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ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAMS ON DESTINATION IMAGE PERCEPTION:

THE CASE OF EXCHANGE STUDENTS IN THE FACULTY OF ECONOMICS OF UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA

29 July 2013

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AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

The undersigned **Konstantinos Vitoratos**, a student at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Economics, (hereafter: FELU), declare that I am the author of the master's thesis entitled *Assessing the impact of student exchange programs on destination image perception: The case of exchange students in the Faculty of Economics of University of Ljubljana*, written under supervision of **Prof.** Ljubica Knežević Cvelbar.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION
1. 1. Rationale
1. 2. Research Question
1. 3. Structure of the Dissertation
2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2. 1. Nature and components of tourism destination image (TDI)
2. 2. Destination Image Formation
2.2.1. Social Media, consumer-generated content & destination image formation
2. 3. Modification of destination image through visitation14
2. 4. Student travel motives and patterns
3. SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK
3.1. Framework of the effect of longer visitation to destination image modification 21
3.2. Testing Hypotheses
4. THE CASE OF EXCHANGE STUDENTS IN SLOVENIA
4. 1. Slovenia - General tourism facts
4. 2. The image of Slovenia as a destination
4.3. The Erasmus Programme & Slovenia as a partner country
5. METHODOLOGY
5.1. Adopted paradigm
5.2. Research methods in primary data collection and analysis
5.2.1. Research Design
5.2.2. Description of the sample
5.2.3 Measurement of Variables
6. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS
6.1. Cognitive, Affective and Overall destination image 40
6.1.1. Hypothesis I – Longer visitation and cognitive image of Slovenia 40
6.1.2. Hypothesis II – Longer visitation and affective image of Slovenia 46
6.2. Information sources
6.2.1. Hypothesis III – Information sources and primary cognitive image 49
6.3. Social Media
6.3.1. Hypothesis IV – Long term visitation and social media
6.4. Evaluation of suggested framework
7. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

7.1. Summary of main findings	58
7.2. Main contribution	60
7.3. Further discussion and recommendations	61
7.4. Research Limitations & Further research	64
8. LIST OF REFERENCED WORKS	66

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Main cited journal articles referring to TDI formation	9
Table 2. Main cited articles referring to destination image modification after visitation	. 17
Table 3. Main young travelers' motivations and travel activities	. 21
Table 4: Main hypotheses to prove validity of proposed model	. 23
Table 5. Number of Incoming and Outgoing Erasmus exchange students in Slovenia	. 29
Table 6: Literary resources for variables and scales used for measurement	. 32
Table 7: Allocation of the survey respondents by continent of origin	. 33
Table 8: Main nationalities represented in the original	. 34
Table 9: Differences in research samples between the two phases	. 34
Table 10: Number of references of cognitive image components in relevant literature	. 35
Table 11: Factor Analysis of cognitive Image Perception component variables	. 36
Table 12: Top-5 of highest and lowest rated cognitive components	. 40
Table 13: Paired sample t-test results for cognitive items of the questionnaires	. 42
Table 14: Paired sample t-test results for affective items of the questionnaires	. 47
Table 15: Descriptive statistics of information source usage and importance before or dur first week of actual visitation to Slovenia	ring . 49
Table 16: Results of bivariate correlation between average rating of cognitive elements a number if sources used by respondent before actual visitation (N=78)	and . 51
Table 17: Frequency table of answers to social media related questions	. 52

Tables 18 & 19: Results of individual samples t-test for evaluations of image and	1 usage of
social media or other travel web apps.	
Table 20: Assessment of hypotheses testing results	55

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 70s, tourism destination image (from this point on abbreviated as TDI) became one of the main focuses of tourism researchers, because of the growing connection that started to be academically proven between destination image and visitation intentions. Mayo's (1973) and Hunt's (1975) works are two significant early contributions to this new trend in tourism studies. The next few decades, many aspects of destination image formation and modification were studied by researchers; among them the components and nature of destination image per se (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008) the impact of previous visitation and the geographical distance between tourist and location (Ahmed, 1991; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991), the scope of factors influencing image (Gartner, 1993; Beerli & Martin, 2004) and many others. However, with destination image being such a broad research area, it is only expected that there are gaps and understudied areas, where academic research can still flourish and add to the already rich existing literature.

The past decade, the student traveler segment has been one of the fastest growing segments of international tourism; a fact is expected not only to bring important benefits to local economies, but to also contribute to the socio-cultural growth of local societies (Son, 2003). The combination of travel and education is a significant part of contemporary student travelling patterns; its popularity has been attributed to many elements, such as the feeling of continuation of already existing leisure travel patterns, the facilitation of border controls and the element of cultural exchange (Byram & Feng, 2006). In addition, modern universities worldwide promote international exchange, in order to become more competitive and globally recognized (Llewelyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008). Estimates show that student travelers might even constitute as much as 20% of the global tourism market, something that has given the segment some recent attention from the academic community (Kim et al., 2007). The Erasmus programme, the main student exchange scheme in Europe, has alone assisted in the realization of 2.3 million outgoing student exchanges within the member states from the day of its launch in 1987. Only between the academic years 2000/1 and 2010/11, the number of exchange students that received financial and administrative support to realize an exchange study in another European university doubled (European Commission, 2011).

The student market shows very specific and distinct patterns in comparison to other traveler groups in terms of travel motives, satisfaction factors and TDI perception. Student lifestyle undoubtedly offers more opportunities to travel, visit places of interest, interact with the local population, have some contact with local authorities and public services and immerse in local culture, especially during study breaks (Babin & Kim, 2001). This is expected to allow this specific traveler group form a

more complete and multi-dimensional image of the destination where the exchange is realized.

1.1. Rationale

Most researchers on TDI and leisure travel agree that the student traveler segment has been highly ignored and understudied in the recent literature and that only during the past few years has the academic community started to explore this highly promising travel market (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982; Chadee, 1996; Son, 2003; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008). In addition to this, there is little to no academic research that has managed to combine international students as travelers and destination image perception (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999). The majority of prominent studies on destination image formation usually use an older sample to measure image perception, mainly middle aged and retired travelers, who are assumed to have sufficient economic means to travel (Sirakaya et al., 2001).

For the aforementioned reasons, this study is expected to throw some light on how an exchange experience, which essentially and logically lasts longer than an average leisure trip, could influence a student-traveler's perceived image of the host country, through an image modification process.

1.2. Research Question

Taking all the aforementioned elements into consideration, the main aim of this research is to answer the following research question:

"How does a study exchange experience, as a form of longer visitation to a destination, modify a country's perceived image for exchange students?"

The question will mainly be approached using two important theories from the tourism destination image literature: Fakeye and Crompton's theory about repeat and long term visits and the complex destination image (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991) and Baloglu and McCleary's (1999) path model of destination image formation, alongside a large number of other similar studies of the same field. Both theories are widely referenced in recent academic work and have given some important insight on how the extent of a visit can positively affect destination image perception. The answers to the question, however, will not only result from the analysis of previous academic works on destination image formation and alteration, but also on the analysis of a case, which will include the collection of primary data. The case will focus on Slovenia, one of the newer and smaller European Union members and the image of

the country as a destination, as perceived by Erasmus exchange students in the summer semester 2013.

1. 3. Structure of the Dissertation

The research will initially introduce the reader to the most important earlier literature findings on some aspects of destination image. This is deemed essential, in order to comprehend image perception, which is formed by a complex and mutable evaluation process of attributes of both cognitive and psychological/affective nature (Dichter, 1985). More specifically, the following aspects are going to be analyzed in a past literature review process: destination image dimensions, image formation & modification process and the role of length of stay on the aforementioned process. Throughout the literature review and according to its findings, several hypotheses will be listed. The research will try to prove the hypotheses in the methodology section, in order to give answers to the research question presented in the section above.

Following the literature review, the case of exchange students in the Faculty of Economics of University of Ljubljana will be presented and analyzed. The case will be used to test the hypotheses, and some background information on the Erasmus Exchange program are going to be presented. The methodology for the primary data collection process will be described in the following chapter of the dissertation, before the data analysis takes place. Before any conclusions are drawn, the hypotheses are going to be tested with several statistical tools and methods, using the SPSS 16.0 package for Windows. Conclusions and discussion on the findings will follow as the final chapter of the dissertation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 1. Nature and components of tourism destination image (TDI)

Most scholars in the tourism field seem to agree on the statement that destination image has very important influence, not only on the destination selection process, but also on the general tourist purchasing and travel behavior (Hunt, 1975; Chon, 1991; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). More specifically, Gartner (1993) claims that "only destinations which the decision making body is aware of will be included in the perceived opportunity set. Awareness implies that an image of the destination exists in the mind(s) of the decision makers... only those destinations with a strong image for the types of activities deemed important to the decision making group or individual remain viable for selection" (p. 193). According to Chen and Tsai (2007), the more favorable a destination image, the higher the overall quality of a trip is expected to be. In addition to that, a positive image gains extra gravity, since it seems to be affecting not only the selection process of tourists, but also their overall tourism behavior.

Although destination image has been thoroughly researched the past few decades, there still seems to be no general consensus over a specific definition of the term, or the very nature of TDI per se. This general discord is putting the whole image study area into a dangerous position, where it might be proven to be atheoretical or nonscientific (Tasci et al., 2007; Alcaniz-Bigne et al., 2009). One of the most commonly cited definitions of destination image is that created by Crompton (1979), who claimed that TDI is "the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination" (p. 18). According to Fakeye and Crompton (1991), destination images are mental constructs, developed from a selection of impressions, picked from a pool of a much wider variety of impressions. MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997) define TDI as "A composite of various products (attractions) and attributes woven into a total impression" (p.537). Those three definitions, along with many similar others, clearly imply that TDI has a very subjective nature, since it is formed by personal perceptions and impressions of the individual tourist or potential tourist. Also, they imply that TDI is created from just fragments of a much more complex and total image, in order to create a personal mental construct that is an individual's TDI.

Contrary to this view, there are scholars that argue that destination image needs to be studied in a more holistic manner, since the overall image is far greater than just adding or picking some of its parts from a larger pool of attributes. Echtner and Ritchie (1993) claim that a destination image cannot only consist of individual attributes, such as climate or friendliness of local people, but also mental pictures and imagery, which are harder to break down to individual elements and have a more holistic nature. Other researchers have argued that image perceptions are usually gestalt or holistic, therefore breaking them down to their components is not advised, but sometimes for the sake of facilitating research purposes this is unavoidable (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Jenkins, 1999).

A last academic opinion of the nature of destination image supports the idea that destination image is as much a personal construct, as well as a social one (Crompton, 1979; Obenour, Lengfelder & Groves, 2005). Under this light, destination image held by individuals is argued to be practically the same with that of their peers in specific social circles; social environments are, therefore, considered to have the capability to create collective images, by combining the image perception of each individual and creating a new, generally accepted one. Not very far from that idea, Sirgy and Su (2000), argue that social norms create social self-images and ideal self-images, which force individuals to search for self-congruity through their image constructs and travel behavior. For this reason, it is a very common phenomenon for potential travelers to visit the places that have the most consistent and matching image to the one they have of themselves and their ideal destination and lifestyle.

Similar to the lack of consensus over the nature of TDI, the academic community has been debating the very structure of destination image for the past couple of decades, even challenging the view that a mental construct, such as a perceived image, can be structured (Lai & Li, 2012). Tasci et al. (2007) argue that a uniform opinion in the academic community over this topic would help research become more efficient and fruitful.

Most scholars seem to agree that destination image is created by both rational and emotional individual assessments, therefore it has a cognitive (also named perceptual in some sources) and an affective component (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). The cognitive component of image is formed through a series of external stimuli, like information sources and promotional material and refers to beliefs and knowledge about a destination and it starts being formed even before the selection process of a destination begins. On the contrary, the affective component mostly refers to feelings and motivations to visit a particular destination and its formation starts when the selection process begins. It can contain positive or negative responses to various environmental stimuli and it's expressed through a series of emotions, feelings, moods and final attitudes (Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Peter & Olson, 1999). Since the affective image is formed on a later stage than the cognitive, it has been claimed that the affective component is a form of mental translation of the cognitive component, so that the individual can have a more familiar and human reaction of like or dislike towards a destination (Vaughan & Edwards, 1999).

There seems to be a predominance of academic researches focused on the cognitive dimension of image, whereas the affective one only started to receive scholarly attention from the 1990s on (Son, 2003; Alcaniz-Bigne et al., 2009). Nevertheless, it has been argued that affective image components might in fact be more powerful during the primary TDI formation process in comparison to cognitive ones, though more research is needed to further support this theory (Kim & Yoon, 2003). Pike and Ryan (2004) argue that the affective component is more valuable for repeat visitors, since they can revive old feelings that they felt while being at the destination; on the contrary, the cognitive component is more effective on first time or potential visitors, who are looking for more practical and tangible information. The main contribution in the field of affective image studies is the older but classic and very often cited one suggested by Russel et al. (1981), who asked their subjects to describe destinations, based on a list of adjectives that was earlier developed. As a result of the study, they came up with a two-dimensional representation of the affective quality of different environments, based on two bipolar dimensions: Arousing-Sleepy and Pleasant-Unpleasant. They added two more pairs in the scheme, as a result of different combinations of those dimensions: Relaxing-Distressing and Exciting-Gloomy (Figure 1). Finally, some researchers have underlined the lack of focus on psychological and affective components of image in the existing literature; elements such as the feeling of a place (romantic, moving etc.) are usually considered too hard to measure with the most approachable research methods available and are, therefore, typically ignored (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Jenkins, 1999).



Fig. 1: Dimensions of affective image component as suggested by Russel et al. (1981)

The majority of researchers seem to accept those two components, but support that this duality of TDI is not adequate: quite often, a conative component to destination image is added as a third component. This component is formed only after the decision is reached and the destination has been selected and directly depends on the other two (cognitive and affective) for its formation (Gartner, 1993; Tasci et al., 2007). Pike and Ryan (2004) accept this scheme and add that the potential travelers try to build an image of different destinations in their perception; therefore they develop alternatives by looking for cognitive information. During the evaluation process, the destination consideration set goes through a set of affective evaluations, whereas when the decision is made, the conation stage has been reached. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) add the component of an overall image as the third component of TDI; this, in a similar manner to Gartner's conative component, is directly formed as a combination of the cognitive and affective components. Fakeye and Crompton (1991) add the dimension of *complex image* to the TDI dual component scheme, which they claim is created only after the actual visitation takes place. Pocock and Hudson (1978) claim that the combination of cognitive and affective image creates an appraisive dimension of image, however TDI is also formed by another component, which they name 'designative image', and which consists of spatial and orientation elements, necessary in order to put places into perspective in their surrounding environment. This theory has been further developed more recently by Son (2005), using the sketch map technique to prove that visitors' mapping and drawing skills show a lot about their perceived destination images. The overall image theory (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) is the one to coincide the most with this research's primary research purposes: first of all, it accepts the existence of a cognitive and an affective image dimension, an idea that is widely accepted in the tourism studies field and, secondly, the two authors based it on rich and well-researched literature background. Therefore, this theory is deemed to be the most academically valuable one presented in this paragraph and will play an important role in the creation of the hypotheses of this research later on.

Some researchers have taken a largely different stance on the structure of TDI. Among them, one of the most prominent views is that of Echtner and Ritchie (1991), often dubbed in other academic works as the 'three dimensional model'. According to this model, TDI consists of three image components, which appear in the form of continuums. The first one is the attributes/holistic continuum, based on previous findings by Um and Crompton (1990) on the gestalt experience of a tourism destination. Elements, such as the hospitality of local people or beautiful mountains, fall in the attributes sides of this continuum, whereas the total image or general impression of the destination falling on the holistic side. The second one is the functional/psychological continuum, based on Martineau's model (Martineau, 1958). The example of climate falls on the functional side and the example of general safety on the psychological side. Echtner and Ritchie (1991) added a third dimension to this already existing scheme, which they named the common/unique continuum, depending on how much different a destination, event or element is perceived to be, compared to the general tourism offer (Figure 2). Additionally to the aforementioned theories, a smaller group of academics supports the view that TDI consists of highlighted and minor elements, therefore creating a core-periphery structure of destination image. Some of the core elements identified are the existence of historical sites and personal safety in a destination (Deutsch & Merritt, 1965; Lai & Li, 2012).



Fig. 2: Components of image complex system, depicting relationship between holistic, cognitive/affective/conative and tri-dimensional TDI theories (Tasci et al., 2007)

To conclude, it is noteworthy to point out that a small number of scholars has made an effort to underline how confusing the notion of destination image is in the academic community, by proving that TDI is very commonly mixed in academic works with other terms, especially destination brand and general country image (Tasci & Kozak, 2006). More particularly, there has been criticism over the lack of distinction between image and branding elements in past academic research and it has been argued that destination image is one of the elements of a destination brand (Cai, 2002; Tasci & Kozak, 2006; Li & Stepchenkova, 2012). In the field of tourism studies, destination image seems to be the most important element of a destination brand, because of the intangible character of tourism as a service-based sector (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). It has also been suggested that destination image is something that is not always connected to destination brand, but can also be formed independently: activation of image in the perception of an individual can happen very naturally, just by the mention of a name or an idea, even if there has been no exposure to any promotion or branding campaigns (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Apart from destination brand, TDI is also claimed to be a component of General Country Image, alongside the very closely related product-country image (Nadeu et al., 2008), although the three terms are not very clearly distinguished in existing literature; a country's overall image has the ability to often influence the perceived image of a destination, because of its very predominant character (Elliot et al., 2011).

2. 2. Destination Image Formation

The formation process of destination images is one of the main areas of focus in tourism studies. The main reason for that, is that there is a very significant number of stakeholders, varying from local councils to whole governments, all interested in finding out more about how image creation can be guided or manipulated, in order to bring their product more popularity (Gartner, 1986). This mostly happens through tourism board and governmental-ran promotional campaigns, which try to project positive images of a destination to the public, in order to alter the perceived image of destinations in different markets.

One of the earliest works usually cited in contemporary studies is that of Gunn (1972), who claims that before any actual travel consideration, each individual already holds an organic image of a potential destination. This image is created and carved from a very young age through stimuli collected randomly over the years from any kind of source like newspapers, television, literature etc. Previous visitation is not deemed necessary; therefore even people without any travel experience have some form of unfinished organic image for most destinations. When the consideration set for a destination is created, then an induced image starts being created in the potential traveler's mind, formed by promotional material created by national tourism boards, ministries of tourism and other local tourism representatives. Very often, induced images vary significantly from the original organic ones (Gunn, 1972). Many scholars have tried to build on Gunn's theory, in order to throw more light on the complexity of TDI formation. The most important of those scholarly efforts are summed up below in chronological order (Table 1) and analyzed in the rest of this chapter categorically.

Researcher(s)	Year	TDI formation factors researched	Destination(s) tested		
Bojanic	1991	- Advertising	Country in Southern Europe (undisclosed)		
Gartner	1993	Information Agents: - Overt Induced - Covert Induced - Autonomous - Unsolicited Organic - Solicited Organic - Organic information	Х		
Lubbe	1998	Personal (Push) factorsDestination pull factors	Destinations most popular for Saudi Arabs		
Baloglu & McCleary	1999	- Stimulus Factors (Information sources) - Personal Factors (Age & Education)	Turkey		
Sirgy & Su	2000	 Destination Environment Tourist self concept Tourist self congruity 	Х		
Sirakaya, Sonmez & Choi	2001	 Familiarity with destination Travel experience Information sources Socio-demographic information 	Turkey		
Hannefors & Mossberg	2002	- TV Travel Shows	Many destinations in Europe and elsewhere		
Klenosky	2002	- Destination Push factors - Destination Pull factors	USA, Bahamas, Mexico, Europe		
Beerli & Martin	2004	- Information sources - Length of stay - Personal factors (Sex, age, origin & education level)	Lanzarote, Spain		
Hanlan & Kelly	2005	- Information sources	Byron Bay, Australia		
Molina & Esteban	2006	- Tourism Brochures	Madrid, Spain		

Table 1. Main cited journal articles referring to TDI formation

(table continues)

(continued)

Researcher(s)	Year	TDI formation factors researched	Destination (s) tested		
McCartney, Butler & Bennett	2008	- Information sources	Macao		
San Martin, Rodriguez del Bosque	2008	- Psychological motives - Cultural Values	Cantabria, Spain		

Gartner (1993) identifies as many as 8 different image formation agents. Each one of them shows different levels of credibility, penetration to the individual's existing mindset and cost of reaching the target. For that reason, he claims that not all of them are appropriate for every promotional or communicative effort and the choice of the right agent is of crucial importance. However, a combination of agents is often necessary, in order to have an effective promotional effort, which creates positive image elements in the perception of the individual. Another observation that he made was that these information agents mostly affect the cognitive component of TDI and have very little effect on the perceived affective image. Out of the 8 agents, Gartner claims that the organic image formation, which coincides with the act of actually visiting a destination, is the one that has the highest credibility, since the individual manages to form an image from personal unbiased experience. This is a very logical argument, since no matter how rich and various the information sources of an individual are, the actual visitation is the one that will make the biggest impact to a traveler with the least effort and time consumption, since it is much more real and tangible than any piece of secondary information will ever be.

Baloglu and McCleary (1999) identify two main types of factors that influence the formation of destination image: personal and stimulus factors. Personal factors can be psychological, such as an individual's values and personality elements, but also social, such as age, education level and many others. These types of characteristics influence mainly the affective component of image, since they are more related to personal emotions and feelings. On the other hand, stimulus factors are the ones that emanate from the surrounding environment and mainly are identified as the different information sources that the individual is exposed to throughout life. Since these sources mostly appeal to the logical part of the brain, they mainly affect the cognitive component of destination image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

A lot of research has been additionally done by other scholars on the effects of information sources on destination image, thus enriching Baloglu and McCleary's (1999) findings and bridging it with Gartner's (1993) theory of image agents. A little

earlier than both of these important works, Bojanic (1991) researched the effectiveness of advertising on image perception. He concluded that advertising can raise interest in a destination and motivate people to visit it more, by affecting their perceived image positively; however he only found newspapers and magazines to be successful in this regard. Baloglu (2000), identified word of mouth as a major contributor to the creation of psychological and affective dimensions of image perception, whereas advertisement and other printed sources contributed more to the reinforcement of tangible and cognitive elements of image. On the contrary, advice received by tourism professionals might have boosted visitation intention, but did not drastically affect image perception. Hanefors and Mossberg (2002) explored the effect of television-broadcast tourism messages and their effect on destination image. According to their findings, this method of approaching the target market has varying level of effectiveness, depending on the maturity of a destination. The audiences seemed to need less basic information on well-known destinations, since they already had a quite developed TDI on those; on the contrary, when a destination was emerging and quite unknown, there was a high need for basic and easily understandable pieces of information, so that the individual could build on a very poorly made pre-existing TDI. Hanlan and Kelly (2005) also identify word of mouth as a very important information source, since it is based on personal experience and carries more legitimacy than any promotional campaign. They also found that potential tourists often try to found out more about their desired destination through information sources written by other travelers, such as guidebooks. This way, they get the feeling of a place through the eves of another traveler and their perceived image of the destination is affected more significantly. Molina and Esteban (2006), concentrated on the way image formation is influenced by tourism brochures and printed material. According to their study, only those brochures that have a strong and appealing visual element can really affect destination image formation efficiently. Therefore, design is really important and it is advised that agencies and promoters create separate brochures for stimulating and informational purposes, because they appeal to different types of potential tourists and have different effects. Finally, McCartney et al. (2008) researched the effect different media have on TDI through the creation of a Communication Effectiveness Grid concept. Each and every destination that tries to reach a potential traveler utilizes a mix of communication methods, such as marketing campaigns, public relations, advertising and so on. Depending on the relevance of the message sent to the audiences, a destination either manages to affect the individual's perceived destination image on a cognitive level and, thus, attract more tourists, or fails to do so and has to reconsider the whole communication mix. According to its characteristics, budget and fame, a destination needs to pick the right mix of information agents, in order to achieve maximum possible positive change in TDI.

Another interesting view on the topic is the one of *push & pull* factors that construct the primary image of a destination. According to that point of view, people's higher needs of belonging, esteem and self actualization, as described by Maslow's pyramid theory, can act as 'push' factors, that lead an individual to the decision to travel (Mill & Morrison, 1985). At the same time, destinations' special features, such as landscapes, food and promotional efforts, can act as 'pull' factors, which make an individual more inclined to visit a specific destination over another (Klenosky, 2002). Those two types of factors, when combined together in a very complex and so far vaguely described manner, can lead to the creation of a primary TDI, which greatly assists the destination selection process (Chon, 1989; Lubbe, 1998).

As the 'push and pull' theory is mainly referring to motivations that lead to tourism behavior, it is very much related to psychological human motivations; at the same time, the affective component of TDI is also formed by personal mental constructs, therefore it has been proven that it holds the same kind of connection with human psychology. Elements such as personal values, cultural distance and risk perception are only some of these psychological elements that might have a very large effect to destination image and decision to travel (San Martin et al., 2008; Lai & Lee, 2012). Familiarity with a destination is also mentioned as a factor that can influence destination choice through image formation (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Sirakaya et al, 2001). Sirgy and Sue (2000) research the ways in which an individual's self perception can affect destination image perception and, subsequently, the choice of travel destination. In that sense, one's desired self-image works as a motivator to travel to specific places over others. The two researchers claim that humans tend to hold more positive images of places that match their personal desires and how they wish to see themselves; therefore they go through a matching process, academically known as self-congruity. This is essentially a psychological process, based on a destination's symbolic attributes, as perceived by the potential tourist. They claim that it affects TDI to a similar extent as a destination's functional characteristics.

Regardless of the existence of several theories over human psychology and its connection to TDI, the academic community has not yet managed to identify and research those complicated and highly personal elements to great depth; therefore they still remain quite unexplored, although there is no doubt they affect decision making and image formation to a large extent (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991).

2.2.1. Social Media, consumer-generated content & destination image formation

For the purposes of this research and the upcoming hypotheses, methodology and analysis sections, it is deemed necessary to highlight the use of social media as a means of forming destination image. However, it is important at this point to highlight that there is a total lack of literature that combines social media and TDI; most of the current academic efforts have focused on social media and the ways in which they can influence destination choice from the side of the potential tourist. In addition, a lot of attention has been given to the use of social media for marketing, promotion and destination branding purposes, none of which really coincides completely with the definitions of TDI given earlier.

Social media is one of the fastest growing online segments currently, consisting of many subtypes, such as photo & video sharing, blogs, sharing of knowledge and many others; the great penetration of user-generated content in the image formation and the destination choice process of the potential tourist has made this source of information of great importance to tourism officials and branding campaign makers (Parra-Lopez et al., 2011). The use of Web 2.0 applications for tourism purposes has been collectively dubbed as '*Travel 2.0*' (Adam et al., 2007). In many ways, the impact on social media on TDI formation could remind someone of the impact word-of-mouth has on the same process; according to some scholars, the two are often found to have similar levels and ways of affecting TDI formation, while in most cases they are also found to be more successful than overt induced agents, such as promotional campaigns, because of their personalized and testimonial character (Govers et al., 2007; Singh et al., 2008).

Xiang and Gretzel (2010) made one of the most noteworthy efforts to study the effects and current trends of social media in relation to tourism. They did not focus on one type of social media, but rather included all forms of it in their research. According to their findings, virtual communities, like travel forums, as well as individual destination reviews seem to constitute the majority of the online social media contributions by consumers. Together, they constitute more than 60% of the total search engine results related to both tourism and social media. Travel blogs are another significant segment, counting for about 15% of the results, whereas social networks, like Facebook, only appeared in about 9% of the results; however, the latter seem to be showing rising tendencies the past few years as tools for tourism promotion and imagery. The two scholars also found that *tripadvisor.com* was the most commonly cited website in social media searches related to tourism, followed by *virtualtourist.com.* The two are even at the moment that these lines are written two of the most recognizable tourism-related websites in existence. Their last finding was that most of the social media related to tourism were strongly connected with leisure tourism, more than any other kind thereof: keywords, such as 'nightlife', 'restaurants' and 'events' almost monopolized search results on such websites.

Schmalleger and Carson (2008) focused their research specifically on tourism-related blogs, by making a literature review on all previous findings on the topic. They argue that online applications and media can be used for five different purposes in tourism; namely promotion, product distribution, communication, management and research.

In terms of communication, which seems to be the function the most related to the purposes of TDI formation, blogs seem to mostly be used in a form of customer to customer basis. Travelers express their opinions on destinations openly, either positively or negatively, thus affecting destination image when a potential tourist gets access to this information before visitation. Especially in the case of negative or inconsistent comments, the significance of suitable reaction from the side of tourism organizations or other officials is crucial.

Choi et al. (2007) touch exactly this last topic in their research, highlighting how the TDI of Macau, as portrayed in consumer-generated content is totally inconsistent to the branding campaign the local tourism authorities of Macau are trying to launch to the public. Macau is almost always presented in social media as a gambling day-trip destination with a strong Portuguese influence, whereas the Macau Tourism Board is persistently making an effort to show the cultural and modern urban sides of the city, in order to differentiate it from its main competitor, Hong Kong. This example proves exactly the great impact that social media can have on a destination's primary image, especially in the case of newly discovered or special interest destinations, such as Macau. Wegner (2007) has also researched the effect of online travel blogs to the destination image of Austria. According to her findings, traveler blogs tend to focus too much on summer and autumn day trips from other neighboring countries, thus presenting Austria as a very seasonal destination. Also, the blog entries tend to vastly focus on Vienna and Salzburg, thus emphasizing more culinary and cultural tourism, something that changes the currently held image of Austria as a nature and sports destination. Contrary to those views, a more recent article by Tham et al. (2013) argues that some governments have stopped seeing electronic word of mouth as a necessarily bad thing, thus trying to encourage prior visitors to post their experiences, sometimes even in exchange for a prize.

From all the above, it is adequately highlighted that social media and other Travel 2.0 applications already have a very strong impact on TDI and could potentially have an even larger role in the creation of destination images, which is currently easy to expect but rather hard to predict the size of. For this reason, this research will try to incorporate customer-generated content through social media in the primary data research and analysis process, in order to shed some more light on this new, but very promising for touristic purposes phenomenon.

2. 3. Modification of destination image through visitation

Image modification has started to be researched almost as early as image creation. This would make sense, seeing from how image is a complex construct and, therefore, is expected to be quite prone to alterations and reconstruction. One of the earliest works in the field of TDI by Gunn (1972) presents the view that an individual's image

of a particular destination goes through a seven-step modification process. The first three steps take place before actual visitation and consist of the collection of mental and secondary sources of information on the destination. The fourth step is the visit itself and the next three are the exploration of the destination, the return trip and the repeat of the process anew, but this time based on the previous experience. This seven step process tries to put both image formation and image modification into the same scheme, something that shows the continuum between the two processes. It also successfully highlights the fact that image modification continues even long after the visit itself; it actually is a process that never ceases.

Similar views have been shared by other tourism scholars as well (Table 2): Phelps (1986) argues that the perceived image tends to be much more realistic after an actual visitation to a destination, in comparison to the one formed by secondary sources of information, like magazines or promotional campaigns. According to her findings, visitors to Menorca seemed to have found a totally different destination than what they expected, with some of the respondents even expecting to spend their vacation in a traditional settlement and not a modern resort. Fakeye and Crompton (1991) studied the effect of the length of visitation to perceived image; they found that long-time visitors have a more complete and positive view about important cognitive and affective destination image elements. According to their findings, food, infrastructure and local people's friendliness are some of the elements that show the biggest postvisitation levels of change, since the travelers have had more time to integrate into the local society and interact with the population. They based their research on previous work of Mishler (1965), who argued that a lengthier stay at a destination helps create a more multi-dimensional image, since it facilitates the creation of personal contacts and relationships. However, according to their findings, elements of TDI changed significantly only after the first visitation, but tended to remain quite stable and unchanged from the second visitation on. Baloglu & McCleary (1999) studied the image perception of four Mediterranean destinations among visitors and non visitors and found that the visitors not surprisingly had very different perceived images than the non visitors; these were different on almost all levels, on a cognitive, affective and overall image dimension. Gartner and Hunt (1987), found out that travel to Utah results in an improved image of the state. In the same fashion, Chon (1991) described that the image of South Korea was generally more positive among visitors than potential visitors who were about to visit the country soon. Konecnik and Gartner (2007) found that the overall image and willingness to visit was higher among Germans that had visited Slovenia before. Those tourists also happened to be the most willing to suggest Slovenia to their social circle as a destination, since they showed high levels of loyalty.

According to Gartner's theory on TDI formation agents (1993), the most important and objective agent of image formation is the one called Organic: It consists of information collected during an individual's actual visit to a place and it has the highest level of credibility. Moreover, travelers who have collected information through organic agents are more likely to promote a place through word of mouth, by providing other potential travelers with Unsolicited Organic and Solicited Organic information, which is two more of the agents that Gartner identified in his research. This would essentially mean that travelers, who have already visited a destination, are the most suitable to promote it back home to their social circle; unsolicited and solicited organic information have satisfactorily high credibility and are, therefore, really effective in changing an potential tourist's TDI before visitation. In that case, it seems that personal visitation does not only change the traveler's perceived image, but also this perceived by members of their social circle. This coincides with Crompton's (1979) and Obenour et al.'s (2005) previously presented theory that TDI is as much of a social as of a personal construct.

The intensity and the length of the visit in comparison to TDI are two elements that have not been thoroughly studied yet. It has been pointed out, however, that it is only logical that the more time an individual spends at a destination, the more they get the opportunity to discover and be exposed to the different dimensions of the place and, thus, create a more holistic image (Beerli &Martin, 2004). However, it shall be reminded that a longer time spent at a particular destination can also highlight some of the negative elements of the place in the perception of the visitor. A short-stay tourist will only see the very basic elements of the destination visited and, in most of the cases, these will be limited to the most important sights the area has to offer, some leisure, nightlife and entertainment options and some superficial contact with the local population, language and customs. On the contrary, a long-term visitor needs to get involved with the less pleasant sides of a destination, such as public services, search for suitable accommodation or might face communicational and other integration issues. Therefore, Beerli's and Martin's view should by no means be perceived as a notion that a more intense and lengthy stay will only positively affect the TDI.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, although there are many elements that can modify destination image, Crompton and Lamb (1986) highlight that, in reality, images are quite stable over time and tend to change very slowly, even after considerable destination elements have been altered. Gartner and Hunt (1987) agree that image modification is a very slow process; they add that, in case most elements of a destination do not change dramatically to the better or the worse, image naturally continues to evolve, based on the perceived induced and organic elements of the destination.

Researcher(s)	Year	Destination(s) tested			
Phelps	1986	- Cognitive image	Menorca, Spain		
Gartner & Hunt	1987	- Destination attractions - Outdoors activities	Utah, USA		
Chon	1991	- Safety and security - Shopping opportunities - Scenery & nature	South Korea		
Fakeye & Crompton	1991	- Social opportunities - Attractions - Infrastructure - Food & Cuisine - Friendliness of locals	Rio Grande Valley, Brazil		
Baloglu & McCleary	1999	- Cognitive image - Affective image - Overall image	Turkey, Greece, Italy, Egypt		
Konecnik & Gartner	2007	- Tourist loyalty - Quality of the destination	Slovenia		

Table 2. Main cited journal articles referring to destination image modification after visitation

2. 4. Student travel motives and patterns

This research is trying to link TDI and student travel, therefore a literature review of past academic work on the topic of student travel motives and patterns is deemed necessary, in order to make the connection.

As highlighted in the introduction, there is an obvious lack of depth in the literature related to the travel motives and characteristics of the student traveler segment (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982; Chadee & Cutler, 1996; Son, 2003; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008). The student traveler segment, however, has not only proven to be a profitable market the past decade, but also shows very prominent differences from other travel segments: different needs, desires and motivations to travel, which the

current academic research hasn't completely understood yet. Hence, the most efficient ways to approach and market destinations to this target group still remain unidentified (Kim et al., 2007). It is also really significant that international students, in particular, as well as domestic students that study away from home, fall somewhere in between the roles of a resident and a tourist; most researchers categorize them one way or the other, depending on the length of their stay in the host-country or host-city (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008). According to a report on youth travel, written for the WYSE Travel Confederation (2011), student travel is defined as "all independent trips of periods of less than one year by people aged 16-29 which are motivated, in part or full, by a desire to experience other cultures, build life experience, and/or benefit from formal or informal learning opportunities outside one's usual environment" (p.15). According to this definition, therefore, international students that spend less than a year in their destination of choice cannot be considered residents and should be studied as tourists in the field of tourism studies.

The motives of student travel have been identified by a handful of studies. The main motivator for student travel, according to Kim and et al. (2007) is the overabundance of free time for college and university students, be it domestic or international ones: autumn, winter and spring breaks are very popular periods to travel with friends and classmates. In other studies, time is seen as a motivator to travel, but under a completely different light: most international students try to get advantage of their limited time in the host-country, in order to see as much as possible, because it's improbable that they will get the chance to live again in the same place for a longer period in the future, because of VISA and other issues (Babin & Kim, 2001). According to the Student Travel report by WYSE Travel Confederation (2011), students make much longer trips than the average tourist and usually try to combine vacation with a memorable or life changing experience. Therefore, language-learning tourism, volunteer tourism and exchange tourism are very popular ways to combine leisure and knowledge and have thus become very popular in this traveler market. More specifically, a study abroad experience was found to offer enough time to get to explore the local culture and history and to create some connection with local people, two very important motivators for international student travel (Hunt, 1992; Babin & Kim, 2001). However, according to Clover's findings (2011) there seems to be no big difference in travel patterns and motivations between short-term and long-term international students. Other motivators identified are those related to fun, leisure travel and entertainment opportunities (Smeaton et al., 1998; Babin & Kim, 2001; Peel, 2004; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008), followed by meeting friends and family that live in the area (Hobson & Josiam, 1993; Smeaton & al., 1998), sports, nature-based and other outdoor activity opportunities (Kim et al., 2007; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008), the party reputation of the destination (Hobson & Josiam, 1993) and word of mouth from friends and other students (Peel, 2004). Apart from scholarly contributions, the UNWTO (2008) has also identified the main motives for youth travelers, with the top 5 motives being the exploration of new places and cultures (34%), relaxation and fun (28%), visit friends and relatives (17%), study abroad (9%) and work abroad (7%).

Very commonly in past literature, researchers identify that students, especially international exchange ones, could be classified into two categories, depending on their main motivation factors: education-first and tourism-first students (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008). Ritchie (2003) claims that the majority of students that stay for a longer time in a host-university are usually more education and knowledge oriented; this usually applies either for students that complete their whole diploma in one university, or for exchange students that stay at the host university for a year or more. Babin and Kim (2001) had some interesting findings related to this duality of a study abroad experience: Although educational benefits seemed to be generally embraced by international students, demanding classes created a negative relationship between educational benefits and utilitarian value of the class. The main explanation given by the respondents was that heavy workload distracted them from their leisure pursuits, therefore making the experience not so desirable. In this case, it is more than clear that there is very often a clash between utilitarian and hedonic value perceived by students, depending on their priorities and the complexity of their study schedule. Glover (2011) argues that in her research there was a much clearer trend: most of the students clearly claimed that the travel and leisure opportunities were more important to them in the selection process of the host university, rather than the fame and academic achievements of the institution itself, thus giving great gravity to leisure and hedonic motivations for exchange student travel. In addition to all of the above, some student niche markets, like recent graduates or students in their last year of studying, seem to be more motivated by exploration, culture and adventure for their trips, especially when coming from distant areas of the world, like New Zealand (Chadee & Cutler, 1996).

Not much research effort has been put into the area of student travel patterns. A very detailed and insightful work on the topic is that realized by Gmelch (1997), who followed around American college students on exchange programs in Europe and took note of their daily schedules, travel patterns and daily routines. According to his findings, exchange students usually travel in groups of 4 to 5 people. They make very spontaneous decisions to travel and they do it very frequently, usually every weekend or whenever their schedule allows. However, he argues that their contact with local culture and people is really superficial, since most of the times the students did not spend much more than a night or two at a destination, before map-hopping to the next one. A slightly more recent study by Field (1999), researched the travel patterns of domestic and foreign students in the USA. According to his findings, domestic students travelled more frequently than foreign ones, ate out more often while travelling and preferred using the car for their transportation. On the contrary,

exchange students preferred to use the plane as a means of transport mostly prepared their own meals and travelled less frequently. However, the two segments showed accord in matters of activities preferred: gratification activities, like shopping and visiting friends were rated highly by both groups, followed by cultural activities, like sightseeing, museum visiting and so on.

Hobson and Josiam (1993) researched the travel patterns of a more specific student traveler subgroup, the American spring break market. According to their findings, students usually spent around seven days in average in their spring break destination, spent an average of 300 dollars per student per trip and their main motivation was fun, partying and leisure. They argue that the spring break market, contrary to popular belief, is not a homogenous market. Some of the students to participate in the research decided to not travel at all during their holidays, whereas others preferred destination in Europe and South America, instead of domestic ones with high reputation, like Florida. In a similar manner, Chadee and Cutler (1996) researched the segment of seniors and recent graduate student travelers from New Zealand. They found that this segment usually plans much longer trips abroad, which can even last up to a whole year, since travelling at that age is considered to be a once in a lifetime experience. About 90% of the participants said they were intending to plan a trip within the next year. They seem to prefer meeting friends and family abroad and staying in private accommodation, rather than youth hostels. About 60% claimed they were intending to take a trip to Europe, making it by far the most popular destination. The unique patterns shown by spring break American and senior or graduate New Zealander students prove what was discussed earlier, about the large variety of sub-segments and niche markets within the student travel market. It can easily be argued that this complexity can make both studying and marketing destinations to this segment rather complicated (Bywater, 1993).

More recently, UNWTO (2008) realized a very insightful research titled *Youth Travel Matters*, which analyzes this segment's travel patterns, demographics and motivations. According to the findings, the average student traveler is booking most of the travel services used throughout the trip online, is very price sensitive, prefers the bus as a means of transport at the destination (more than 60% of respondents) and youth hostels as the main type of accommodation (more than 60% of respondents). A little less than 50% of the trips realized by young travelers last up to a week, but it's not surprising, based on what was discussed before that more than 10% of the trips last between one and two months. The length of the trip varies a lot, depending on the continent, with Africa showing the largest duration (average 68 days) and Latin America the shortest (47 days). The research also threw light into the most important student traveler motivations and pastimes during their trips abroad (Table 3). These results seem to contrast what was proven from scholars cited earlier in this chapter, showing more focus on educational and social motives, rather than leisure and

entertainment ones; however it is important to highlight here that some of those academic papers focused on exchange students, who are a sub-category of the general youth traveler segment, which the UNWTO tried to identify as a whole in this research.

Table 3. Main young travelers' motivations and travel activities (Source: UNWTO, 2008)

Student Travel Motivation Factors	Student Travel Activities
Increase knowledge (81%)	Shopping (73%)
Explore other cultures (81%)	Cafes & restaurants (71%)
Interact with local people (70%)	Visiting museums and monuments (67%)
Build friendships (65%)	Walking / Hiking / Trekking (62%)
Experience everyday life (63%)	Cultural events and festivals (59%)

3. SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK

3.1. A framework of the effect of longer visitation to destination image modification

The main purpose of this study is to prove the existence of a correlation between longer visitation periods in a destination and tourism destination image modification; this will be based on the findings of the literature review presented earlier and the case following in the next chapters.

Of all the academic and scholarly theories presented so far, this study will mostly be based on the theories of Baloglu & McCleary (1999) on information sources and that of Fakeye & Crompton (1991) on the effect of previous visitation on destination image. Study exchange as a means of staying at a destination for a period longer than the typical vacation or leisure travel period will be used, based on the literature presented in chapter 2.4. The main effort will be concentrated on combining the two main theories and coming up with a new framework.

This framework claims that a study exchange, as a form of a longer visitation to a destination, can significantly and positively affect TDI of the host country. This is visible on both cognitive and affective image level, since a longer visitation can modify the holistic or overall image of a destination for the individual (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). In addition, information sources are going to be included into the suggested scheme, as the main means to influence an individual's cognitive image of

a destination; the variety of information sources is important, since different combinations of information agents have variable results for different individuals (Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). It is assumed that an exchange student, before choosing a host university and a host country, is generally going through a larger number and variety of information sources than the average leisure traveler; the risk of an exchange experience in a young age can easily be perceived as bigger and the significance of the trip much higher for the future development of the individual. In addition to all the above, this research will try to prove something that is completely missing from the academic work done so far on TDI: the correlation between the realization of a student exchange experience abroad and the desire to create and share consumer-generated content on social media and other related Travel 2.0 applications, as presented in chapter 2.2.1.

Figure 3 is a depiction of the aforementioned framework in a graphic manner, for easier comprehension.



Fig.3: Suggested framework of destination image modification, based on the works of Baloglu & McCleary (1999) and Fakeye & Crompton (1991).

3.2. Testing Hypotheses

The main hypotheses to prove the validity of this model (Table 4) will be tested in the next chapter of this research, through a primary data collection and analysis process

on the case of Slovenia as an exchange study destination for Erasmus students. Some necessary background information on the case follows in the next chapter.

Hypothesis 1 : A study exchange, as a form of longer visitation of a destination, can make the cognitive image of the host country more positive for exchange students.	Fakeye & Crompton (1991)
Hypothesis 2 : A study exchange, as a form of longer visitation of a destination, can make the affective image of the host country more positive for exchange students.	Fakeye & Crompton (1991)
Hypothesis 3 : Exchange students that have received information from a larger number of different information sources have a more positive cognitive image of the host country in the first period of the study exchange experience.	Um & Crompton (1990) Gartner (1993) Baloglu & McCleary (1999)
Hypothesis 4 : Exchange students with higher levels of cognitive and affective image perception are more likely to share material on social media and other web 2.0. based applications.	No significant prior research done on the topic

Table 4: Main hypotheses to prove validity of proposed model

4. THE CASE OF EXCHANGE STUDENTS IN SLOVENIA

4. 1. Slovenia - General tourism facts

Slovenia is a small, alpine Central European country, with a limited but interesting Mediterranean coastline. Because of the great variations of landscape in such a small territory, Slovenia shows examples of Mediterranean, Continental and Alpine climate (Omerzel Gomezelj & Mihalič, 2008). The country's total size is 20,273 km² and its population is 2,058,123 people, about 4.3% of which are foreign nationals, registered by local authorities (Slovenian Tourist Board, 2012; Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2013). Slovenia used tourism as one of its main development forces after its independence, in order to reach EU membership status. To a large extent, Slovenian tourism planning was based more in inland attractions, many of which had

been developed and known to surrounding areas as early as the Austro-Hungarian times (Hall, 1999). In 2010, it was estimated that tourism represented about 12% of the country's GDP, whereas 13.6% of the active Slovenian population was employed in the tourism industry and all the other industries directly related to it. Both percentages are expected to show positive annual growth rates the next few years, something that shows the country's potential to grow touristically (World Economic Forum, 2011).

In 2011, Slovenia showed an impressive increase in visitor numbers and overnight stays, despite of the ongoing economic crisis in the E.U. area: The country welcomed 3.22 million visitors, 7% more than in 2010, accounting for 9.39 million overnight stays, a 5% increase in comparison to the year before. The average stay in the country was 3 days, whereas the largest contributors to Slovenian tourism were Italians, followed by Germans and Austrians. Ljubljana, Portorož, Bled and Soča valley are the most recognizable Slovenian destinations (Slovenian Tourist Board, 2012). Although the country has a touristically important coastline, Slovenia is mostly trying to take advantage of its inland attractions, such as beautiful caves, mountains and old towns. Also, the country's wellness tourism sector is the strongest among all of the former Yugoslav republics and brings important revenues to the local economy (Hall, 2003). Just the nature-based and spa tourism activities in the country are together accounting for more than 50% of the overnight stays in Slovenia (Slovenian Tourist Board, 2012).

In terms of general competitiveness, according to the World Economic Forum 2011 report, Slovenia ranks 33rd out of 139 countries in the world. The country ranks high in environmental sustainability (23/139), safety and security (29/139), Tourism infrastructure (17/139) and ground transport infrastructure (25/139). On the other hand, its weak points, as presented in the report, are air transport infrastructure (74/139), price competitiveness in the travel and tourism industry (99/139) and availability of qualified tourism labor (78/139). Since the previous report in 2009, the country has improved its position in the international ranking by two spots, reflecting its stable development and improvement as a tourist destination (World Economic Forum, 2011). The newest report of 2013 ranked Slovenia a little lower, placing 36th out of 140 countries, with most of the rankings from the previous report staying on the same levels, except from price competitiveness in the travel and tourism industry (111/140), where Slovenia ranked much lower (World Economic Forum, 2013). A safe assumption would probably be that the global crisis forced other European destinations to lower their tourism-related prices, however tourism in Slovenia has been stable and rising the past few years and therefore there was no need to reevaluate the pricing system, as was the case elsewhere.

Tourism in Slovenia is managed by SPIRIT Slovenia – Slovenian Tourist Board. The organization is a public agency, formed by the merge of three previously separate bodies: the Public Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Entrepreneurship and Foreign Investments (JAPTI), the Slovenian Tourist Board (STO) and the Slovenian Technology Agency (TIA). The merge took place in the beginning of 2013. The tourist organization is responsible for the creation of new tourism products, the amelioration of tourist information centers, the marketing campaigns of the country and the positioning of Slovenia as a tourist destination globally. Its main effort is to bring public, private and civil stakeholders into the industry and thus make Slovenia a more competitive and innovative tourism destination. The slogan of the country for tourism purposes is **I feel Slove**nia, usually on a typical Slovene green color in the background, which symbolizes the power of Slovene nature and the character of Slovene people themselves (Slovenian Tourist Board, 2012).

4. 2. The image of Slovenia as a destination

Slovenia is a fairly new state in Europe, having declared its independence only in June 1991 and receiving international recognition after a short ten-day armed conflict against Yugoslav forces. For the previous few decades, it was part of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia's dissolution happened through a series of conflicts and bloody wars, collectively dubbed as the *Yugoslav Wars*, which took place between 1991 and 1995 and were claimed to be the bloodiest wars in the recent history of Europe, after World War 2 (Hoare, 2010). As a result, the reputation and, subsequently, the general image of the former Yugoslav republics as tourist destinations received a very strong blow that, depending on the area lasted from a few years to a couple of decades (Hall, 2003).

Hall (1999) has followed the evolution of imagery of Slovenia, as promoted by the country's Tourist Board after 1996, when it officially started its operations. With logos, such as '*The sunny side of the Alps*' or 'A *green piece of Europe*' during the 90s, Slovenia tried to use its pristine nature, good climate and imposing mountains as a means to attract tourists and boost its hard hit tourism flows, after the breakup of Yugoslavia. This promoted image also coincided with the country's effort to develop alternative types of tourism, like nature-based tourism, extreme sports tourism and spa/wellness tourism. In another of his works, Hall (2003) claims that Slovenia, along with Croatia, immediately made an active effort to get rid of any negative connotations that the terms 'Balkans' and 'Yugoslavia' might carry along with them. Slovenia started promoting itself in manners similar to those usually met in Austrian or Italian tourism campaigns, in an effort to be more associated with Central Europe, a feeling of safety, old heritage and similar attractions to those met in the two neighboring countries.

Konecnik (2002) is one of the few researchers that have explored specifically the image of Slovenia as a tourism destination in depth. She interviewed 119 experts in the yearly ITB Berlin tourism convention and found out that previous visit to Slovenia or contact with Slovenian people in the past had a very important positive effect on the image of a country as a destination, both on a cognitive and affective image level. In general, the vast majority of foreign interviewees mentioned the beautiful scenery, the friendliness of locals and the Slovene mountains as the main pull factors of Slovenian image. More specifically, previous visitors had a "better opinion of attributes like suitable accommodation, quality of infrastructure, standard hygiene and cleanliness, personal safety and security, modern health resorts and appealing local food" (p. 9). Surprisingly, her findings show that non-visitors had a more positive image perception of traditional Slovenian events; she argues that Slovenians have possibly not yet realized how to involve visitors in their traditional festivities; hence most of the previous visitors found them a little plain, confusing or indifferent. Furthermore, experts that had previous contact with Slovenian people did not seem to have a very positive image of Slovenian beaches, something that probably stems from the domestic belief that Slovenian coasts are not as attractive as those of other countries, like Croatian ones.

Konecnik and Gartner (2007), explored the image perception of Slovenia even further, based on Konecnik's previous work on the same topic. Their sample was consisting of German and Croatian individuals, with the sole limitation that they had heard of Slovenia as a destination beforehand. On a cognitive level, the German respondents claimed that the strongest elements of Slovenia's TDI were the natural beauty, existence of lovely towns, friendliness of locals, quality of beaches and suitable weather for tourism purposes. On an affective level, most of them described Slovenia as offering "relaxing yet exciting atmosphere which represents a good base for nightlife and entertainment and, in combination with natural attractions, good opportunities for recreation" (p. 414). The Croatian respondents did not offer that much insight to the researchers, since in their case it was very hard to separate the cognitive and affective components of image and analyze them individually. One of their most important observations, however, is that "Slovenia is now in an enviable position. Being a relatively new country, it has not had time to build or erode much brand value. It could eventually exemplify how systematic development can enhance brand value". This could also imply that Slovenia is not as recognizable as other European states and, from that perspective, a large part of the potential world tourist market does not have a clear or fixed image of Slovenia as a destination. In that way, it can easily be argued that the country has the power to look deeper into the international market's needs and create the right promotion and marketing mix, in order to enhance its induced TDI.

4.3. The Erasmus Programme & Slovenia as a partner country

The case presented as part of the methodology of this paper has a really strong connection to the Erasmus Programme, the main student exchange programme within the European Union. Therefore, it is deemed necessary for the deeper understanding of the relationship between student exchange programs and student travel segment in Slovenia that some background information on the Erasmus scheme is provided in this section.

The Erasmus Programme is part of the European Union's Lifelong Learning scheme since 2007, however it has been running independently ever since 1987, celebrating its 25th year or successful operation in 2012. The annual budget for the programme is calculated at more than 450 million euros, used to realize more than 230000 student exchanges in partnering universities in 33 European countries. The main goals of the programme are to assist the creation and growth of more competitive professionals and academics, language learning, intercultural communication skills and sense of independence. One of the main goals, however, was and still is to raise awareness over the existence of a European identity (European Commission, 2013). According to Fernandez (2005), Europe has grown to be a complex social and political system, where young people very often stand in confusion over where they belong and what is their role within the community. Erasmus programme is trying to assist this difficult and vague process, by offering youth a way to experience shared cultural European heritage in a young age.

Although one of the main reasons why Erasmus was inaugurated was the creation of a European identity, Sigalas' (2010) findings are a bit discouraging: He claims that although the exchange programme allows interaction among different European peoples, there is not much contact with locals and their culture or everyday life. He even argues that, in most cases, communication among exchange students themselves is rather superficial, unless they speak the same language or have the same ethnical background. As a result, his findings showed that the programme did not keep up to the expectation that it can sufficiently strengthen European identity, except modestly and in the younger generation of students. Van Mol (2013) partially supported this view. According to his findings, the programme affected some students' perception of Europe and their own identity related to it. The main factors that seemed to affect this process were the students' nationality and their location while on exchange; it was found that those students that lived in border areas or saw a lot of examples of cooperation among European states had developed a more precise idea of 'Europeanness' and embraced a European identity more. However, the researcher argues that those students that usually go on exchange programs have an already developed sense of 'European-ness', in comparison to the average student, therefore the findings in such researches should always be taken in with a small dose of doubt. Mitchell (2012) contests the opinions of other researchers, by claiming that her findings show a clear growing interest of previous Erasmus exchange participants in the E.U. and its general mechanism; however she agrees that the experience does not involve a lot of contact with the host country's local people, their language and their culture. She also support's Van Mol's view on the overrepresentation of European Union supporters within the Erasmus community, therefore she suggests that more research is needed in this field. Fernandez (2005) comments on the issue by saying that the only real solution to this problem, which could massively boost the sense of European identity all over the Community would be if an exchange semester was obligatory for all students who are residents of E.U. states. In that way, they will have to be more involved and informed on the issue and show more personal involvement in the processes and connections within the European Union, something that will make them more active European citizens.

Despite the aforementioned debate, Otero (2008) claims that he found Erasmus students to be overall very satisfied with their overall exchange experience. The vast majority claimed that they were the first in their family to have a study experience out of their country and that their semester abroad helped them improve their language and social skill. He also raises the issue of general participation capabilities of European students to the Erasmus programme, arguing that the European community needs to make some more effort to make the experience equally available to a larger percentage of students from all the European member states, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Slovenia participated in the Erasmus Network for the first time during the academic year 1999-2000, along with all the other candidate countries that joined in the 2004 European Union enlargement. The first official student exchanged from and to the country, however, officially took place in the 2000-2001 academic year. Slovenia was the first ex-Yugoslav republic to be involved in the scheme and to receive an E.U. member status (European Commission, 2012).

Since 2000, Slovenia has seen significant raise in both incoming and outgoing student mobility numbers (Table 5). The average exchange student to the country spent about 5.5 months on exchange in Slovenia. This actively proves that the program has been flourishing in Slovenia and has brought a strong foreign and international element to the country, in the form of exchange students living mostly in the country's two largest cities, Ljubljana and Maribor. The University of Primorska, in the coast of Slovenia and the University of Nova Gorica also participate in the scheme, though with a much weaker presence. In addition to that, the European Union has been allocating a growing budget for Erasmus exchange purposes to Slovenia: 2.87 million Euros in 2007-08 was raised to 3.83 million Euros in 2010-11. The average monthly

grant for incoming students to Slovenia is calculated at about 352 euros, staying on stable levels despite the European financial crisis (European Commission, 2012).

Table 5. Number of Incoming and Outgoing Erasmus exchange students in Slovenia(Source: European Commission, 2012)

Academic	2000-	2001-	2002-	2003-	2004-	2005-	2006-	2007-	2008-	2009-	2010-
Year	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
Incoming	62	108	129	201	378	589	752	876	1078	1271	1436
Outgoing	227	364	422	546	742	879	972	1192	1308	1368	1480

According to the statistical information of the European Commission (2012), Slovenia was mostly chosen as an Erasmus exchange destination in the academic year 2010-2011 by Spanish, Polish, Czech, Portuguese and Turkish students. Students from Turkey are a growing segment in the Slovenian education system and society, showing very significant levels of growth the past few years. This becomes even clearer from the fact that during the academic year 2009-2010 they were not one of the top five nationalities of exchange students in the country. In addition to Turkish, the number of Spanish, Czech and Portuguese students has been growing, though in slower rates, whereas Polish and French students are showing signs of slow decline.

Slovenia as a destination and exchange students enrolled in the country's biggest and main university, University of Ljubljana, are going to be the subjects for the primary data analysis of this particular research. After presenting the main literature findings in the fields of tourism destination image and exchange studies in Europe, the main hypotheses, methodology and data analysis will be presented in the following chapters.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Adopted paradigm

This research was conceived and carried out under the influence of a positivist approach. The main focus is to prove that an Erasmus student exchange, as a form of a long-term tourism experience in a destination, can positively affect the image of that particular destination in the long term.
For this to be realized, the research is trying to prove the validity of five different hypotheses, as presented earlier in chapter 2.5. Some of these hypotheses are based on academic works done by other researchers on similar topics in the past, whereas the rest were formed, in order to prove the validity of the framework suggested in section 2.5.

In the philosophy of positivism, the collection and analysis of primary quantitative data is considered of utmost importance, in order to prove in a scientific way the validity of the hypotheses and highlight the existence of an objective reality, concerning the topic of choice (Guba, 1990). In this case, therefore, the research will try to prove that there is a relationship between a long-term destination visit and the creation of a positive destination image. The results of this work will be expected to not only prove a causal relationship between the two elements in the case picked for the purposes of the primary data collection and analysis, but also in any other similar case; therefore, it is expected that the results could be applied to any Erasmus exchange student, in any city or university participating in the scheme. Also, the results could be applicable in the case of other exchange programs, which take place outside of the European Union.

5.2. Research methods in primary data collection and analysis

5.2.1. Research Design

This study was realized with the use of a descripto-explanatory research design, in the sense that it tries not only to describe the data analyzed, but also find and try to explain causal relationships between different elements and reach valuable conclusions concerning the topic researched (Saunders et al., 2012).

The main focus is on the effort to test and prove valid the hypotheses made in chapter 2.5. The primary tool used for that purpose is a pair of self-administered questionnaires, one of them being the preliminary and the second being the final one, respectively. The questionnaires were handed to exchange students, who were actively attending classes in the Faculty of Economics of the University of Ljubljana during March 2013 and June 2013, respectively. The two questionnaires were necessary, in order to measure the respondents expectations from Slovenia as a destination right after their arrival to the country and compare it to their final image perception after 2.5 months of stay in Slovenia.

The preliminary questionnaire (Appendix 1) was handed to the students in person, at the beginning of their university classes and under the supervision of their professors and the researcher. The main reasons for that was the exclusion of any Slovenian students participating in the same classes as the exchange students and the provision of explanations to the respondents, concerning the aims and the process of the primary data collection. The questionnaire was not anonymous, for the single purpose that the same sample would participate in the second phase of the primary data collection as well, thus making their contact data necessary for communication purposes.

The final questionnaire (Appendix 2) was based on the preliminary one, with slight but necessary alterations. This time, the questionnaire was handed to the participants of the first round of primary data collection in the form of an online questionnaire, sent to them individually and personally by email. The respondents had a pre-set and known deadline to fill in the questionnaire electronically and submit it. The reason for that was that the students are dispersed for vacation and other leisure trips throughout May and early June, therefore it would be very hard to reach a large percentage of them in person.

Both of the questionnaires included 4 categories of questions: the first one referred to some of the most important cognitive image elements, whereas the second to the four affective image elements suggested by Russel et al. (1981) and expressed in four pairs of polar opposite adjectives (Arousing-Sleepy, Pleasant-Unpleasant, Relaxing-Distressing and Exciting-Gloomy). The third category referred to the information sources used by the students for preparation, before their arrival to Slovenia. In the end, the fourth and last category requested from the participants to offer some demographic and personal data to the researcher, including, in the case of the preliminary questionnaire only, their contact details for the second phase of the primary data collection.

Before the main tool for the primary data collection was finalized in the form of questionnaires, an extensive review of the methods used by other scholars on the topic of TDI was realized. *Table 6* presents in a concentrated form the most striking examples of previous works that led to the choices described in this section. The most important works, from which the research design was mostly influenced, where the ones that led to the main proposed framework in Chapter 2.5, namely those of Fakeye & Crompton (1991) and Baloglu & McCleary (1999). The work of Konecnik (2002) was also of particular importance, because of its affinity to the topic of the image of Slovenia as a destination.

Research Method	Academic works on destination image using same method
Questionnaire as the main primary data collection method	Chon (1991) Fakeye & Crompton (1991) Baloglu & McCleary (1999) Konecnik (2002) Kim &Yoon (2003) Beerli & Martin (2004) Chen & Tsai (2007) Martin et al. (2008) Nadeu et al. (2008)
Usage of a 7-point Likert scale for cognitive image component evaluations	Fakeye & Crompton (1991) Baloglu & McCleary (1999) Beerli & Martin (2004) Martin et al. (2008)
Usage of a 7-point Likert scale for affective image component evaluations	Baloglu & McCleary (1999) Konecnik (2002) Martin et al. (2008) Beerli & Martin (2008)
Usage of the 4 affective image components described by Russel et al. (1981)	Baloglu & McCleary (1999) Konecnik (2002) Martin et al. (2008)

Table 6: Literary resources for variables and scales used for measurement

The population of interest for this study was all the exchange students in Slovenia. However, due to the large number of the students and the dispersion of faculties and universities within the country, only the Faculty of Economics was chosen to participate in the study. Another reason for this decision was the willingness of the exchange student services staff of the faculty to provide the researcher with important information on the timetables, the numbers of students and the contact details of their professors within the faculty.

5.2.2. Description of the sample

Only exchange students of non-Slovenian origin and who had overall spent less than 1 month in Slovenia during their lives were eligible to participate in the research. Therefore, about 1/6 of the exchange students were automatically not eligible for selection, since they were already spending their second semester in University of Ljubljana. Previous visitation to Slovenia in the past for short periods (less than a

week) did not exclude some of the students from participating in the research, because the focus of the study is on the effects of longer periods of visitation to TDI. The final sample of the preliminary primary data collection process ended up accounting of 78 individuals, all of whom completed their preliminary questionnaires in a valid manner, without any omissions. Although in most researches on TDI the research samples are much higher, reaching usually a few hundreds of respondents, the fact that the sample includes almost every single eligible individual in the Faculty of Economics of University of Ljubljana makes it adequately representative for the research purposes.

In terms of demographic data, 65.4% of the sample was female and 34.6% male, which could roughly be translated to 2/3 of the respondents being females, whereas the rest males. The average age of the sample was 22.9 years old, with the youngest respondent being 19 and the oldest 30 years old. The vast majority of the respondents were between 20-22 years old, which is expected, considering that most of the students are on exchange while on the second or third year of their bachelor degree studies. In terms of nationalities, more than 70% of the respondents came from Europe, with the other continents following (Table 7). There was no representative of Oceania in the sample.

Continent of origin	Percentage of representatives in sample
Europe	71.8%
Asia	20.6%
Africa	3.8%
Americas	3.8%
Total	100%

Table 7: Allocation of the survey respondents by continent of origin

The students came from a relatively mixed background, which comprised of 31 different countries of origin. Most of the nationalities mentioned in chapter 3.3 as the prominent ones in the scheme in Slovenia are represented in the sample, with the exception of Poland (Table 8). The strong presence of South Korean students in the sample can easily be explained by the existence of a co-operation program between the Economic Faculty of University of Ljubljana and a number of business and economic higher education institutions in the city of Daegu, South Korea.

Nationality	Percentage of sample
German	12.8%
Portuguese	9.0%
Turkish	9.0%
Czech	6.4%
Russian	6.4%
South Korean	5.1%
Croatian	5.1%
Spanish	3.8%
French	3.8%
Finnish	3.8%

 Table 8: Main nationalities represented in the original sample of the primary data collection process

In the second phase of the primary data collection process, the return rate was 61.5% of the original sample, with 48 fully completed and valid responses collected. There are a few reasons for this relatively low return rate: the Erasmus students tend to travel a lot during their semester abroad, thus not having access to the internet and their email accounts for long periods of time. Secondly, it is assumed that a lot of them provided the researcher with their secondary email addresses, which they do not check as often for updates. The main problem, however, was that because of time restraints, the second phase of the primary data collection process could not last for more than two weeks, meaning that any answers that arrived before the deadline set had to be omitted. Still, it is expected that this number of replies will offer a quite clear picture of the change of image perception of Slovenia as a destination, especially since the original sample was not very big itself, although including almost every individual on exchange at the Faculty of Economics of University of Ljubljana.

In terms of demographic distribution, there were some changes between the two phases as well: there was a bigger prevalence of female second-time respondents (75% of the final sample) and also European students (77.1% over 71.8% in the previous phase). Some more comparative statistics are summarized in Table 9 below.

	1 st phase	2 nd phase
Number of respondents	78	48
Return rate	-	61.5%
Average age of respondents	22,94 years	23,73 years
Male/Female ratio (%)	35/65	25/75
Biggest ethnic group	Germans (12.8% of total)	Germans (12.5% of total)
	Europeans (71.8%)	Europeans (77.1%)
Origin breakdown	Asians (20.5%)	Asians (16.7%)
	Americans (3.8%)	Americans (4.2%)
	Africans (3.8%)	Africans (2.1%)

 Table 9: Differences in research samples between the two phases

 of the primary data collection

Of course the smaller size of the final sample causes certain limitations, which will be discussed and assessed further on, in a later chapter. However, considering the small but very representative of the total population initial sample size, it is considered that a little more than 60% of the initial samples is a satisfactory return rate in order to deduct results that could be applied to the total population of exchange students in Ljubljana.

5.2.3 Measurement of Variables

As already mentioned, the questionnaires in the first and second phase had a shared part, based on previous literature on cognitive and affective destination image. 27 variables referring to the cognitive image were extracted from previous academic works, shown in table 10 below in order of prominence.

Name of cognitive image component	Number of mentions in academic work surveys (N=12)		
Cultural Attractions*	11		
Climate / Weather*	10		
Landscapes / Scenery	10		
Tourist Accommodation *	10		
Friendly local people*	10		
Safety standards*	10		
Nightlife*	9		
Shopping*	9		
Natural Environment / Flora-Fauna*	8		
General Infrastructure*	8		
Local cuisine*	8		
Beaches*	7		
Outdoor/Recreation activities*	7		
Value for money*	7		
Hygiene Standards*	7		
Restaurants*	5		
Lakes & Mountains*	4		
Spas / Wellness Resorts*	3		
Events & Festivals*	3		
General Transport Infrastructure	3		
Domestic Transport Network	3		
Standards of living	3		
Political Stability*	3		
Local customs	3		
Small towns**	2		
Air accessibility	2		
Ground accessibility	1		
*Those components are also encountered in acaden Konecnik (2002) and Konecnik & Gartner (2007)	nic works on Slovenia's image as a destination by		

Table 10: Number of references of cognitive image components in relevant literature studied

** This component is only encountered in articles on Slovenia's image as a destination by Konecnik (2002) and Konecnik & Gartner (2007)

The variables were measured through statements, towards which the respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement through a seven-point Likert scale, with (7) referring to total agreement and (1) to total disagreement. All the statements had a similarly positive character, such as "Slovenia has a favorable climate for tourism purposes" or "Slovenia is a safe country", in order to not confuse the respondents and cause falsification of the final results.

The 4 sets of variables introduced by Russel et al. (1981) were used to measure affective image (Relaxing-Stressful, Pleasant-Unpleasant, Exciting-Gloomy and Arousing-Sleepy). Those four pairs were vastly used in previous relevant literature, with very few alterations or additions. In the case of cognitive image elements, a seven-point Likert scale was used, as previously mentioned in chapter 4.2.1. In the case of affective image, a semantic-differential seven-scale rating system was used, with each one of the opposite adjectives of each pair being at each end of the rating line. This helped show which pole of the two opposite adjectives continuum the respondent felt more in agreement with.

The cognitive image components were factor analyzed using the Varimax rotation procedure with SPSS 16.0 software package for Windows (see Appendix 3 for SPSS output). Only those variables that had factor loadings higher than 0.50 were retained in the final factor analysis. Three of the variables did not manage to cut through after the first factor analysis and were subsequently removed. Namely, those were "Clean and suitable for swimming beaches", "Political stability of Slovenian society" and "Air accessibility of Slovenia". The rest of the variables were factor analyzed again, meeting the 0.50 quota this time and being categorized in 5 different factors, which explained a total of 65.3% of the total variance. A graphic illustration of the factor analysis results can be seen in table 11.

Factor	Factor Loadings	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained	Factor Mean
Factor I: Natural & Man- made Environment		7.79	32.46%	5.35 (n=78) 5.29 (n=48)* 5.69 (n=48)**
Favorable Climate	.61			
Beautiful Landscapes	.91			
Unspoiled natural environment	.77			
Beautiful lakes & mountains	.79			

Table 11: Factor Analysis of cognitive Image Perception component variables
(numbers rounded to two decimal digits)

(table continues)

(continued)

Cultural Attractions	.51			
Beautiful towns	.66			
Factor II: Leisure Activities and Value for Money		2.71	11.30%	4.82 (n=78) 4.73 (n=48)* 5.19 (n=48)**
Variety of outdoors activities and sports	.57			
Interesting nightlife	.70			
Events & Festivals	.59			
Variety of Restaurants	.60			
Shopping options	.86			
Value for money	.52			
Factor III: Tourism and Transport infrastructure		2.25	9.36%	4.16 (n=78) 4.07 (n=48)* 4.49 (n=48)**
Spa and wellness options	.63			
Quality of accommodation	.63			
Quality of transport network	.77			
Quality of tourism infrastructure	.52			
Convenience of domestic transport	.73			
Factor IV:				5.03 (n=78)
Level of social		1.59	6.64%	4.84 (n=48)*
development				5.41 (n=48)**
Accessibility from neighboring	.67			
General hygiene	.69			
Standards of living	.52			
Safety of destination	.69			

(table continues)

(continued)

Factor V:				4.39 (n=78)
Elements of		1.34	5.57%	4.45 (n=48)*
Slovenian culture				4.58 (n=48)**
Interesting	60			
cuisine	.00			
Uniqueness of				
national customs	.67			
& traditions				
Friendliness of	07			
local population	.02			
Total Variance			65.2%	
explained			05.5%	
* Refers to first pl	hase of data colle	ection (March 201	3) ** Refers to secon	d phase (June 2013)

Most of the loadings have a value of .60 or more, thus showing a relatively strong correlation of the variables grouped together and an adequate cohesion of the groups. Factor I mostly includes items that are related to the natural environment, as well as human creations, like towns and other monuments, which today are important cultural attractions. It could also be said that this factor includes items that are, directly or indirectly, related to sightseeing and attractions. Factor II includes items that refer to activities a tourist can enjoy while on holiday, as well as the value for money of the destination overall, which actually most of the times depends on those aforementioned leisure time activities. Factor III is a more technical factor, referring to all those elements that have to do with the destination's infrastructure in terms of tourism accommodation, transport, spa/luxury resorts and so on. Factor IV focuses more on the level of development of a destination as a society, including items, such as standards of living, hygiene, public security and so on. In the end, factor V mostly includes those items that have to do with Slovenian culture, such as the predisposition of local people, their cuisine and their traditions.

The means of each factor's individual element ratings are also present in the table above. As clearly seen, in the case of each and every one of the five factors the evaluation of the 48 final respondents in June 2013 is higher than both their answers in March, as well as the evaluations of the whole initial sample (n=78) in the beginning of the semester. This clearly shows a preliminary tendency for amelioration of the cognitive image with the passing of time on Erasmus exchange, however more concrete results on that will follow in the analysis section. In addition, the factor with the highest mean rating is clearly Factor I, showing a distinction of Slovenia's natural beauty for the visitor. The factor with the lowest rating is Factor III, indicating that the students were not highly satisfied with Slovenia's tourism and transport infrastructure and offer. However, even in this case, the evaluation is more positive after the second phase of the data collection, showing improved image perception.

Apart from the cognitive and affective image components, the research is also touching the issue of social media as sources of information and as a means to create awareness for a destination, by sharing personal experience. Therefore, apart from the first, shared part of the two questionnaires, a second, differentiated one was added as a last section in each one of them. In the preliminary questionnaire, the respondents were asked to grade in a 7-point Likert scale how important several information channels were for them, in order to collect information about Slovenia, before visiting the country for their exchange semester. 1 was tagged as 'Very Unimportant', whereas 7 as 'Very Important'. Apart from the 7 point scale, an eighth option was given to the respondents, tagged as 'Never Used', in case they never had any contact with one or more of those information channels.

In the second part of the final questionnaire, the respondents were asked about sharing their impressions of Slovenia on social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Travel applications, forums and so on. They were given the option to choose through a multiple choice question all those social media that they used to describe their experiences, while in Slovenia. For those that had not yet shared any material online, they were subsequently asked about their intention to do so until the end of their semester abroad. Depending on their answer, they were moved either to the demographic questions or to a similar multiple choice question, as described earlier.

Since there is very limited prior research on the topic of social media and destination image formation, this part of the questionnaire was mostly based on the researcher's own discretion. The measurement methods of these variables are pretty basic in the field of primary data collection and analysis and the main reason was to provide with simple and easy to understand results, which would assist the effort to prove the research hypotheses right or wrong and to work as a basis for further research on the same under researched topic.

6. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The answers of the 48 respondents who completed both parts of the survey were the ones to be analyzed from the whole survey population. The rest of the 30 questionnaires that remained from the first stage of the primary data collection, without being followed up by a second stage reply were not taken into consideration in this part of the research, since it was impossible to track the change of attitude of these individuals throughout their semester in Slovenia.

The questionnaire results were inputted in SPSS 16.0 for Windows. The first, common part of both the questionnaires (cognitive and affective image perception elements) was evaluated separately than the rest. The main test used to prove the hypotheses referring to this first part is a paired sample T-test, which would allow the comparison between the attitude of the students in the beginning and the end of their

semester. For the second part of the questionnaires, which is relevant to information sources and social media, different methods and tests were used, depending on the case, since the measuring scales used were quite different and, thus, needed to be approached in a different manner from one another. Moreover, the hypotheses referring to these specific questions of the questionnaires have a different scope than the first ones and do not go into as much depth, since they compliment the main findings of the study and are not the main focus themselves.

At this point, it is very important to mention that, although the final sample of the survey used equals more than 60% of the total population of exchange students in Faculty of Economics of Ljubljana, which means that it is a quite representative portion of the total population studied, the final number of questionnaires as a total (N=48) is quite limited. This causes certain problems with the analysis of the results, especially when studying significance of the final results, since the sample is considered too small in terms of statistical analysis. In the following chapters it will be more obvious how the sample size affects the final results and what limitations can be set to accepting or turning down the initial hypotheses.

6.1. Cognitive, Affective and Overall destination image

6.1.1. Hypothesis I – Longer visitation and cognitive image of Slovenia

This part of the analysis corresponds to the first 27 items of the questionnaire, which are shared between the questionnaires used in phase one and two of the data collection process, as part of the common part (refer to Appendices 1 and 2 for the full questionnaires). Before the main statistical analysis follows suit, it is deemed interesting for the purposes of the research to present some general findings from the questionnaires, which will help paint a picture of Slovenia's image in the minds of the young exchange students. In Table 12 below, the components with the highest and the lowest ratings are presented, thus showing Slovenia's strongest and weakest points in terms of cognitive image perception:

Cognitive components rated highest (n=48) Phase I	Cognitive components rated highest (n=48) Phase II	Cognitive components rated lowest (n=48) Phase II	Cognitive components rated lowest (n=48) Phase II
Lakes & Mountains 5.94	Lakes & Mountains 6.40	Accessibility by air 2.83	Accessibility by air 2.29
Landscapes & Scenery 5.83	Landscapes & Scenery 6.40	Unique local cuisine 3.73	Unique local cuisine 3.96
Safety of destination 5.44	Safety of destination 6.21	Spa & Wellness offer 3.83	Quality of transport 4.04
Friendliness of locals 5.35	Unspoiled environment 6.17	Political stability 3.94	Beaches for swimming 4.25
Unspoiled environment 5.25	Outdoor activities 6.02	Quality of transport 3.96	Political stability 4.27

Table 12: Top-5 of highest and lowest rated cognitive components in March and June 2013

In the two columns showing the highest rated cognitive image elements, no significant changes can be noticed; Components referring to Slovenia's natural beauty and attractions are monopolizing the results in both the results from March and June 2013. The only exception comes from the results from phase one, showing friendliness of locals as one of the best rated components in terms of expectations of the students. However, after the exchange has almost reached its end, this component does not manage to keep its position and is replaced by outdoor activities, which probably gained more popularity between the time phase one and phase two took place, since the weather provided the students with more excursion and leisure time. Another significant observation is that all these components seemed to have a higher evaluation in phase two, rather than phase one, showing more appreciation for the natural beauty of Slovenia as a whole and confirming the high mean value of Factor I, shown earlier in the methodology sector. All of the top 5 rated components show really high levels of satisfaction in the eyes of the students, being rated on average with a 6 or more, showing an almost perfect image perception level. These results seem to also be confirming Slovenia's prior success as a mountain and nature destination, rather than a sea, sun and entertainment one (Konecnik, 2002; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007).

On the contrary, there are a few noticeable changes in the bottom 5 rated components, shown on the two columns on the right. The two worst-rated components, namely accessibility by air and uniqueness of Slovenian cuisine remain in the bottom 2 positions, the first one even getting a much worse evaluation in June 2013, thus showing the frustration of the students with Ljubljana airport's connectivity to other European and international destinations. Nevertheless, Slovenian cuisine is rated higher in the second phase, however still rater in both cases lower than the average of the 7-point Likert scale. The students' frustration with transport from, to and inside Slovenia seems to not end at the air coverage of the country; students rated quality of transport within the country as being close or less than the average in both cases, with transport getting the third worst rating in June 2013 from all the cognitive image elements. This is not surprising to see, since Slovenia's small population and size has not allowed for much development in that department: the country's big cities are still offering only buses and taxis for transportation, with a total absence of trams, city trains or subway networks. Especially after midnight, the only option for partying students is to take a taxi back to their apartment or dormitory. In addition, the general condition of buses is, in general, satisfactory; however the existence of some old buses in the network smudges the good image of local transportation. In a similar manner, travelling from city to city in Slovenia is in some cases highly problematic, with no direct connection from Ljubljana to many localities of high importance, like the Skočjan caves or the coastal towns of Piran and Portorož.

Political stability of Slovenia happened to be a very sensitive issue, during the period in which the research took place. Between March and June 2013 a lot of scandals and parliamentary changes took place in the country. In addition, the ex Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa was convicted for corruption and misuse of public funds, thus creating a realy negative hype for Slovenia's political scene during the time of general political and economic turmoil in Europe (Bloomberg, 2013). It is obvious from the results that students got aware of this situation, thus rating political stability poorly in both instances. As far as the spa offer in Slovenia is concerned, it is assumed that the students were not aware of Slovenia's reputation as a spa and wellness destination before and shortly after their arrival to the country, since this element is completely absent from the bottom 5 list in phase two; actually, this component received a much higher rating in the second phase, showing increased levels of awareness about Slovenia's spa and wellness product offer throughout the period of Erasmus exchange. Last, but not least, the presence of beaches suitable for swimming in the bottom 5 of the second phase is again not very surprising, if one considers the very small size of the Slovenian coast, which on a big part is monopolized by the commercial port of Koper, thus leaving very little space for swimming areas.

It is very important to stress here that, although some of the components did not cut through the average point of the Likert scale used (7 points, 4 being the absolute mean), most of them managed to receive a higher evaluation in the second phase, thus giving early impressions of an improved cognitive image of Slovenia after the Erasmus exchange is realized, something that will be further tested in this section.

The main way to prove the validity of the first hypothesis, is to check the results of a paired sample T-test, which will show us the means of the ratings per variable and let us see the average opinion on each element for phase one and phase two of the primary data collection process. The results follow in table 13 below (see also Appendix 4 for SPSS output). In the table, the highest mean, which shows the most positive stance, has been highlighted in bold. In addition, in cases where the difference of the two means between phase one and two is higher than 0.5, the value has been highlighted further by being underlined. In that fashion, it will be easier to compare the means and see where there have been the biggest improvements or disappointments of the exchange students studying in Slovenia.

Component	Mean (1)	Mean (2)	Std. Error (Mean)	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Favorable climate for tourism	4.96	4.94	0.243	0.086	0.932
Beautiful landscapes& scenery	5.83	<u>6.4</u>	0.195	2.884	0.006
Unspoiled natural environment	5.25	<u>6.17</u>	0.195	4.704	0.000
Beautiful lakes and mountains	5.94	6.4	0.186	2.466	0.017
Clean beaches	4.06	4.25	0.313	0.599	0.552
Outdoor activities& recreation	5.15	<u>6.02</u>	0.190	4.611	0.000
Lovely small towns	5.23	5.5	0.195	1.391	0.171

Table 13: Paired sample t-test results for cognitive items of the questionnaires

(table continues)

(continued)

Spa & wellness options	3.83	<u>4.52</u>	0.258	2.663	0.011
Nightlife & entertainment	4.73	4.98	0.267	0.936	0.354
Interesting cultural attractions	4.5	4.75	0.241	1.037	0.305
Interesting events and festivals	4.35	<u>5.1</u>	0.23	3.266	0.002
Good restaurants	4.83	5.25	0.245	1.699	0.096
Good shopping options	4.29	4.54	0.339	0.738	0.464
Good value for money as destination	5	5.25	0.277	0.903	0.371
High quality of accommodation	4.23	4.56	0.211	1.578	0.121
High quality of transport	3.96	4.04	0.273	0.306	0.761
Good tourism infrastructure	4.33	<u>5</u>	0.273	2.438	0.019
Good road accessibility	4.96	5.31	0.297	1.193	0.293
Good air accessibility	<u>2.83</u>	2.29	0.318	-1.704	0.095
Convenient domestic transport network	4.02	4.35	0.289	1.153	0.255
Clean country	4.67	<u>5.42</u>	0.25	3	0.004
High standards of living	4.29	4.69	0.234	1.692	0.097
Safe country	5.44	<u>6.21</u>	0.227	3.392	0.001
Political stability	3.94	4.27	0.291	1.147	0.257
Interesting & unique cuisine	3.73	3.96	0.298	0.769	0.446
Interesting & unique customs	4.27	4.35	0.284	0.294	0.770
Friendly & hospitable people	5.35	5.44	0.282	0.295	0.769

It is very easy to see that the general stance of the respondents has been vastly improved at the second stage of the primary data collection. Furthermore, some of the means show a great improvement between phase one and two, as shown by the underlined values in column three of the table above. More specifically, Slovenia was rated much higher in the second phase for having unspoiled natural environment, beautiful landscapes and scenery, offering a large variety of outdoors sports and recreation activities, spa and wellness options, events and festivals, high quality of tourism infrastructure and last, but not least, for being a clean and safe country.

The results also seem to confirm those found by Fakeye & Crompton (1991), who claim that longer visitation periods are almost guaranteed to improve perception in certain components of a destination's image, namely friendliness of locals, attractions and opportunities and local food and cuisine. All of those elements show improved stances of the respondents between the two phases, thus proving that longer visits make people more aware of certain aspects of a destination, which take more time to be explored and appreciated.

There are some very simple but good explanations for most of these changes; Slovenia is generally known as a country of unmatched natural beauty, since it combines the southeast side of the Alps with a beautiful Adriatic coast and very green scenery throughout its whole countryside. Since the first phase of the research was carried out in early March, when the weather in Slovenia is still rather cold and rainy, most of the students did not yet have the opportunity to explore and enjoy the Slovene countryside. However, it is impressive to see that the students already had high expectations of the country in that aspect, since their initial mean rating was already 5.25 for unspoiled nature and 5.83 for beautiful landscape and scenery. Their views in the second phase are really close to the highest rating of the Likert scale used (7=totally agree), thus showing a very high liking for the Slovenian nature and landscape. The very low levels of significance (close to zero for both variables) proves further that the students did indeed have a very improved perception of Slovenia in terms of natural beauty, something that strongly supports the first hypothesis.

In a similar manner, weather is probably the main reason for the students' improved ratings in Slovenia's offer of outdoors activities, as well as events and festivals. During March, Slovenia's skiing season is almost ending, however the weather is still not good enough for other activities, such as rafting, kayaking, trekking and mountain climbing; those activities can be much better enjoyed from May on. The same for events and festivals, although Slovenia has some interesting events, like the carnival celebrations in February, most of the cultural events and music festivals are taking place close to the summer months, at the end of spring. Since the second phase of the questionnaires was carried out in mid June, it is obvious that the students had the opportunity to enjoy participating in some interesting events and practicing some sports and other outdoor activities, thus rating Slovenia much higher in this regard. Once again, however, it is noteworthy that the initial ratings were still high, showing high expectations. Low significance levels support that the results of the comparison

on means for those two variable sets were not random either, thus supporting the first hypothesis even further.

Cleanliness of a destination is one of the elements that an individual can judge very fast, after visiting a destination, usually not changing their opinion very easily as time goes by. However, this is not the case here, since Slovenia is rated much higher in the second phase and with very low significance levels, thus showing very small chances that the positive change was a random event. One cannot easily explain how the perception of cleanliness can change so drastically, however the weather could again be the one behind this change: March was a very snowy month in Ljubljana, thus creating a lot of melting or black snow in the streets, which often give a perception of dirt to the newcomer. As for safety of Slovenia, this is one of the most important elements to be evaluated for long-term visitors in a destination. Safety, especially in the developed world, is not very easy to evaluate in a short time's stay. However, in long-term visits, like an exchange semester abroad, a visitor gets to see the destination at all times of the day, visit non-touristic neighborhoods and see the shadiest of areas that a city has to offer. As one can easily see, Slovenia was expected to be a safe destination for the newcomer students in phase 1 already, however in phase two the perception seems to be even more positive.

Contrary to the above, there is only two out of the twenty-seven variables related to cognitive image elements that showed a higher expectation that the reality. Slovenia got a slightly worse average grade for its climate for tourism purposes, however this was expected by the researcher from the beginning: spring 2013 was one of the harshest springs Slovenia has seen for a very long time, with heavy snowfall occurring even until late April, thus disappointing students who have a lot of free time and want to travel. The result was expected to be even lower; the fact that the phase two result is so close to the one in phase one is considered as a very positive element.

The second variable that showed a worsened picture after phase two was completed is the air accessibility of Slovenia. This was yet another variable, where the worsened result was expected: Ljubljana airport is practically the only airport in the country operating all year round, covered by a very limited number of airlines and reaching very few destinations, exclusively in Europe. Exchange students have a lot of free time to travel and usually like to leave the borders of the state, where they study and see the neighboring countries as well. Seeing by the very limited offer of flights from Ljubljana to neighboring states, most students end up using other means of transport, such as train and mini-van, to see destinations like Vienna, Budapest and Venice. At the same time, many of the students return home for the Easter holidays or during other periods of their stay abroad. It is a very common phenomenon in Slovenia to use airports in neighboring countries for such purposes, especially Treviso and Marco Polo international airports in Italy, Pleso airport close to Zagreb, Croatia and Vienna International Airport.

It could be contested by some that the validity of the other variables' comparisons is guaranteed, because of the high significance levels, which could show that there is a high chance that the results were caused by luck and not a solid positive attitude of the sample towards the destination. As an answer to that doubt, it could be said that even if some of the results were a result of luck, the table's results are overall too improved in phase two, with 25 out of 27 variables showing important improvements in phase 2. This can easily prove that the general stance of the respondents has improved and it is not possible that the results are a product of luck, but rather a result of their overall experience in Slovenia, which was positive for them and changed their overall attitude to the better.

As a result of all of the above, hypothesis I is considered valid, since the results are overwhelmingly improved in phase two of the primary data collection, with some of the most significant factors (natural environment, outdoor activities, safety) showing vastly positive change. Therefore, Fakeye and Crompton's (1991) theory about the positive effect length of stay has on a destination's perceived image is confirmed in the case of exchange students in Slovenia.

6.1.2. Hypothesis II – Longer visitation and affective image of Slovenia

This part of the analysis corresponds to the next 4 items of the questionnaire, which remained the same between the first and second part of the primary data collection process.

The presentation is slightly different here, because the grading scale was of a different nature: the seven point scale used was in this case bipolar, each pole representing an adjective of positive nature and its opposite of a negative nature. An evaluation of 1 was the closest one to the positive element, whereas an evaluation of 7 closest to the negative element.

As with the previous case, a paired samples t-Test was utilized, in order to compare the means of the items and test their significance levels. The results of this test are presented in table 14 below. In the table, the lowest mean, which shows the most positive stance, has been highlighted in bold. It is reminded here that in this part of the research a lower evaluation shows a preference towards the more positive adjective of the continuum used in the questionnaire, 1 being the closest to the most positive evaluation. Contrary to the cognitive image variables, no big differences between the two phases' means were observed in this part of the research, therefore none of the means was further highlighted with underlining, as was the case before.

Component	Mean (1)	Mean (2)	Std. Error (Mean)	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Slovenia is relaxing/stressful	2.88	2.52	0.255	1.388	0.172
Slovenia is pleasant/unpleasant	2.23	2.19	0.166	0.252	0.803
Slovenia is exciting/gloomy	2.79	2.98	0.234	802	0.427
Slovenia is arousing/sleepy	3.25	3.50	0.257	973	0.336

Table 14: Paired sample t-test results for affective items of the questionnaires

Here, the results are a little more ambiguous than in the case of the cognitive image hypothesis; half of the items show an improved stance of the respondents in the second phase, whereas the other half show a move towards the negative side of the continuum. In all the cases, however, it is encouraging that the mean is closer to the positive side of the continuum (with 4 being the absolute average between the positive and the negative adjectives, 1 being the absolute positive and 7 the absolute negative). More specifically, Slovenia is judged as being more relaxing after a few months spent in the country, as well as more pleasant; out of all the four sets of adjectives, Slovenia actually scored the most positive in the pleasant/unpleasant continuum, being judged as a very pleasant destination in both the questionnaires. On the contrary, Slovenia is seen as gloomier in June than it was seen in March, which is surprising on the first look. In addition, it is seen as sleepier than it was seen before.

Another element that needs to be judged is the very high significance levels in all of the elements tested. Usually, one could say that this might be because of the small size of the sample, which might statistically not be large enough to show safe results. However, in this case, there is a need for more background information on the circumstances, under which the students rated Slovenia's image on an affective level, in order to make sure if the results might have been a matter of luck or they really represent a change in attitude, to the better or to the worse.

There is some background information about the research that might help in the interpretation of some of the results: The first phase was realized in March, when many of the students had just started their classes. This month is one of the busiest in University of Ljubljana – Faculty of economics. A big part of the sample consisted of exchange students of the European Master in Tourism Management program, who had just arrived in Ljubljana about a week before the questionnaires were filled in. The students were at that time having a lot of workload, therefore it is expected that a

lot of them judged Slovenia as being stressful, simply because of their university schedule and not because of the country itself. At the same time, the rest of the Erasmus students were also overwhelmed with a lot of assignments, which probably made them rate accordingly. As a result, it could be said that the improved image of Slovenia as a relaxing destination might simply be because of the negative exterior influences that were in place during the first phase of the primary data collection process.

As far as the continuum pleasant/unpleasant is concerned, in that case there are not many comments to make. Slovenia was expected to be a highly pleasant destination, something that was slightly improved further in the post-experience phase, therefore here the result seems to be more secure and trustworthy.

Surprisingly, Slovenia is seen as being gloomier in the second phase of the questionnaire than it was before. The reason is most probably the extremely heavy winter that lasted from January until April 2013 that year and which did not allow students to travel as much as they would want to in their leisure time. A lot of hours spent inside dorm rooms or classrooms probably gave the students the impression that Slovenia is gloomier than it really is. Still, it is encouraging that the results in both phases are not very negative, being closer to the positive pole of the continuum.

In a similar manner, Slovenia is seen as sleepier in June than it was expected in March. Once again, the reason is probably that most of the students expected to see more life, more events and other leisure opportunities during the winter, which was not satisfied as a need because of the harsh winter; indeed, Ljubljana was more sleepy than usual that winter, in comparison to previous ones and only a select few bars and restaurants were crowded in weekdays. In addition, Saturdays are not very popular with locals or students in Ljubljana, contrary to the situation in other European states, thus causing some frustration or disappointment to some of the more outgoing exchange students. The result in this case is very close in both cases to the neutral point of the continuum, thus showing that Slovenia is not perceived as a very lively destination, probably because of its not so promoted or developed nightlife, concert and event planning etc.

As a result of the above explanation, Hypothesis II is considered only partially valid, since practically only two of the items were improved in the second phase and the significance levels do not let us make safe assumptions even about those two items. However, it could probably safely be claimed that Slovenia is seen as a more pleasant destination with time passing by and, more questionably, as a more relaxing destination as well. However, it is seen as less exciting and less arousing than it was expected to be, probably because of all the elements described earlier. Therefore, Fakeye and Crompton's (1991) theory about long term visitation and improved affective image of a destination is not fully proven in this case.

6.2. Information sources

6.2.1. Hypothesis III – Information sources and primary cognitive image

This hypothesis assumes that the more information sources one utilizes before the trip, in order to get informed about the destination of choice, the better the cognitive expected image is for that individual. As a result, this hypothesis requires the use of data from the first round of primary data collection and could involve all 78 original respondents, since it does not require any sort of comparison between the expectation stage and the modified image stage.

Before testing the hypothesis, it is interesting to see some descriptive statistics about how highly different information sources were rated by the respondents. In Table 15, one can see the information sources presented in the questionnaire to the respondents ranked in order of popularity among the respondents and in order of rating as more or less important.

Information source	Used by (% of respondents)	Average rating by users
Family & relatives	84,6%	4,38
YouTube/other video host	79,8%	3,85
Academic/school readings	79,8%	3,81
Social Media	79,5%	3,85
Wikipedia	78,2%	3,91
Slovenian Tourism Board Website	70,5%	3,33
Travel Guidebooks	67,9%	3,29
Tripadvisor	60,3%	2,77
Promotional Leaflets	56,4%	2,32
Travel TV shows	50,0%	1,81
Travel Magazines	48,7%	2,10
Other information source	23,1%	1,08

 Table 15: Descriptive statistics of information source usage and importance

 before or during first week of actual visitation to Slovenia

It is obvious that word of mouth is still, as mentioned in the literature review earlier, one of the most important information sources and one of those that travelers usually trust more than others, by seeing it as more close to them and more accurate, as also supported by Gartner (1993). In general, most students seemed to have used a combination of more than one or even more than two information sources, as shown by the high percentages that most of the sources collected in terms of prior usage. However, it is noteworthy that almost none of the sources managed to earn a high

rating of importance by the users; considering that in the 7-point Likert scale 4 is the neutral point and 7 is the 'very important' rating, only word of mouth by family or relatives has managed to earn a rating of neutral to slightly important. All the others are rated as slightly unimportant to totally unimportant. This can be possibly explained through the tendency of travelers to use a combination of sources, thus making each one individually less important and capable of providing with adequate information. Another explanation might be that half of the students were actually studying tourism management and were, therefore, a little more informed than the average individual from their studies and general background. One last theory might be the prevalence of Europeans in the survey process; Europeans are more likely to have an idea of another European country's image, without purposedly using many information sources, with school education sometimes being enough of a source already. On the contrary, non-Europeans are more likely to look for information in different channels, but being the minority in this survey they could not affect the results accordingly.

Moving back to the main purpose of this chapter, the testing of the hypothesis, it is important to explain the testing process, before seeing the final results. In the case of this hypothesis, a slight manipulation of data was required on the SPSS spreadsheet of the first phase results: a new variable was created, which represented the different information sources a respondent rated as important to them in the pre-visitation period. Only media which were rated by the respondents with a rating over the neutral point, between slightly important and very important (therefore between 5 and 7, with 4 being the neutral point) were counted. The reason for that was that otherwise there would be too many variables to compare, causing both problems of practical and comprehensive nature. The smallest number of information sources rated as slightly to very important was 0, meaning that some of the respondents did not particularly use any information source before their arrival to Slovenia. The highest number was 11, with the total number of media presented in the questionnaire being 12.

In addition to this variable, the average of all the ratings of the 27 different cognitive image items was calculated as a new variable, simply by dividing all the ratings on the 7-point Likert scale by 27, the number of the cognitive image components used in this questionnaire. This variable demonstrates in an easy and understandable manner the average cognitive image of Slovenia as a destination for a specific individual, based on the evaluations of the individual elements.

Subsequently, the two variables were put in a bivariate correlation process on SPSS 16.0, going through both a Pearson and a Spearman method, because it is unknown if the two variables have a linear relationship. The results are shown in Table 16 below.

Table 16: Results of bivariate correlation between average rating of cognitive elements and number if sources used by respondent before actual visitation (N=78)

Average rating of cognitive elements	
Pearson Correlation	0.209
Significance (2-tailed)	0.067
Spearman's Correlation	0.173
Significance (2-tailed)	0.131

Number of information sources

usod

According to these results, no matter which test we accept as the most accurate, there is a positive correlation between the number of information sources used before visitation and the rating of Slovenia's cognitive image before the long term stay is realized. This means that the more information sources a student used, in order to receive information about their exchange study destination, the more positive their primary cognitive image perception of Slovenia is expected to be. As far as the significance levels are concerned, in the Pearson's test they are a little higher than the statistically desirable level (5%), whereas in the Spearman's test they are slightly higher; in any case, these levels might also be explained by the small size of the sample and, at least in the case of the Pearson's test, they are not as high as to show that the results are totally dependent on pure coincidence.

As a result, it can be claimed that hypothesis III is confirmed as valid; however there is the need of extra research with a bigger sample, in order to make sure that the results are completely statistically significant and accurate. However, it can be said that Um & Crompton's (1990), Gartner's (1993) and Baloglu and McCleary's (1999) theory about the positive effect of information sources on primary cognitive image perception is proven here to a satisfactory level. Further research would give the opportunity to cover any doubts and to support the hypothesis even further on the case of Slovenia.

6.3. Social Media

6.3.1. Hypothesis IV – Long term visitation and social media

In the last part of the second questionnaire, the respondents were asked to answer a series of simple questions about their prior sharing of material concerning their exchange experience in Slovenia on social media and applications. Since the final hypothesis is not based on prior literature, because of the surprising lack of relevant prior research to the topic, proving this hypothesis right or wrong is easier than in the previous cases. In table 17 below, some interesting descriptive statistics can show the general predisposition of the respondents towards social media experience sharing.

Question	Answer(s)		
	Yes		
Have you shared information about your	58,3%		
experience in Slovenia in social media? (N=48)	No		
	41,7%		
	Facebook: 92,9%		
	Online blog: 25%		
If yes, which social media did you share	Travel website review: 25%		
your material and impressions in? (N=28)	Apps and other media: 21,4%		
	Travel forum post: 7,1%		
	Youtube video: 3,6%		
	Yes		
If no, are you intending to do so before or	45%		
shortly after your exchange is over?	No		
(11-20)	55%		
	Facebook: 66,7%		
If was which social madia are you	Online blog: 33,3%		
If yes, which social media are you intending to use in order to do $\cos^2(N-0)$	Travel website review: 22,2%		
intending to use, in order to do so: (N=9)	Apps and other media: 22,2%		
	Travel forum post: 11,1%		

Table 17: Frequency table of answers to social media related questions (second questionnaire)

As seen from the results above, only a little over half of the respondents claimed to have shared their impressions about Slovenia with the online community. Of those that have not shard anything online, more than half claimed that they have no interest to do so in the future. There are many assumptions that can be made here, especially since the main focus of the questionnaire was not social media itself, therefore there was a lack of depth in the questions concerning this part of the exchange experience. However, it is quite clear that the exchange students interviewed came from different social and cultural backgrounds and showed some reluctance in using social media to share their material and impressions from Slovenia. It could be argued that the levels of prior sharing in social media are not high enough to be considered exceptional; about one out of two travelers that has access to the internet would most probably share information, impressions or pictures from their recent trip, even if it was a shortterm one.

Another interesting fact is that, although most of the students surveyed are studying tourism on a master's level, very few of the respondents showed familiarity with travel blogs, forums and applications. Most of the students showed their preference of Facebook as a social media, where they can share their travel material. This probably shows a questionable penetration of different types of social media in this target group of people, which was definitely not expected and raises questions about the validity of the hypothesis as a whole.

However, it is very important at this point to not underestimate Facebook's importance in this process; 27 of the respondents said they have already used the social network to show images and narrate stories of Slovenia to their connections, and 6 more of them said they are intending to use the website, in order to do show before their semester is over or shortly after. This makes Facebook the only social media, which students use, in order to generate content concerning their exchange destination. It is very important, nevertheless, to point out that, out of all the social media presented as options to the respondents in the questionnaire, Facebook is the only one, in which they share their material with their close personal circle (friends, family and acquaintances that they have added as 'Facebook friends'). In all the other cases, the user shares material with a much wider range of users and, in most cases, he or she cannot have full control of who has access to this information, with the exception of personal blogs, where the user can set the privacy settings, so that only specific users have access. On closer inspection, personal blog is the second in both popularity and intention of usage, thus making the two most personal social networks the two most chosen by respondents. It could, hence, be claimed that exchange students are willing to share material concerning their exchange semester online, but mainly with their close circle of friends and family and not with the whole web or the world. They feel safer knowing that they can have control on who sees this information and that they show their approval of their travelling patterns and habits.

In order to test the hypothesis even further, the following process was followed: Two new variables were created, one measuring the mean of all cognitive items evaluations that the individual provided in the second (post-experience) questionnaire (27 in total) and one calculating the same mean for the 4 affective elements. Afterwards, those two were put an independent samples t-test, being the test variables; previous usage of social media for reproduction of material from Slovenia during the exchange was used as the grouping variable, with 1 showing a previous usage of social media apps for such purposes and 2 showing no such previous activity. The point of this process was to prove that respondents who did use social media to share experiences from Slovenia gave higher average evaluations of cognitive and affective items of Slovenia's image on the second phase of the primary research, compared to the same numbers given by people who never engaged in such activity. The results follow in table 18 and 19 below (see also Appendix 5 for SPSS output):

Group Statistics					
	Have you contributed material about Slovenia online?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Average of affective image	Yes	28	2,65	,614	,116
in phase 2	No	20	3,00	,907	,203
Average of cognitive image	Yes	28	5,05	,529	,100
in phase 2	No	20	4,84	,842	,188

Tables 18 & 19: Results of individual samples t-test for evaluations of
image and usage of social media or other travel web apps.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		
		F	Sig.	Sig. (2-tailed)
Average of affective image in phase 2	Equal variances assumed	,670	,417	,119
Average of cognitive image in phase 2	Equal variances assumed	3,736	,059	,310

From the results, it is clear that people who used social media to share their impressions of Slovenia rated affective image lower (2.65) than those who did not use social media at all (3.00). Bearing in mind that a lower evaluation shows a better affective image (see chapter 6.1.2.), it is clear that users of social media did have a more positive affective image of Slovenia towards the end of their experience than non-users. In a similar manner, social media respondents rated Slovenia's cognitive image with an average of 5.05 over 4.84 for non users. It's important to be reminded at this point that for the cognitive items a higher rating shows a stronger and more positive perception (contrary to affective evaluations).

However, in table 19 we can see that the sig. (2-tailed) levels for both tests are passing the statistically ideal 0.05 levels, therefore showing a very high probability that these results were a matter of luck and not some deeper statistical correlation between the variables. The small size of the sample is definitely to be blamed for that, meaning that a higher sample might have given more statistically significant results.

Therefore, the last hypothesis can only be partially accepted as valid from these results for two reasons: to begin with, students showed a very varied interest towards different social media, almost neglecting those made specifically for travel purposes

and focusing more on the more social/personal life-related ones. Secondly, the results of the t-test prove the hypothesis, however with significance levels not being statistically acceptable.

It is obvious that the hypothesis needs a more targeted and tailored questionnaire, in order to be more safely proven valid or invalid. It is suggested that this research's results are used as the base for the creation of another, more targeted research, which will focus on the willingness of students to use social media, in order to share their impressions of a place and, thus, help other potential travelers in the process of creating a primary cognitive and affective image of the aforementioned destination.

6.4. Evaluation of suggested framework

In the previous chapters, the five hypotheses presented at the end of the literature review were tested for validity separately, using different statistical tools and tests, depending on the case. In table 20 below, the final results are summed up and presented in a more graphic manner.

HYPOTHESIS	PREVIOUS WORKS BASED ON	RESULTS & NOTES
Hypothesis 1: A study exchange, as a form of longer visitation of a destination, can make the cognitive image of the host country more positive for exchange students.	Fakeye & Crompton (1991)	Hypothesis I Validity confirmed
Hypothesis 2: A study exchange, as a form of longer visitation of a destination, can make the affective image of the host country more positive for exchange students.	Fakeye & Crompton (1991)	Hypothesis II Partial Validity confirmed
Hypothesis 3: Exchange students that have received information from a larger number of different information sources have a more positive cognitive image of the host country in the first period of the study exchange experience.	Um & Crompton (1990) Gartner (1993) Baloglu & McCleary (1999)	Hypothesis III Validity confirmed Notes: Extra research needed with higher sample to improve significance test levels

Table 20: Assessment of hypotheses testing results

(table continues)

(continued)

HYPOTHESIS	PREVIOUS WORKS BASED ON	RESULTS & NOTES
Hypothesis 4: Exchange students with higher levels of cognitive and affective image perception are more likely to share material on social media and other web 2.0. based applications.	No significant prior research done on the topic	Hypothesis IV Partial Validity confirmed Notes: Might have been proven valid in a more targeted research effort with a higher sample

Therefore, it is shown that two out of the five hypotheses were proven to be valid, two more were proven to be partially valid and the last one ended up being also partially validated, however showing high potential for validity with more targeted future scholarly efforts and differently designed questionnaires.

In an attempt to confirm the validity and usefulness of the framework suggested, we need to break the framework down to its parts, seeing them under the chronological order of the visit: even before the visit itself is realized, information sources create some form of awareness of a destination, therefore aiding the creation of a primary cognitive image for that specific destination. This step corresponds to Hypothesis III, which was validated by the primary data analysis process. Moreover, the analysis validated especially Gartner's (1993) claim that the more varied the information agents are in nature, the wider and more accurate the cognitive image perceived is. It seemed that the students prefer using a mixture of different information sources or almost no information sources at all, depending on their educational and cultural background.

The next step is the actual visitation of the destination, which in our case is a long term one, lasting for more than a couple of weeks. During this period, according to the framework both the cognitive and affective parts of image perception are positively influenced. However, according to the results of the primary data analysis process, the affective part was shown to only be partially influenced positively, since the students seemed to be very sensitive to different stimuli of their environment, which affected some of the affective components negatively as time went by (Hypothesis II). However, the cognitive image seemed to be positively affected, some of the components showing great improvement after the exchange was realized (Hypothesis I).

In addition to previous research done by acclaimed scholars, the framework claims that exchange students are very likely to promote their exchange destination through social media to their close circle, but also to the whole world. Hypothesis IV was proven to be partially validated, since exchange students showed the tendency to share information only through more personalized networks, like Facebook or personal blogs, where they can have full control of who has access to their material. Students seemed to be more hesitant to use travel-oriented applications and forums, however the lack of more depth of the questionnaire used does not allow the research to yield results on the reasons why this phenomenon takes place, especially since most of the students were studying tourism on a master's level and are expected to be acquainted with such channels. However, it was also proven that users of social media for such purposes had a more positive affective and cognitive image of Slovenia.

Figure 4 below shows in a graphic manner the validity of the model, showing validated hypotheses and parts in green color and partially valid parts in yellow.



Fig. 4: Colored graphic evaluation of the suggested framework

As a result, it can be safely said that the framework suggested seems to be legitimate and useful in theory, however there is a need to clarify some of its part a little further, by conducting a more extensive and targeted future research, which will help prove the validity of the yellow parts of the graph above. Only then will it be able to be used as a base for future literary works as a valid academic reference. The main innovation that this framework is trying to introduce is the inclusion of the expectations (before) and the impression sharing (after) stages into one scheme, something that has never happened before in previous academic work. Nevertheless, the effort to include such a long and complex period as a trip, its expectations and later impression sharing period in one framework is already very ambitious and it's only expected that it would take a lot of effort to be proven definitely right and accurate. Only further research can show if it really has the potential to be as ground-breaking as it seems in theory at this early stage and with the current important, but still rather narrow in scope primary data contribution.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

7.1. Summary of main findings

This research tried to research the effect of a combination of longer visitation periods to destinations and a mixture of different information agents to the modification of that destination's perceived image. In this section, some of the main findings of this research will be presented and the research question will be answered through this presentation.

According to the results, there is indeed a connection between the cognitive side of perceived image and the usage of a large variety of information sources. It seems that expectations on a cognitive level are usually high in areas, in which a destination is already known to excel. For instance, in the case presented, Slovenia seemed to rate highly in expectations on its natural environment, mountains and lakes, scenery and friendliness of its local people, which are elements that Slovenia is promoted for already the past couple of decades. After the long term stay in the destination, expectations were replaced by an even more highly evaluated reality, which seemed to confirm the destinations strong points. Moreover, Slovenia seemed to be rated higher in most of the other cognitive items as well, showing an overall positive attitude of the students towards their country of choice for the Erasmus exchange. In this case, primary cognitive image and final cognitive image seem to be both very high, with the secondary one showing clear signs of improvement. It is important to point out here that Slovenia was rated really low in terms of air accessibility, something that can be further discussed in the suggestions area.

As far as the affective image is concerned, the results were more mixed. According to studies realized in the past, affective image takes more time to build and is usually affected by more long term evaluations and stimuli coming from the environment, as well as by most of the cognitive evaluations, which are already created in the preselection period (Vaughan & Edwards, 1999; Pike & Ryan, 2004). This would normally mean that the findings should show a total alignment of the cognitive and

the affective items, thus showing an overall improved affective image of the destination. However, this study found that some external stimuli might be too strong for the visitor to ignore, especially when they belong to a specific group of people. Namely, in the primary data analysis it was shown that students found Slovenia more sleepy and gloomy than when they expected it to be on the first week after arrival. However, as explained earlier, stimuli such as the bad weather and the long winter of that year, in combination with Slovenia's small size, Ljubljana's less vibrant nightlife compared to other European capitals and the lack of a good network of transport in the country gave the students the impression of a place where "not much is going on". On the contrary, they seemed to find Slovenia more pleasant and relaxing than they expected, probably because of the beautiful nature and the country's small size, which does not cause the stress of other European states. Therefore, it seems like the two dimensions of overall image are not totally aligned and deeper research needs to be done into the stimuli that might affect such affective evaluations. Since affective evaluations are mostly based on sentiments, memories and feelings, it is possible that a research with a more psychological background would be most appropriate, to identify those connections. Nevertheless, it needs to be underlined that, although some of the attributes showed lower ratings on the second phase, all four of the affective items were above the neutral point, showing that Slovenia's affective perceived image is generally positive to the visitor, both before and after the long-term stay.

The research also tried to add the experience-sharing element into the picture, in order to try to show if the modified image is positive enough for the students to feel the need to share their impressions of the country and try to share knowledge on the new destination that they hopefully managed to vigorously explore throughout their exchange semester. Here again the findings were mixed, showing that students were much more eager to share their experiences in less interest-specific websites, such as Facebook, rather than more travel-oriented applications and web-pages, with access to a larger number of users. On the one hand, it can be assumed that the exchange experience is a personal memory, which students want to share with their closest of relatives and friends, but on the other one could easily argue that the same students do not have the desire to share their knowledge on the country, simply because they do not gain so much from their experience, as to feel capable of sharing. Another view could be that the affective element, which is mostly based on sentimental and personal constructs, is the one that mostly guides such actions, as is the sharing of material with other people. Since the affective side of overall image is slightly lowered throughout the experience, students lose their desire to share their experience with the world. The scenarios in this case can be countless, however in every case it is encouraging to see that the combined percentage of people who either shared or are planning to share their material on Slovenia with part of the web 2.0. Community reached 77% in this study (37 out of 48 respondents). On 23% of them claimed that they have no interest in any form of sharing of information or material from their exchange experience with the world. This shows that the area has very bright potential and that students are in general quite open to promote the country of exchange without any extra motivation, just to fulfill their own personal desires.

All in all, to answer the research question in a paragraph, it can be said that an exchange experience definitely changes the cognitive aspect of TDI, with most of the evaluations changing even dramatically to the better after the experience has almost reached the end. Students seem to appreciate elements, such as natural beauty, leisure time activity offer and the friendliness of local people, which also happen o confirm their earlier high expectations, when they chose Slovenia as their Erasmus exchange destination. The affective image, on the other hand is a little trickier, since it is affected by more elements and a longer stay can very often bring out the negative elements of a place, which are normally hidden to short-term visitors, who do not really experience the holistic image of a place (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Exchange students in Slovenia find the country more pleasant and relaxing than they expected, however they also find it rather sleepy and gloomy, probably because of the lack of a very vibrant nightlife and the small size of the country, which occasionally reminds one of rural areas in neighboring countries. Generally speaking, however, the overall image seems to be improved, since only a particle of the affective image components seemed to be rated lower than at the beginning of the exchange semester, whereas the rest of the affective elements and the vast majority of the cognitive items were rated much higher in the second phase of the research process.

7.2. Main contribution

This research contributed on three different levels to the fields of destination image and student travel, as sub segments of the tourism studies field.

The first contribution was that it provided, as already mentioned earlier, a first insight into the inclusion of the pre-departure expectations and the post-experience promotion of the destination in the research of destination image. A long term visit, contrary to a short one, requires a lot more preparation in advance and concludes with a lot more knowledge and material to share at the end. Therefore, it is essential to start researching in more depth the connections between the phases and try to find the incentives which lead individuals to long-term visits to different places, as well as the ones that push them to share their experience with the world. Although the scope of the current research is relatively small, it is definitely good food for thought and a good base for future research, which could prove the suggested framework right and thus contribute vastly to the already existing literature.

Secondarily, it threw some more light into the relatively under-researched segment of student travel. Exchange students are almost neglected by modern researchers, although the numbers of Erasmus exchange students in Europe are constantly growing, with the inclusion of new member and partner states in the European Union.

As already mentioned a few times in previous chapters, students not only are a profitable tourism segment, but also a very interesting one for research purposes, since today's students are going to be tomorrow's workers and, therefore, tomorrow's biggest travelers. Understanding the changes in tourism behavior in young people could reveal a lot of trends in the tourism trends of the close future.

Lastly, this research focused on one of the less researched tourism destinations of Europe and the world. Slovenia is a small, but very diverse and rich in cultural and natural attractions state, which only recently started to attract more attention and create a name for itself as a destination. The aim of this research was for the reader to collect a little more information on this destination and to add some more insight on the quite limited existing literature on Slovenia, mostly done until now by professors and scholars active at University of Ljubljana. More specifically, only Konecnik (2004) and Konecnik & Gartner (2007) researched destination image using Slovenia as their case of choice.

For all the above reasons, this research will hopefully manage to close some of the gaps in the existing literature concerning TDI, student travel and Slovenia as a destination and attract some more interest to these fields or items of study from future researchers.

7.3. Further discussion and recommendations

From the findings of the research, it is obvious that TDI is a relatively complex concept and that, depending on the case studied, results of primary data analysis might vary, in some places confirming previous academic findings and in other rejecting popular and quite established ideas and theories. In the literature review presented earlier, it was already obvious that scholars tend to disagree a lot on elements as basic and fundamental, as the components of destination image themselves. However, this research tried to prove that an exchange study experience abroad is a unique form of travel, which creates strong memories, feelings and attachments to places. Under this light, it can potentially help a destination expand its popularity and attract new, possibly earlier inaccessible market segments.

Slovenia has already seen its number of tourists rising the last few years, hitting a record number of 3.3 million tourists in 2012, however what is more noteworthy is that youth hostel bookings in the country were raised by 29% in 2012 compared to 2011, thus showing a quite strong potential in the youth travel market segment (The Slovenia Times, 2013). However, as shown from the results of the survey conducted in two phases among the exchange students of Faculty of Economics of University of Ljubljana, although Slovenia is really enjoyed by students, there are some points that could give the destination a really strong competitive advantage in the near future, if they were addressed by the Slovenian tourism authorities.

For a long time, even after its independence, Slovenia used to be a transit destination on the way from the Croatian Adriatic coast to Austria or Italy (Mihalic, 1993). This situation seems to be starting to change recently, judging from the latest tourism figures of the country, however the primary data analysis of this research possibly holds one of the best answers for this problem, which would help local authorities make Slovenia more of a main and less of a complimentary destination: the students claimed that Slovenia has very poor accessibility by air to other countries. In fact, Ljubljana airport holds only a handful of connections to big European cities, with airline ticket prices being significantly higher than in other European destinations. Therefore, lacking an air hub, Slovenia immediately lacks a competitive advantage. Being surrounded by airports like Vienna, Venice and Zagreb international airports, it is more than expected that tourists will prefer to skip Slovenia from their itinerary, or just spend a few hours in select destinations there, before moving on to their main holiday destination. A quite logical and legitimate suggestion towards the Slovenian authorities would be to make the airport more affordable, or to encourage the usage of other, less used airports with potentially lower taxes, like Maribor or Portoroz airports. This would definitely boost the circulation of tourists in the country and help place it more distinctively on the map of European tourism.

Another point that seems to have been already taken into serious consideration by the Slovenian tourism authorities, but was confirmed in this study, was that Slovenia is not seen as a typical sea, sun and sand destination. Students seemed to find the offer of beaches in the country poor, probably because of the very small extent of the Slovenian coastline, however they seemed to be enthusiastic about the country's Alpine and lakeside landscapes. In that sense, it is encouraged that the National Tourism Agency keeps promoting Slovenia as a mountain, ski, kayaking, rafting and trekking destination, as well as a spa and wellness destination, which seem to be the main areas that Slovenia is doing well at until now. Focusing on promoting coastal tourism might seem to have its benefits; however with the Croatian and Italian coast just around the corner, it seems that spending large fund in promoting the small coast might prove to be futile and not profitable in the long run.

Another element that should be pointed out from the results is that Slovenia is seen as an exceptionally safe destination for most visitors. This is an element that might initially seem to not be very useful for tourism planning, however if combined with the right campaign it could yield very positive results. For instance, if promoted as a safe, family destination, Slovenia would be able to attract such groups as older visitors and pensioners, as well as young high school students from surrounding countries, who could come to Slovenia on school trips from Italy, ex Yugoslav republics, Austria and so on, with the consent of their parents and the support of their educational institutions. This, combined with the perceived friendliness of local Slovenians, could be used as well to promote exchange programs for young students, who could come live with host families in Slovenia for shorter or longer periods of time or attend summer camps and other programs that combine education and leisure for under aged students.

As far as the tourism segment in question (university undergraduate and postgraduate foreign students) is concerned, it seems that, in order to keep attracting larger numbers of these visitors, Slovenia needs to become a little more exciting and arousing all year-round. In the summer, outdoors activities and sports seem to keep young people entertained enough, however in the off-season months the nightlife, shopping and eating out options in the country seem to not be enough to keep the interest of visitors. For this reason, it seems that Slovenia is mostly a spring and summer destination, since in the winter only ski and other winter sport fanatics visit the country, due to the absolute lack of any other form of leisure-oriented reputation of Slovenia as a destination. One way for the tourism planning authorities to boost activity and raise the country's reputation as a fun and interesting place where "things are going on" is to boost event planning, concerts, festivals and so on, not only in the spring and summer season, but also in the winter. These events do not have to necessarily be highly cultural or traditional in nature; attracting foreign singers or showmen, organizing themed evenings in central squares or big students parties in major campuses throughout the country would help create this alternative and genuine feeling of a big student campus, where everyone knows each other and is comfortable enough to meet, have fun and enjoy the time in a new destination. There are very few places in Europe with such a reputation and Slovenia would be ideal to cover this gap with its small size, relaxed rhythm of life and friendly people.

Last, but not least, exchange programs seem to be benefiting the country, by making more people aware of Slovenia's position, identity and tourism offer. Exchange students seem to be willing to promote the country for the time being only to their direct circle of friends and acquaintances. However, the local tourism organization could profit by organizing campaigns, where students have to share their experience in Slovenia through audiovisual media or forms of art, like painting, poetry, literature etc. Those pieces will then be used for promotional purposes on social media, with the intention to create a viral hype around the country. Another idea would be to create contests for review writers on websites, such as TripAdvisor. The most successful, accurate and helpful writers can claim prizes offered by the organization, such as special packages, memorabilia etc. In this way, students who get to know the country very well by spending a semester or even a whole year there can help the national tourism organization by promoting Slovenia in different manners and with very little cost.

All in all, Slovenia seems to be a rapidly growing destination in Central Europe, still claiming its position on the touristic map and with a lot of potential for both economic growth and strategic changes in planning for the future of local and incoming tourism. Contrary to other, obsolete or already overgrown destinations, Slovenia still has the opportunity to find its own competitive advantage, make it known to the world, use it

and become one of the most visited countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The student market is a very good segment to start from, considering that students are usually pioneers in tourism, since they have a lot of time to travel and explore and also tend to be more involved in word of mouth and online promotion, thus bringing a lot of direct, but also indirect revenue to the places visited.

7.4. Research Limitations & Further research

This research's final results and recommendations were mostly based on the primary data collection process, which allowed for some findings that showed the expectations, preferences and tendencies of the exchange student travel segment. However, the period, within which the primary data collection could take place, was relatively short. Considering that most students spend about 4-5 months in their host university country and the general timeline of the whole research was about the same, only one generation of exchange students could actually be approached. Furthermore, the researcher only had access to the class hours and contact emails of professors in Faculty of Economics of University of Ljubljana, thus being unable to approach other faculties and try to raise the size of the total sample. As a result, the first round of questionnaires resulted in 78 respondents, which formed the whole population of the newly arrived exchange students at the faculty for that semester. However, in most similar researches, much higher samples are used, usually reaching numbers of several hundred respondents. Such numbers would have helped yield more definite and statistically significant results. Nevertheless, the fact that those 78 students represented the whole population in question, at least for that one faculty of the university, gives much more legitimacy to the results than if the population was much larger and the sample was only a fraction of it.

Another limitation that should be taken into consideration was the distance between the researcher and the sample during the second phase of questionnaire filling. In the first phase, the researcher was present in the classroom, helping the students and making sure that they all answered their questionnaires. However, geographical proximity was not possible in the second phase, thus the students were contacted by email, which resulted in not all of them returning the second questionnaire. Another reason, which explains the return rate, is the tendency of students to travel between end of May and beginning of June; as a result, many of them did not have access to their email addresses for the 12 days that the survey remained open. Also, many of the students had misspelled their email address or other contact details; therefore they could not be approached in June, in order to fill in the follow-up questionnaire.

In addition, it should be underlined that the scope of this research is relatively broad, but limited to a certain extent. Because of time, dissertation size and other limitations, issues like the inclusion of social media or information sources in the suggested framework could not be addressed as deeply as necessary, in order to yield more definite results. Those topics were approached as complimentary ones, in order to offer some new insight to the already widely discussed topic of TDI, however further research will be needed, so as to strengthen certain of the claims made in this research. Special attention should be given to the possible relationship between student travel and social media, a very under-researched study area, which could actually yield very fruitful results, thus enriching the already existing relevant literature. At the same time, a very interesting relevant topic of research would be an investigation of the ways in which primary cognitive image can affect the decision of an Erasmus exchange destination. This could lead to a much clearer image of how students pick their long-term destinations, which information sources they use, in order to form their primary cognitive image of a place and which destinations are the best represented ones in different information channels.
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APPENDICES

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1. First phase questionnaire	. 1
Appendix 2. Second phase questionnaire	. 4
Appendix 3. Factor Analysis SPSS output	. 7
Appendix 4: Hypothesis I – Paired samples T-test	10
Appendix 5: Hypothesis II – Independent samples T-test	14

Appendix 1: First phase questionnaire

This questionnaire aims to measure the most important elements of Slovenia's image as a destination for international students and collect information on their expectations from Slovenia before the actual first visitation.

For this questionnaire to be valid, please give answers to all of the questions. The questionnaires are not anonymous, for the sole reason that the research will be completed only after the same participants fill in a follow-up questionnaire in May 2013, to assess their new image of Slovenia. All personal data remains confidential and will NOT be used for commercial or other purposes, outside of the scope of this research.

This questionnaire takes about 5-8 minutes to be filled in.

Part A: Assessing expected performance of Slovenia's cognitive image components

Instructions:

Judging from your own **expectations before visiting Slovenia** and from information you have come across during your research on Slovenia as a destination, please rate your <u>expected</u> <u>performance</u> of Slovenia in the following areas.

Slovenia has a favorable climate for tourism purposes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers beautiful landscapes and scenery	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers unspoiled natural environment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers beautiful lakes and mountains	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers clean beaches, suitable for swimming	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers many good options for outdoor recreational & sports activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia has lovely small towns worth visiting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers many spa and wellness options	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers good nightlife and entertainment options	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers interesting cultural attractions (museums, heritage sites, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers interesting events and festivals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers good restaurants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers good shopping options	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1 = Totally Disagree,	4 = Neutral, 7	= Totally Agree
-----------------------	----------------	-----------------

Slovenia offers good value for money as a destination	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers high quality of accommodation services	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers high quality of transport	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia has good infrastructure for tourism purposes (Signs, roads, info centers etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia has good road accessibility from neighboring countries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia has good accessibility by air	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia has a convenient domestic network of transport (trains, buses etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia is a clean country, with high hygiene standards	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia has high standards of living	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia is a safe country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia is a politically stable society	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenian cuisine is interesting and unique	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenian people have interesting and unique customs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenian people are friendly and hospitable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Part B: Measuring affective image components of Slovenia

Below there are pairs of opposite adjectives to describe a destination. Circle the number that is closest to the adjective that describes your opinion on Slovenia the most. If you have a neutral opinion, circle number 4.

Slovenia is relaxing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Slovenia is stressful
Slovenia is pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Slovenia is unpleasant
Slovenia is exciting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Slovenia is gloomy
Slovenia is arousing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Slovenia is sleepy

Part C: Information Sources

In this part, we are trying to figure out which were your sources of information when you decided to pick Slovenia as your Erasmus exchange destination or when you learnt that Slovenia was going to be your Erasmus destination.

Please mark how important each source was during the information collection process, following the pattern:

TV Shows / Documentaries	NU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Travel Magazines	NU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Travel Guides (e.g. Lonely Planet, Bradt etc.)	NU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
School / Academic readings	NU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
YouTube or other video hosting website	NU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Wikipedia	NU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenian tourism board website	NU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Tourism Promotional leaflets	NU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Tripadvisor	NU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Social Media (Facebook, Twitter etc.)	NU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Friends & Family that have visited before	NU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Other source (please name below)	NU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1 = Very Unimportant, 4 = Neutral, 7= Very Important, NU = Never Used

Part D: Personal Data

Please fill in the following personal data. Your name and email are of extreme importance, so that you can be contacted again in May 2013 for the second and last part of this research with a similar questionnaire. *Your personal data will NOT be used for any commercial or other practices and will remain confidential*.

Full Name (First, middle & last Name)

Email address

Age _____

Sex MALE FEMALE

Nationality _____

Faculty in Ljubljana _____

THANK YOU KINDLY FOR YOUR TIME AND HELP! Konstantinos Vitoratos, Master Student of Tourism Management, Ekonomska Fakulteta

Appendix 2: Second phase questionnaire

This questionnaire is a follow up of the preliminary questionnaire you answered to in March 2013. It aims to measure the most important elements of Slovenia's image as a destination for international students and collect information on their impressions from Slovenia after having spent more than 2 months in the country.

For this questionnaire to be valid, please give answers to all of the questions. The questionnaires are not anonymous, in order to identify which of the participants to the preliminary research returned the second questionnaire. All personal data remains confidential and will NOT be used for commercial or other purposes, outside of the scope of this research.

You will not be contacted again to participate in this survey once you have completed this questionnaire.

This questionnaire takes about 5-8 minutes to be filled in.

Part A: Assessing expected performance of Slovenia's cognitive image components

Instructions:

Judging from your own **impressions of Slovenia the past few months living in the country**, please rate Slovenia in the following areas.

Slovenia has a favorable climate for tourism purposes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers beautiful landscapes and scenery	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers unspoiled natural environment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers beautiful lakes and mountains	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers clean beaches, suitable for swimming	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers many good options for outdoor recreational & sports activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia has lovely small towns worth visiting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers many spa and wellness options	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers good nightlife and entertainment options	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers interesting cultural attractions (museums, heritage sites, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers interesting events and festivals		2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers good restaurants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Slovenia offers good shopping options	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers good value for money as a destination	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers high quality of accommodation services	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia offers high quality of transport	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia has good infrastructure for tourism purposes (Signs, roads, info centers etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia has good road accessibility from neighboring countries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia has good accessibility by air	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia has a convenient domestic network of transport (trains, buses etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia is a clean country, with high hygiene standards	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia has high standards of living	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia is a safe country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenia is a politically stable society	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenian cuisine is interesting and unique	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenian people have interesting and unique customs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slovenian people are friendly and hospitable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Part B: Measuring affective image components of Slovenia

Below there are pairs of opposite adjectives to describe a destination. Circle the number that is closest to the adjective that describes your opinion on Slovenia the most. If you have a neutral opinion, circle number 4.

Slovenia is relaxing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Slovenia is stressful
Slovenia is pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Slovenia is unpleasant
Slovenia is exciting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Slovenia is gloomy
Slovenia is arousing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Slovenia is sleepy

Part C: Slovenia in Social Media

In this part, we are trying to figure out which are the most popular social media used by students to reproduce visual and non-visual impressions of Slovenia as their Erasmus hosting country.

Please tick the option(s) that apply to your individual case:

C.1: Have you contributed, posted or uploaded any material concerning Slovenia as a destination online during your stay in Slovenia?

YES (please go to question C.2)

NO (please go to question C.3)

C.2: If yes, which of the following channels and media did you use to reproduce your impressions from Slovenia?

(Note: You can mark more than one answers, if they apply to you)

- \Box Online blog entry
- □ Review on travel website (example: TripAdvisor, Virtual Tourist etc.)
- \Box Review on non-travel website
- □ Travel-related forum post
- □ Facebook pictures / video
- \Box Youtube video
- \Box Other (please specify)

C.3. Are you intending to use social media in the near future to share your impressions of Slovenia?

YES

(please go to question C.4)

NO

(please go to part D - Personal Data)

C.4: If yes, which of the following channels and media are you intending to use in the near future to reproduce your impressions of Slovenia?

(Note: You can mark more than one answers, if they apply to you - if you choose the last answer,

- \Box Online blog entry
- Review on travel website (example: TripAdvisor, Virtual Tourist etc.)
- \Box Review on non-travel website
- \Box Travel-related forum post
- □ Facebook pictures / video

 \Box Youtube video

 \Box Other (please specify)

Part D: Personal Data

Please fill in the following personal data. Your personal data are of significant importance, in order to make sure all the participants of the preliminary phase returned their questionnaires. *Your personal data will NOT be used for any commercial or other practices and will remain confidential*.

Full Name (First, middle & last Name) _____

Email address _____

Age _____

Sex MALE FEMALE

Nationality _____

Faculty in Ljubljana	
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THANK YOU KINDLY FOR YOUR TIME AND HELP! Konstantinos Vitoratos, Master Student of Tourism Management, Ekonomska Fakulteta

Appendix 3: Factor Analysis SPSS Output

	Component									
	1	2	3	4	5					
Slovenia has a favorable climate for tourism purposes	,613									
Slovenia offers beautiful landscapes and scenery	,909									
Slovenia offers unspoiled natural environment	,766									
Slovenia offers beautiful lakes and mountains	,790									
Slovenia offers many good options for outdoor recreational & sports activities		,569								
Slovenia has lovely small towns worth visiting	,658									
Slovenia offers many spa and wellness options			,629							

Rotated Component Matrix^a

(table continues)

(continued)

Slovenia offers good nightlife		,698			
and entertainment options					
Slovenia offers interesting	,511				
cultural attractions					
Slovenia offers interesting		,586			
events and festivals					
Slovenia offers good restaurants		,603			
Slovenia offers good shopping		858			
options		,000			
Slovenia offers good value for		500			
money as a destination		,322			
Slovenia offers high quality of			624		
accommodation services			,034		
Slovenia offers high quality of			774		
transport			,771		
Slovenia offers high quality of			E17	E20	
infrastructure			,517	,520	
Slovenia has good accessibility				669	
from neighboring countries	u			,000,	
Slovenia has a convenient			700		
domestic network of transport			,733		
Slovenia is a clean country, with				COF	
high hygiene standards				,000	
Slovenia has high standards of				501	
living				,521	
Slovenia is a safe country				,689	
Slovenian cuisine is interesting					500
and unique	u and a second se				,000
Slovenian people have	524				665
interesting and unique customs	,524				,000
Slovenian people are friendly					816
and hospitable					,010

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 13 iterations.

Compon	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotati	tion Sums of Squared Loadings			
ent	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %		
1	7,790	32,457	32,457	4,009	16,705	16,705		
2	2,713	11,305	43,762	3,522	14,674	31,379		
3	2,245	9,355	53,117	3,158	13,159	44,538		
4	1,594	6,643	59,760	2,828	11,784	56,321		
5	1,336	5,566	65,326	2,161	9,005	65,326		
6	1,102	4,591	69,917					
7	1,032	4,300	74,217					
8	,920	3,832	78,048					
9	,799	3,327	81,376					
10	,721	3,004	84,379					
11	,592	2,466	86,845					
12	,551	2,297	89,142					
13	,459	1,912	91,055					
14	,402	1,675	92,730					
15	,358	1,492	94,222					
16	,326	1,357	95,579					
17	,258	1,075	96,654					
18	,217	,905	97,559					
19	,139	,577	98,137					
20	,120	,498	98,635					
21	,109	,456	99,091					
22	,105	,437	99,528					
23	,065	,273	99,801					
24	,048	,199	100,000					

Total Variance Explained

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Appendix 4: Hypothesis I – Paired samples T-test

Compon		Initial Eigenvalue	es	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
ent	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	7,790	32,457	32,457	4,009	16,705	16,705
2	2,713	11,305	43,762	3,522	14,674	31,379
3	2,245	9,355	53,117	3,158	13,159	44,538
4	1,594	6,643	59,760	2,828	11,784	56,321
5	1,336	5,566	65,326	2,161	9,005	65,326
6	1,102	4,591	69,917			
7	1,032	4,300	74,217			
8	,920	3,832	78,048			
9	,799	3,327	81,376			
10	,721	3,004	84,379			
11	,592	2,466	86,845			
12	,551	2,297	89,142			
13	,459	1,912	91,055			
14	,402	1,675	92,730			
15	,358	1,492	94,222			
16	,326	1,357	95,579			
17	,258	1,075	96,654			
18	,217	,905	97,559			
19	,139	,577	98,137			
20	,120	,498	98,635			
21	,109	,456	99,091			
22	,105	,437	99,528			
23	,065	,273	99,801			
24	,048	,199	100,000			

Total Variance Explained

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Slovenia has a favorable climate for tourism purposes & Slovenia has a favorable climate for tourism purposes	48	,158	,283
Pair 2	Slovenia offers beautiful landscapes and scenery & Slovenia offers beautiful landscapes and scenery	48	,069	,642
Pair 3	Slovenia offers unspoiled natural environment & Slovenia offers unspoiled natural environment	48	,141	,338
Pair 4	Slovenia offers beautiful lakes and mountains & Slovenia offers beautiful lakes and mountains	48	,076	,609
Pair 5	Slovenia offers clean beaches, suitable for swimming & Slovenia offers clean beaches, suitable for swimming	48	-,306	,034
Pair 6	Slovenia offers many good options for outdoor recreational & sports activities & Slovenia offers many good options for outdoor recreational & sports activities	48	,320	,027
Pair 7	Slovenia has lovely small towns worth visiting & Slovenia has lovely small towns worth visiting	48	,295	,042
Pair 8	Slovenia offers many spa and wellness options & Slovenia offers many spa and wellness options	48	,002	,988

Paired Samples Correlations

(table continues)

(continued)

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Pair 9	Slovenia offers good nightlife and entertainment options & Slovenia offers good nightlife and entertainment options	48	,120	,416
Pair 10	Slovenia offers interesting cultural attractions & Slovenia offers interesting cultural attractions	48	,170	,248
Pair 11	Slovenia offers interesting events and festivals & Slovenia offers interesting events and festivals	48	,195	,183
Pair 12	Slovenia offers good restaurants & Slovenia offers good restaurants	48	,222	,130
Pair 13	Slovenia offers good shopping options & Slovenia offers good shopping options	48	-,117	,427
Pair 14	Slovenia offers good value for money as a destination & Slovenia offers good value for money as a destination	48	-,178	,227
Pair 15	Slovenia offers high quality of accommodation services & Slovenia offers high quality of accommodation services	48	,088	,552
Pair 16	Slovenia offers high quality of transport & Slovenia offers high quality of transport	48	-,023	,875
Pair 17	Slovenia offers high quality of infrastructure & Slovenia offers high quality of infrastructure	48	,012	,937
Pair 18	Slovenia has good accessibility from neighboring countries & Slovenia has good accessibility from neighboring countries	48	-,024	,869

(table continues)

(continued)

Pair 19	Slovenia has good accessibility by air & Slovenia has good accessibility by air	48	-,126	,395
Pair 20	Slovenia has a convenient domestic network of transport & Slovenia has a convenient domestic network of transport	48	-,085	,568
Pair 21	Slovenia is a clean country, with high hygiene standards & Slovenia is a clean country, with high hygiene standards	48	,133	,368
Pair 22	Slovenia has high standards of living & Slovenia has high standards of living	48	,280	,054
Pair 23	Slovenia is a safe country & Slovenia is a safe country	48	-,069	,641
Pair 24	Slovenia is a politically stable society & Slovenia is a politically stable society	48	,119	,422
Pair 25	Slovenian cuisine is interesting and unique & Slovenian cuisine is interesting and unique	48	,158	,285
Pair 26	Slovenian people have interesting and unique customs & Slovenian people have interesting and unique customs	48	-,018	,903
Pair 27	Slovenian people are friendly and hospitable & Slovenian people are friendly and hospitable	48	,107	,470

	Have you contributed material about Slovenia online?	Ν	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean		
Average of affective image	Yes	28	2,6518	,61365	,11597		
in phase 2	No	20	3,0000	,90685	,20278		
Average of cognitive image	Yes	28	5,0461	,52938	,10004		
in phase 2	No	20	4,8430	,84152	,18817		

		Leven Eq Va	e's Test for uality of rriances			
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	Sig. (2-tailed)	Lower	Upper
Average of affective image in phase 2	Equal variances assumed	,670	,417	,119	-,78949	,09307
	Equal variances not assumed			,146	-,82456	,12814
Average of cognitive image in	Equal variances assumed	3,736	,059	,310	-,19531	,60146
phase 2	Equal variances not assumed			,348	-,23241	,63855

Group Statistics