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The measurement of destination image: the case of Austria

Abstract. This paper provides a short overview concerning the construct of the destination image as well as the importance of its measurement in travel context. Subsequently, the results of an empirical survey which was carried out in January 2003 with Polish students to measure the image of Austria is presented. The results particularly suggest that Austria should strengthen its cultural facilities as well as new intangible experiences, such as variety and fun or freedom and open-mindedness.

Keywords: destination image, measurement, importance grid, Austria.
JEL Codes: M31.

1. Introduction

International tourism, the movement across international boundaries, has increased dramatically over the last three decades. Information and communication technologies, the emergence of a large number and variety of travel destinations and decreasing travel costs gave birth to a highly competitive industry (Weiermair 2001). Today more countries than ever hope to generate tourism dollars by attracting lucrative markets from all over the world (Sharpley and Sharpley 1997; Smeral, Weber et al. 1998). Especially in mature markets, such as the Austrian tourism market, it is of utmost importance to enter new markets and address new target groups, such as the emerging country – Poland.

Therefore, the destination image has become a strategic weapon and competitive advantage in the tourism industry: it plays a crucial role in the description, promotion, distribution, amalgamation, organisation and delivery of the destinations' product. Beyond doubt a positive image of a destination supports tourists' decision making process: it is responsible for 'awareness' and 'evoked' sets and consequently, serves as a differentiating factor among competing destinations (Pikkemaat 2002; Sönmez and Sirakaya 2002, p. 185). As a considerable number of factors affect tourists' decision making process, e.g. climate, scenery, accommodation, cultural at-

tributes, political factors, exchange rates, the availability and form of transportation, tourists possess images of potential destinations which reflect their perception of the characteristics of a destination (Coshall 2000, p. 85). Additionally, destination images permit tourists to generate a set of expectations about a destination before that destination is actually experienced. The latter seems to be important as the tourism product has become a bundled product whose services are often characterized by credence and experience qualities (Zeithaml 1991).

Thus, this paper is organized as follows: First, it examines some recent literature and discusses both, the theoretical concept of destination images and its measurement. Consequently, a survey of Polish students is presented focussing on the evaluation of selected destination attributes of Austria. The paper concludes with implications for the management of the Austrian image and future research requirements.

2. Destination image analysis

Analyzing destination images has become an important strand of tourism research within the past two decades (Chon 1990; Fakeye and Crompton 1991; Dagostar and Isotalo 1992; Crompton and Ankomah 1993; Milman and Pizam 1995; Dann 1996; MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997; Murphy and Pritchard 1997; Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Baloglu and Mangaloglu 2001; Pike 2002; Sönmez and Sirakaya 2002; Peters and Pikkemaat 2003). A significant recent contribution towards a conceptual framework for tourism destination images identifies four characteristics which describe the image construct: the nature of images is complex (not unequivocal), multiple (in elements and processes), relativistic (subjective and generally comparative), and dynamic (over time and space) (Gallarza, Saura et al. 2002). Therefore, several definitions of destination images have been reported (Echtner and Ritchie 1993; Gartner 1993; Coshall 2000; Baloglu and Mangaloglu 2001; Gallarza, Saura et al. 2002; Klenosky 2002). Many of these definitions treat image as the sum of perceptual beliefs, ideas, and impressions based on information processing from a variety of sources over time resulting in a mental construct (Gartner 1993; MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997). The most frequently cited definition of a destination image is delivered by Crompton (1979), who stated that ‘an image may be defined as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination’ (Gallarza, Saura et al. 2002, p. 60) Thus a destination image is tourist’s total impression which is formed as a result of the evaluation of various destination elements’ and attributes whereby differences in meaning, number and importance of dimensions may occur (MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997, p. 538).

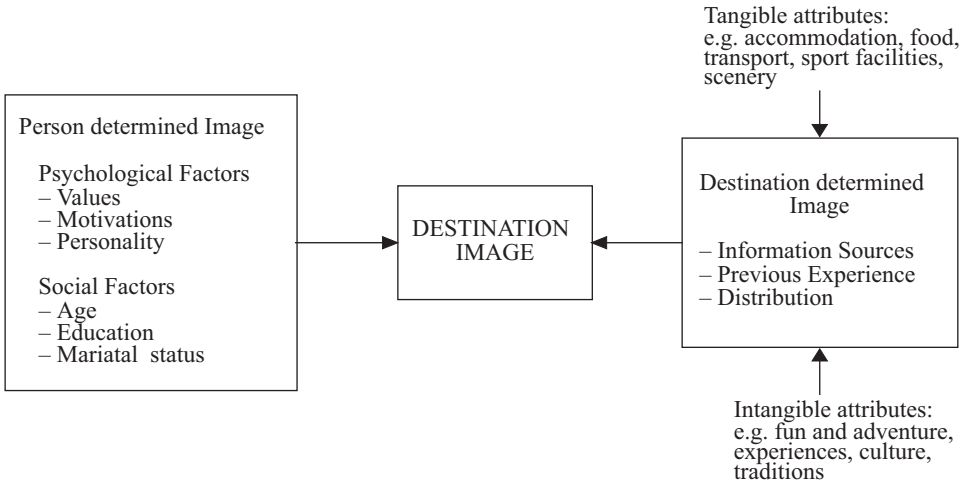

Figure 1. The formation of a destination image
Source: Baloglu and McCleary 1999, p. 870; Peters and Pikkemaat 2003, p. 158

More in detail and demonstrated in Figure 1 below, the overall image construct is mainly determined by two major forces: personal factors and stimulus (destination) factors (Crompton 1979; MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997; Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Gallarza, Saura et al. 2002).

Following this motivational research by using the push and pull theory (Dann 1981; Dann 1996) the push or person determined image factors embrace psychological factors, e.g. values, motivations, personality as well as social factors, e.g. age, education, marital status. The pull or destination determined image factors summarize the influence of external stimulus and physical objects as well as previous experiences (Baloglu and McCleary 1999). The importance of studying this relationship between the push and pull factors dependent of each other instead of being entirely independent has been recently strengthened by Klenosky (2002).

Focussing on destination determined image factors and following thereby Echtner and Ritchie's (1993) pathbreaking work on the measurement of destination images tangible (functional) and intangible (psychological) attributes of a destination can be distinguished: while tangible attributes are characteristics of an image which are directly observable (or measurable) intangible attributes are less tangible and more difficult to observe (and measure). Additionally, attribute-based or holistic image components and common or unique image factors have to be included for the measurement of destination images as these three continuums altogether form tourists' destination image (Echtner and Ritchie 1993, p. 3).

A common agreement among diverse researchers is that both affective and cognitive tourist evaluations are coincident elements for tourists' image formation. While the cognitive evaluation refers to the beliefs or the knowledge about desti-

nation attributes, the affective evaluation refers to feelings or emotional responses towards destination attributes (Gartner 1993; Baloglu and Mangaloglu 2001; Gallarza, Saura et al. 2002; Sönmez and Sirakaya 2002; Pikkemaat and Peters 2003). Recently two works (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Sönmez and Sirakaya 2002) have confirmed earlier research (Gartner 1993; Dann 1996): that in fact cognitive images are formed prior to affective images. Therefore, affect is more likely to serve as an intervening variable between cognitive evaluations and the overall image construct (Baloglu and McCleary 1999, p. 890).

Concluding chapter one it is obvious that destination images influence tourist's destination choice as well as his/her satisfaction and consequently the success of any destination. As tourists' behaviour and images vary over different segments due to socio-demographic and psychographic variables, a focus on a special target group, e.g. students, may increase the validity and the reliability of destinations' image measurement research.

3. Measurement of destination image

The measurement of destination image has been of great interest to both, tourism researchers and practitioners. In a comprehensive review of destination image research Pike (2002, p. 542) has analysed 142 image papers and amongst other results he concludes that relatively few papers (23) attempt to measure the destination image in a travel context. According to his further results, countries have been the most popular destination type of interest (56), followed by states (27), cities (26), resort areas (23) and provinces (11). Referring to data analysis techniques quantitative techniques are preferred, whereby factor analysis is the most applied data analysis technique (41), followed by t-tests (21), perceptual mapping (21), analysis of means (20), cluster analysis (14), importance-performance analysis (9), reportery grid (8), mapping techniques (3), constant sum (2) and conjoint analysis (1). The dominance of countries as object of destination image studies and of quantitative techniques as data analysis methods is confirmed by Gallarzia, Saura and García (2002, pp.64). Therefore, the recent image literature claims a lack of alternative image measurement methods, on qualitative techniques as well as on using innovative and holistic approaches that combine both, quantitative and qualitative research (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Coshall 2000; Baloglu and Mangaloglu 2001; Sönmez and Sirakaya 2002). For instance Echtner and Ritchie (1993) suggested that a combination of structured (e.g. Likert Scale, semantic differential) and unstructured (e.g. reportery grid analysis, open-ended interviews) methodologies should be used to measure the complex nature of destination images. Considering once more the literature only few researchers investigated the demand structure of

students as a special target segment (e.g. Crompton 1979; Pizam, Jafari et al. 1991; Tapachai and Waryszak 2000) and Pike (2002) explicitly report a lack of image research focusing on students as respondents.

4. The survey

The purpose of this study is threefold: first, to assess destination images and perceptions of a mature tourism market (Austria) in the mind of a potential, emerging new target group (Polish students); second, to discuss the importance of tangible and intangible destination attributes on the basis of empirical results and third, to identify image satisfiers and dissatisfiers for the destination Austria.

In January 2003 a students' survey was carried out for gaining further insights into the evaluation of destination images. Thus, 240 students from different faculties of the University of Poznan were asked to complete a self-administered question-

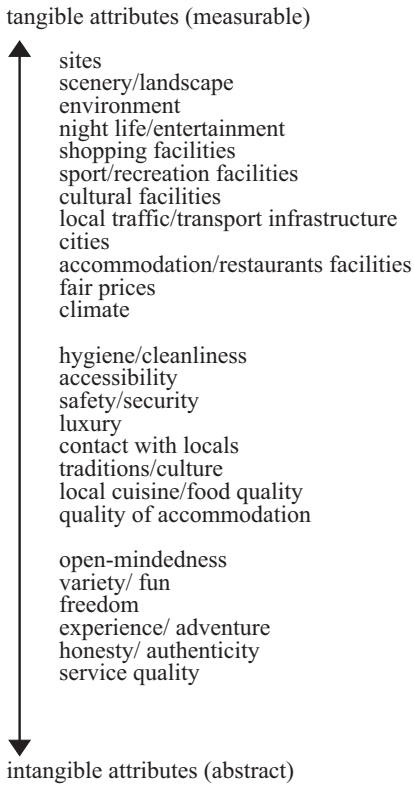

Figure 2. List of destination attributes used in the survey

naire and to indicate their perceptions of the Austrian destination image.

Analyzing the literature in terms of destination attributes which have been used in former studies for the measurement of destination images (Echtner and Ritchie 1993; Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Gallarza, Saura et al. 2002) and due to the authors' prior research (Peters and Pikkemaat 2003; Pikkemaat and Peters 2003), a final list of twenty-six destination attributes was developed. Students had to evaluate these attributes on a 5 point Likert-scale including tangible as well as intangible factors (see Figure 2).

Furthermore, students evaluate these attributes twice, once in terms of associations with an ideal destination and once in terms of associations with Austria. Following these principles of the 'SERVQUAL' approach (Parasuraman, Zeithaml et al. 1985; Parasuraman, Zeithaml et al. 1988), it was possible to measure the gap between expectations of an ideal destination image and satisfaction scores with the Austrian destination image. Additionally, personal and social factors as well as open-ended questions were included in the survey.

5. Results and discussion

The students' sample consists of 59.6% women and 40.4% men. More than 74.2% are at the age between twenty and twenty-five years, 22.5% are younger than twenty years and the rest is over twenty-five years old. The majority of the students are living alone (62.1%), but 37.9% are partnered. 76.7% of the respondents have an income below 1000 PLN[1], 21.7% between 1000 and 2000 PLN and 1.7% more than 2000 PLN. As concerns the subject of studies, 18.3% are studying economics, 17% architecture and civil engineering, 17% jurisprudence, 16.6% medicine, 16.6% humanities and 14.1% natural sciences. Asking students about their leisure interests and activities by using multiple answers, 71.3% are interested in music, 65% in travelling, 60% in cinema/television, 56.9% in fashion, 52.5% in sports, 50.8% in family/friends and 47.9% in reading. Lower student interests are found for animals (18.3%), nature and environment (27.9%), the Internet (30.4%) and culture (39.2%).

In the first step of data analysis the expectations of students regarding their 'perfect' destination were assessed using the twenty six attributes listed in Figure 2. The five strongest and weakest associations are listed in Figure 3 below.

Not very surprisingly for the students' sample fair prices are evaluated as the most important destination attribute. Also experience/adventure, variety/fun as well as hygiene/cleanliness and scenery/landscape are important image attributes of the

[1] 1 PLN = 0.216 Euro.

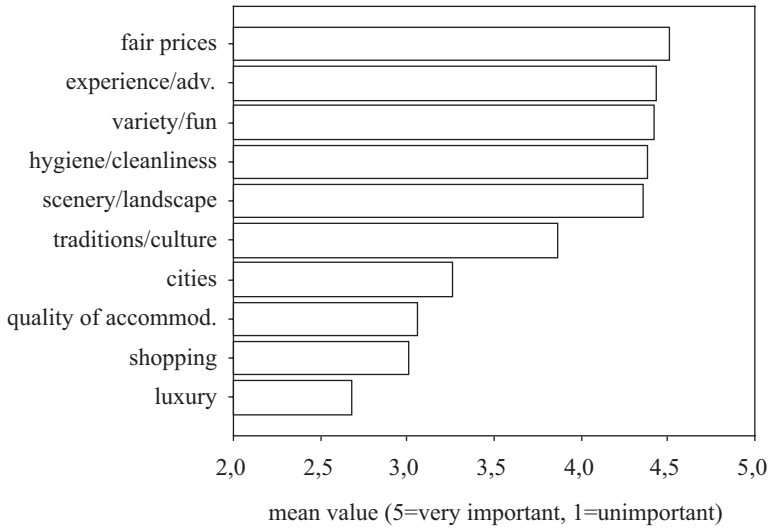

Figure 3. Lowest and highest associations for a 'perfect' destination

destinations' product and service bundle. Unimportant attributes for students are luxury, shopping or the quality of accommodation. Also cities and tradition/culture are evaluated as being less important.

As the twenty six destination attributes have been evaluated once more for the destination Austria Figure 4 presents the five strongest and weakest values.

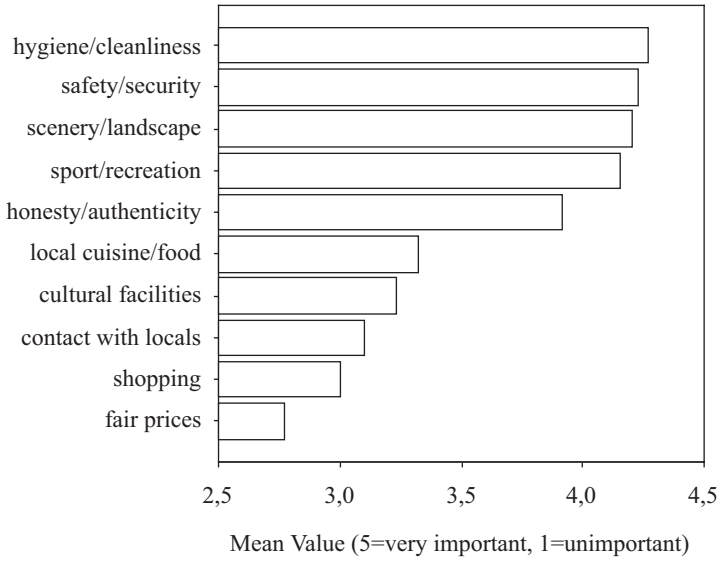

Figure 4. Lowest and highest associations for Austria

Polish students' most important association with Austria is hygiene/cleanliness, followed by safety/security and scenery/landscape. Also sport/recreation facilities and honesty/authenticity are important image factors of Austria. The lowest value belongs to 'fair prices': Polish students do not see Austria as a cost-efficient destination. Low associations can also be reported in descending order for shopping, contact with the locals, cultural facilities and local cuisine/food quality.

Next, the 'SERVQUAL' approach (Parasuraman, Zeithaml et al. 1985; Parasuraman, Zeithaml et al. 1988) was used to further analyze the overall importance of destination image attributes and the image scores for the destination Austria. Thus, the following main gaps between expectation factors for an ideal destination and the performance of Austria can be identified:

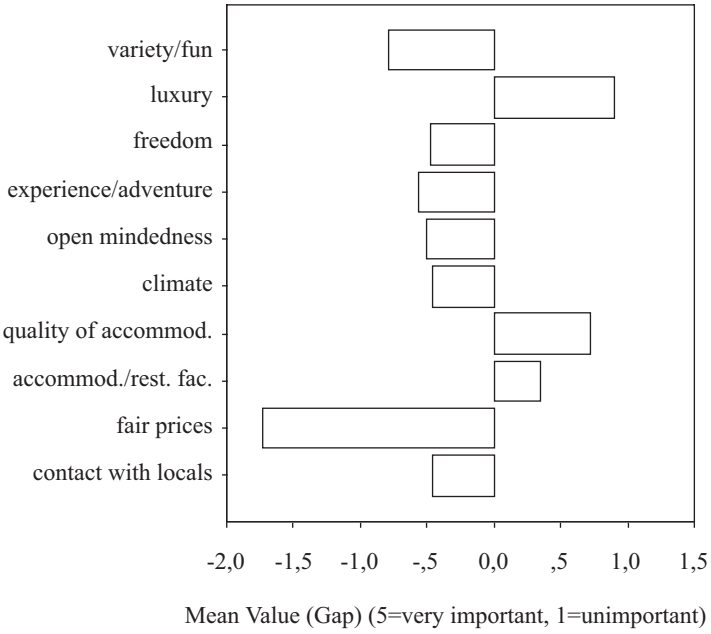

Figure 5. Image Gaps for the destination Austria

Only three image destination attributes concerning luxury, quality of accommodation and accommodation/restaurant facilities were appreciably exceeded by the perceived Austrian image. The most important negative gap is the cost-price level. Also variety/fun and experience/adventure are important image gaps of Austria. Moreover, open-mindedness, freedom, contact with the locals and climate display less satisfactory values. Comparing Figure 3 and Figure 5 it is obvious that the three most important expectations for an ideal destination (see Figure 3) show the highest negative gaps (see Figure 5).

Table 1. Rotated Final Matrix with Factor Loadings for the Image of Austria

	Factor 1: Basic tourism infra-structure	Factor 2: Natural resources	Factor 3: Traditional intangibles	Factor 4: 'New' in-tangibles	Factor 5: Culture & tradition	Factor 6: Contact &Prices
Night life/entertainment	0.785					
Shopping facilities	0.770					
Cities	0.734					
Accommod./rest. Facilities	0.695					
Local cusine/food quality	0.663					
Local traffic/transport infrastructure	0.662					
Service quality	0.636					
Quality of accommodation	0.620					
Sport/recreation facilities	0.485					
Environment		0.886				
Scenery/landscape		0.868				
Climate		0.594				
Hygiene/cleanliness			0.747			
Safety/security			0.747			
Honesty/authenticity			0.695			
Accessibility			0.632			
Luxury			0.495			
Experience/adventure				0.778		
Variety/fun				0.709		
Freedom				0.668		
Open mindedness				0.492		
Traditions/culture					0.838	
Cultural facilities					0.688	
Sites					0.573	
Contact with locals						0.521
Fair prices						0.496
Mean Value	3.603	3.884	3.946	3.683	3.476	2.938
Variance explained (%)	20.2	10.5	10.3	8.3	7.3	5.5

Method of extraction: analysis of main components
Rotation: Varimax-Rotation
Total Explained Variance: 62.065%
Sample Appropriateness: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = 0.844
Bartlett Test of Spericity = 2660.13 (sig = 000)
Mean Value (1=weak association, 5 = strong association)

In the second step of data analysis, the factor analysis method was used to identify the main image dimensions of Austria. The following factors could be extracted:

All twenty-six destination attributes listed in Figure 2 are taken into account and can be reduced by a varimax rotated factor analysis into six image building factors explaining together more than 62% of the total variance. Further, all items show a satisfactory factor loading above 0.48. Therefore, these factors display core elements of the students' image of Austria. The dominating factors: basic tourism infrastructure, natural resources, traditional intangibles, 'new' intangibles, culture and traditions as well as contact and prices could be extracted.

Assuming significant differences in social variables (sex, age, income) the extracted factors remain stable with two exceptions: significant differences can be reported for the sex variable as women associate factor 3 (traditional intangibles) ($p=0.044$) and factor 5 (culture & tradition) ($p=0.027$) with Austria more strongly than men. Next, assuming differences due to psychological factors the following differences arise: students interested in sports evaluate factor 5 (culture & traditions) lower ($p=0.011$), students interested in fashion evaluate factor 5 (culture & tradition) higher ($p=0.004$), students interested in nature show stronger associations with factor 2 (natural resources) ($p=0.006$) whereas the same factor is evaluated lower by students interested in the Internet ($p=0.002$). Consequently, testing the influence of the destination determined image factors (information sources, previous experiences and distribution) significant differences can be reported: first, previous experiences influence the evaluation of factor 1 (basic tourism infrastructure) ($p=0.005$) as those who are influenced by own experiences evaluate factor one lower than those without any own experiences; second, those who are stronger influenced by promotion evaluate factor 3 (traditional intangibles) stronger ($p=0.003$); third, political events influence the evaluation of factor 1 (basic tourism infrastructure) ($p=0.014$) as those who are more politically influenced evaluate this factor stronger; fourth, those who are more influenced by cultural events evaluate also culture and traditions (factor 5) stronger ($p=0.000$); sixth, also those who still remember Austria from grammar school evaluate factor 5 (culture and traditions) stronger ($p=0.015$). No significant differences have been found for the information sources friends, sport events and historical events.

Next, the mean value of the factors is used to compare the overall strength of association. Thus, Table 1 demonstrates that traditional intangibles (3.946) and natural resources (3.884) are main image building factors of Austria, followed by 'new' intangibles (3.683) and basic tourism infrastructure (3.603). Contacts with the locals and prices (2.938) as well as culture and traditions (3.476) appear to be weak image building factors for the Polish students.

The results of the factor analysis underline somehow a differentiation between tangible and intangible image building factors as suggested by Echtner & Ritchie (1993). Whereas factor 1 (basic tourism infrastructure), factor 2 (natural resour-

ces) and factor 5 (culture and tradition) include more tangible items which all together constitute the core elements of any destination product bundle, factor 3 (traditional intangibles) and factor 4 ('new' intangibles) contain the more intangible items of a tourism product. Additionally, comparing the two intangible factors it is obvious that factor 4 underlines the demands of the new experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1999). These demands are in line with the former research on students' image evaluation which has also pointed out the importance of delivering new intangible experiences, such as variety/fun, freedom or openness (Peters and Pikkemaat 2003).

Finally, an importance grid was used to analyse satisfiers and dissatisfiers in the students' image evaluation of Austria and to derive some implications for Austrian destination managers. Therefore, following Vavra (1995) and Johnston (1995) it is hypothesized that the importance of attributes can on the one hand be gained directly by asking respondents (explicit importance), on the other hand indirectly by a multiple linear regression of the single satisfaction statements of the attributes against the overall satisfaction score (implicit importance). The two values of each attribute are then put into an importance grid, which in turn helps to identify three distinct satisfaction determinants (Fuchs 2002). Satisfiers tend to obtain in surveys very low importance scores, but show a very high influence on satisfaction. Performance Factors are quality attributes or quality dimensions, which display coinciding explicit and implicit importance scores. They are labelled one--dimensional factors and depending on the score level they are either high or low importance performance factors. Dissatisifiers are rated very high in terms of explicit importance but they have no or only very little influence on total customer satisfaction. To provide boundaries between the quadrants the arithmetic mean can be used for the explicit importance as well as for the implicit importance (Matzler, Sauerwein et al. 2000).

Due to correlations between the twenty-six image attributes the six factors seem to be more appropriate for an importance grid analysis. Table 2 summarizes the empirical results.

Table 2. Explicit and Implicit Importance Scores for the destination Austria

	Explicit Importance (arithmetic mean)	Implicit Importance (std. regression coefficients)
Factor 1 : Basic Tourism Infrastructure	3.603	0.044
Factor 2 : Natural Resources	3.884	0.204
Factor 3 : Traditional Intangibles	3.946	0.071
Factor 4 : 'New' Intangibles	3.683	0.242
Factor 5 : Culture & Traditions	3.476	0.174
Factor 6 : Contacts & Prices	2.938	0.066
Mean Value	3.584	0.134

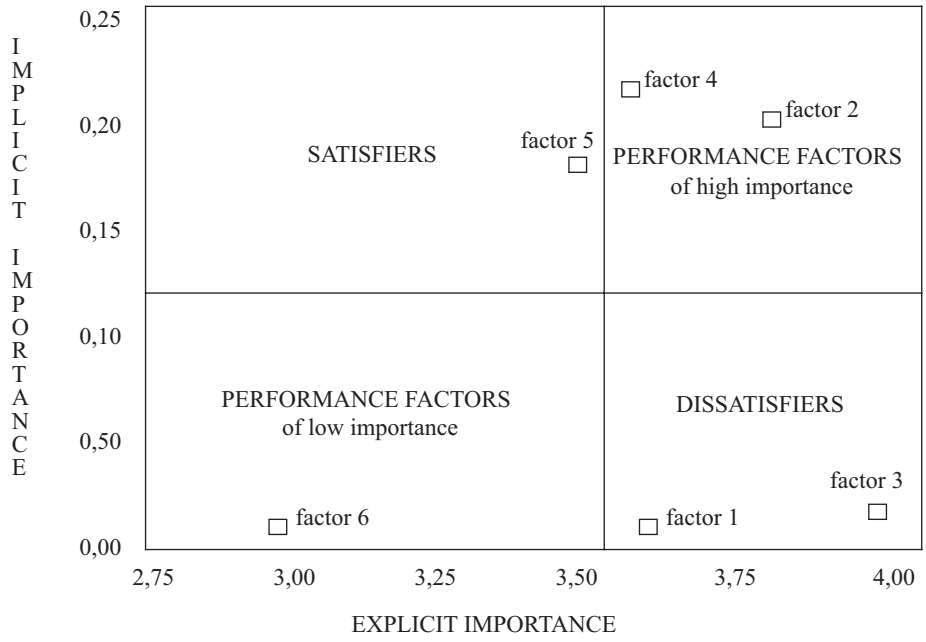

Figure 6. Importance Grid for Austria

Translating the values of Table 2 into an importance grid Figure 6 displays the results in the corresponding importance grid graphically.

Table 2 and Figure 6 can now be used to interpret differences of the importance of destination attributes. Surprisingly enough, only one factor (5) appears as a satisfier: the factor yielding tradition and culture, cultural facilities and sites. Satisfiers are implicitly important factors behind tourists' expressed satisfaction (Weiermair and Fuchs 2003). Factor 1 (basic tourism infrastructure) and factor 3 (traditional intangibles) are dissatisifiers, which means that they have only little influence on tourists' total satisfaction as long as they are delivered above a certain threshold. Performance factors of high importance are factor 2 (natural resources) and factor 4 ('new' intangibles), whereby factor 4 is located near the boundary to satisfiers. Factor 6 (contact and prices) is a performance factor of low importance.

Summarizing the empirical findings three results are outstanding. First, Austria's image cannot fulfill students' expectations of an ideal destination. There exist big gaps between students' expectations and the image of Austria: students prefer destinations with fair prices which offer additionally, experience/adventure and variety/fun as well as hygiene and a nice scenery. Although, Austria can compete in terms of hygiene and scenery, it is less satisfactory associated with fair prices, experience/adventure or variety/fun.

Second, the factor analysis pinpoints the importance of offering an attractive destination bundle which includes both hardware and software components of the tourism product. Students demand intangible attributes as well as tangible attributes and it makes no sense delivering them unbundled from each other as both are an integral part of students' evaluation about destinations' attractiveness.

Third, the basic tourism infrastructure and traditional intangible destination attributes have only little influence on students' total satisfaction, but they expect a certain level of these factors. Consequently, they are unsatisfactory if they are delivered below a certain tolerance limit. Once more, the dominance of the new experience economy is empirically reflected as the factor 'new intangibles' is evaluated highest in terms of the implicit importance and represents a performance factor of high importance. Additionally, students' total satisfaction is mainly influenced by the delivery of culture and tradition. With caution it may be assumed that students also demand cultural and traditional attributes which are staged and therefore deliver memorable experiences.

6. Conclusions

This paper analyzed destination attributes of the image formation process of students applied to the destination Austria. As limitations of the study methodological aspects have to be mentioned: although the survey included open-ended questions these questions have not been considered here. Therefore, the methodological claim for a combination of qualitative and quantitative research was ignored. However, the study could as a first step throw some more light on the importance of evaluating students' destination images.

Following Echtner and Ritchie (1993) the survey included tangible as well as intangible items. The empirical data, especially the factor analysis underlines on the one hand the assumption that a destination image is perceived as holistic construct which includes tangible and intangible attributes as well as common and unique characteristics. On the other hand, the results show that destination images are perceived as information chunks of the tourism bundle as students seem to evaluate in a more global way bundled elements of the destinations' product combining both, tangible and intangible attributes. Therefore, for further research it may be appropriate to focus on the analysis of common and unique destination attributes of the destination value chain.

Taking into account that the image formation process is determined by pull and push factors as demonstrated in Figure 1, the results affirm significant differences due to person and destination determined factors. Thus, as the next step of data analysis it is recommended to further probe into the open-ended questions concerning the unique selling position and competitive destinations of Austria.

Finally, the experience value of a product is a dominant factor influencing tourists' travel decision making process. In this context tourists are looking for emotional experiences, such as variety and fun, happening, openness, freedom. The tourism product has become a bundled, tangible and intangible product with high experience quality. For Austria's destination marketing managers the results support the importance of adding experience dimensions (e.g. having adventure, fun, variety and feeling free) to basic tourism services and products. Intangible new experiences are implicitly very important for students but they are not satisfied with their delivery in Austria. Surprisingly, only the factor comprising cultural and traditional items is identified as satisfier. Hence, management efforts to improve this dimension for a young, educated, urban target segment will be rewarded by strongly increasing the overall satisfaction scores of students.

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