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Szerkesztette:

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A local residents' perspective on the projected image of Budapest: insights for a post-Covid19 re-positioning

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Introduction

Tourism has been one of the worst affected sectors by the Covid19 pandemic. This event has deeply transformed travelers' motivations, needs, and expectations worldwide, resulting in the advent of new travel trends. Post-Covid19 tourism trends show an increasing demand for lesser-known destinations (off the beaten path), outdoor (nature-based), and sustainability-oriented (positive impact on the environment and communities) (CBI 2021, World Travel & Tourism Council – Trip.com Group 2021). A report on the emerging consumer trends in travel and tourism in 2021 highlights that 72% of modern travellers wish to support local communities through their travel (World Travel & Tourism Council – Trip.com Group 2021). In cultural cities there is an increasing phenomenon of tourists wanting to live like a local and engage in authentic local neighbourhood experiences (Coronel et al. 2022). In this context, post-pandemic strategies require a re-positioning of the destination enhanced by digital tools i.e., online travel videos; in this way, the tourist offer can be re-directed towards other activities outside of the city centre i.e., music and gastronomy festivals, natural places, while avoiding a great disturbance for local residents (Coronel et al. 2022).

Before the pandemic, Budapest, capital of Hungary, envisioned a great tourism development. Budapest was awarded for being the 'European best destination' (European Best Destinations, 2019) and was one of the top tourism destinations in Central-Eastern Europe accounting more than 24,5 million international arrivals in 2019 (Hungarian Central Statistical Office 2021). In 2018 the Hungarian Tourism Agency (Magyar Turisztikai Ügynökség) launched a social media campaign entitled 'Budapest, Spice of Europe' for rebranding the city (Kovács, Z. 2018). The campaign consisted of the design of Budapest's tourism image, website, photography and the production of image films at a cost of HUF 235 million gross, becoming the most expensive of all history in Hungary (Kovács, A. 2018). The main goal was expressing Budapest's character: historical heritage, cultural life, premier quality gastronomy, flourishing fashion and more (Kovács, Z. 2018). As part of the campaign, three official promotional videos about Budapest as a tourist destination were released and consequently posted on YouTube between May 2018 and November 2019.

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The current study aims to contrast the pre-pandemic image of Budapest projected by the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) through the promotional videos with the local residents' image; and thus, provide with insights on the ways to re-position the destination in the post-Covid19 era, in line with the new travel trends. Through the locals' eyes this study unveils strengths and weaknesses of the promotional material created by the DMO and presents suggestions for future improvement. The current study contributes to the understanding of the role of residents in the building, promotion and success of the destination image. Furthermore, it explores the gap between the government's image and the inhabitants' image and expands on the effects and implications.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. DMOS AND THE PROJECTED IMAGE OF A DESTINATION

Projected image refers to the verbal or visual representations of the destination, communicated by the destination itself through different media channels for marketing purposes (Hunter 2016, Almeida-García et al. 2020). Tourist destinations are represented by the DMOs, who are in charge of creating and delivering inducing information aimed not only to promote the destination but to create a positive image (Manhas et al. 2016), or positively modify the existing image (Guerrero-Rodríguez et al. 2020).

As part of their duties, DMOs undertake some branding activities such as the creation and use of logos or slogans (Manhas et al. 2016). Such symbols are meant to be associated with the destination and to bring about emotional connection in the target segment (Költringer – Dickinger 2015). Ideally, they should be based upon the core attributes that define the destination's character (Campelo et al. 2014). However, the last point is often misunderstood by DMOs when trying to encapsulate the wide range of attributes of the destination in one single slogan (Pike 2005), or to represent the destination by one or two landmarks (signature buildings) (Kavaratzis 2004). Nevertheless, a catchy slogan or memorable logo are not in the capacity to give the destination a new identity since they are only instruments but not the strategy itself (Kavaratzis – Ashworth 2006).

However, DMOs face a number of challenges when it comes to promoting a destination (Pike 2005). Some DMOs tend to project a destination image influenced by their own perceptions or by political or economic interests (Hunter 2016) that differs from the destination image that people have in mind. The projected image of a destination should be close to reality (Štefčeková – Vaňová 2013). Authenticity is an important issue to take into account since images projected by destinations could fail at representing mere illusions, intended to appeal to both tourists and residents (Govers – Go 2004). In this context, DMOs face a dilemma between the desire to project an authentic image and the need to project a commercial image (staged authenticity) (Govers – Go 2004). Similarly, the projected image of a destination should be based on practices that are part of the culture and identity of the destination and are enacted and legitimated by the locals, otherwise it becomes empty and meaningless especially for the domestic market (Pedeliento – Kavaratzis 2019).

1.2. THE ROLE OF LOCAL RESIDENTS

Scarce literature has been produced on the image that locals have about the place where they reside as a tourist destination (Stylidis 2020), while research on the mismatch between the image projected by the destination and the image perceived by local residents is rare (Ji 2011). Moreover, previous research has addressed the need to understand the residents' perceptions of themselves as part of a tourist destination and their role in the international visitors' tourist experiences (Hunter 2016). Although theory suggests the participation and involvement of all the stakeholders in the branding process (Park et al. 2009), residents' views and opinions are rarely considered by DMOs when planning, developing, and communicating the image of a destination.

Local residents are part of the destination. They are themselves an image element (Ji 2011) and their daily lives are an attraction for visitors (Stepchenkova – Zhan 2013). Therefore, "who they are and what they do is inherently connected to how destinations are experieced by visitors" (Jeuring – Haartsen 2016:4). In this vein, it is important to understand locals and their everyday experiences so the projected image represent the actual interests and experiences of residents and visitors (Hunter 2016). Moreover, unique local experience (unique selling proposition) can be built on the shared vision of the host community (Park et al. 2009). As a result, DMOs will be able to understand a place's peculiarities and know what should be portrayed and how it should be portrayed (Campelo et al. 2014).

Local residents play a key role as destination ambassadors and local experts (Stylidis 2020). They are the most important city marketers (Kavaratzis 2004) as they are active information providers and promote the destination' attractions amongst visitors and visiting friends or relatives (Stylidis 2020). Unlike DMOs, local residents interact with visitors, hence they have control on the delivery of on-site experiences (Woosnam et al. 2020) while co-creating value for visitors (Stylidis 2020).

Local residents are potential consumers of the tourism facilities and activities offered by the destination (Ji 2011). Usually, branding and promotional strategies are focused on appealing only the external audiences (Pedeliento – Kavaratzis 2019). However, it is recommendable to target locals through marketing campaigns to avoid unofficial counter-branding campaigns and to ensure residents positive attitude toward the brand (Wassler et al. 2019). For instance, inhabitants with the most favorable image showed higher levels of place attachment, support for tourism and were more likely to recommend their place to others (Stylidis 2020). In this regard, special attention should be paid to the self-congruity to avoid public resistance to marketing campaigns (Wassler et al. 2019).

1.3. IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTIONAL VIDEOS

The pandemic accelerated the digitalization process in tourism. Digital tools play a key role at every stage of the travellers's journey: pre-, during, and post-trip (Coronel et al. 2022). Destination promotional videos (DPVs) are among the most popular sources of information for travelers, especially at the planning stage, for travel inspiration (Google Travel Study – Ipsos MediaCT 2014) and have proven to impact destination image and visit intentions (Leung et al. 2017, Guerrero-Rodríguez et al. 2020). Therefore, they are considered as the "most complete and influential image creators" (Tiago et al. 2019:882).

A DPV can be defined as the audio-visual material containing promotional information of a tourist destination aimed to raise awareness about the destination, engage and persuade audience and shape the projected destination image (Flavián et al. 2017, Moin et al. 2020). A DPV contains both visual (images, text, captions, logo and slogan) and aural elements (narration, monologue/dialogue, soundtrack and theme song) (Leung et al. 2017, Moin et al. 2020). The combination of images, text and sound makes videos one of the most efficient means to promote destinations (Pan et al. 2017).

2. Methodology

The study seeks to contrast the pre-pandemic image of Budapest projected through the official DPVs with the destination image held by residents; and provide with insights on the ways to re-position the destination in the post-Covid19 era, in line with the new travel trends. To this end, the study adopts a qualitative approach for both, data collection and data analysis.

Focus group was chosen as the method for data collection given its great capacity to afford insights about feelings, thoughts and perceptions of people in their own words (Barbour 2018). As addressed by Stylidis (2020), the use of qualitative tools such as focus groups can help to understand residents' images. First, a purposive sampling procedure was adopted to identify the three official promotional videos part of the latest campaign called 'Budapest, Spice of Europe'. These videos were searched in the official YouTube channel 'WOW Hungary' and were easily recognized by their titles which include the name of the campaign (see Table 1).

Table 1 *Analyzed destination promotional videos*

Video	Channel	Premiere	Duration	Link
1. Budapest – Spice of Europe	WOW Hungary	May 2018	1.15 min.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JYvlerSFIE&t=8s
2. Budapest – Spice of Europe – New image film	WOW Hungary	October 2018	2.02 min.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlwjcWXG8cs&t=59s
3. Budapest – Spice of Europe	WOW Hungary	November 2019	2.00 min.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sx0g1 uSX7nc&t=20s

Source: Elaborated by the author

Once the official DPVs were identified, three focus groups were carried out between November and December of 2019. A different video was analyzed at each session. By applying convenience sampling, a total of 27 Hungarian university students (female = 52%), aged between 20 and 26 years, participated in the focus groups. The focus groups were held in English with an average of 9 participants per group and an average duration of 35 minutes per session. The author was the moderator of the focus groups. At the beginning of each session screening questions were formulated to the participants to ensure that

none of them had previously watched or known about the videos. A different video was displayed at the beginning of each session, then, with help of an open-ended questionnaire, participants were encouraged to give their opinion about the corresponding DPVs. Respondents were questioned on how authentic the video was, how identified they were with the broadcasted images, whether in their view the video showed the best of Budapest, whether the video was missing something and whether they would change something in the video. All the sessions were audio recorded and then transcribed by the author.

The second stage consisted of the content analysis of the transcriptions. Content analysis is one of the most rigorous and appropriate methods for the analysis of data generated through focus groups (Stewart et al. 2007). Conventional content analysis was applied since it allows to obtain insights from the data without imposing preconceived categories or theoretical perspectives (Hsieh – Shannon 2005). Drawing on the general guidelines for conventional content analysis (Hsieh – Shannon 2005, Moretti et al. 2011), the procedure for data analysis consisted of nine steps: (1) Reading repeatedly the transcriptions in order to get a sense of whole and achieve immersion, (2) Highlighting words and phrases that appear to capture meaningful concepts and to be connected with the research questions (3) Making notes of the first impressions on the highlighted phrases (4) Grouping and labeling highlighted phrases expressing similar concepts into mutually exclusive categories/codes (5) Sorting codes into categories according to their relationship (6) Revising, subsuming and merging categories to avoid overlaps (7) Organizing categories into a hierarchical structure (tree diagram) (8) Developing definitions for each category (9) Reporting findings including exemplars (quotes) of each category.

3. Results

As a result of the content analysis of data, the following categories emerged (see Figure 1).

3.1. HOW RESIDENTS SEE THE VIDEOS AND HOW VIDEOS SHOULD BE

Regarding the videos' content, respondents claimed that this is not original and the DPVs portray the same locations that can be easily searched in the internet: *"Nothing new is shown to me in this video [...] I would prefer they to show something different like the sides of Budapest that you cannot actually see from pictures and stock photos"* (Male, video 1). Furthermore, DPVs are *"too repetitive"* (Female, video 2), since some locations were showed several times in the same video.

Respondents found that DPVs focus mainly on the main touristic sites of Budapest, especially the 5th district. They would rather prefer the promotion of other districts i. e. 7th, 8th and 9th or places out of the mainstream (off the beaten path) such as residential areas or universities. *"The universities, a little bit inside the university life because it is also a part of Budapest"* (Male, video 3). Moreover, respondents claimed that the DPVs should exhibit not only how Budapest looks like but the general atmosphere, including the residents' life, gastronomy and nature: *"There was not crowd anywhere, not in the underground, not in the bridges, not in Heroes Square, it feels empty"* (Male, video 2).
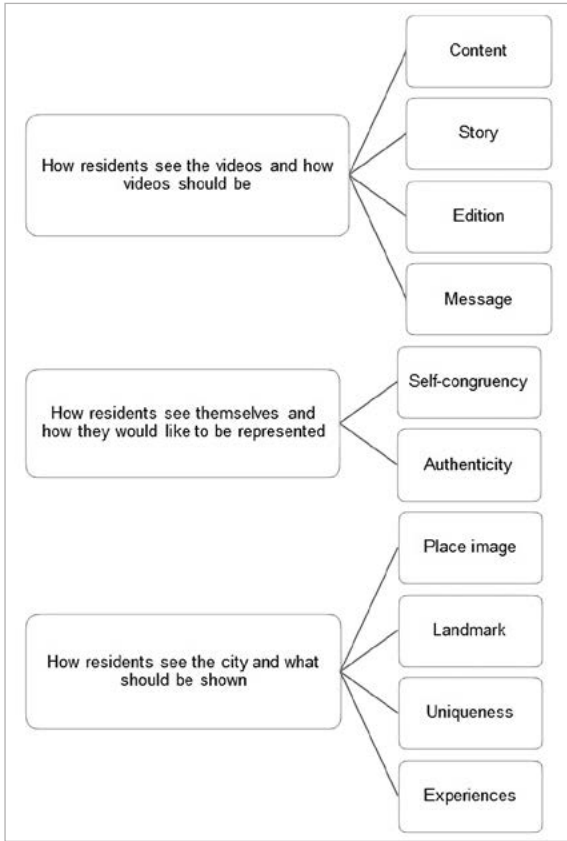
Figure 1 *Categories emerged from the content analysis*
Source: Elaborated by the author

The stories of the DPVs lead in some cases to the identification of the viewers with the main characters and situations resulting in a positive attitude toward the video: *"The one at the beginning of the video, with the old picture. I used to do that, not with Budapest but with other countries [...] So, that element of going back to places and revisiting them is something that I can feel identified with"* (Female, video 1). In contrast, when the audience doesn't feel identified with the story or characters, it translates into a negative attitude toward the video: *"I didn't really like it. First of all, I think it targeted wealthier people so much that I felt poor watching the video"* (Female, video 3). However, video 1 fails at focusing too much on the story and main characters that overlooks showcasing the destination: *"You don't really see any kind of sites or not too much. The whole video is focusing on the couple, and you see not the perspective but the couple itself"* (Female, video 1). Additionally, the characters do not interact with the locals.

Some respondents criticized the edition of the DPVs in terms of load and pace of the takes. In addition, they felt overwhelmed and distracted by the amount of information

given at one time: *"I tried to focus on the background and see the things of Budapest, but I can't I just saw dancing, dancing, dancing and something just changing in the background"* (Male, video 2). Additionally, some locations broadcasted in the videos are difficult to recognize even for locals *"I have been there fairly recently so I can recognize it from the inside, but a foreigner?"* (Male, video 2). Therefore, respondents suggest to use captions or insert the names of the showcased places in order to ease their identification.

Although video 1 and video 3 convey a clear message about the varied offer of Budapest in terms of activities: *"It has a wide variety of programs and possibilities so you won't get bored here"* (Female, video 3), in case of video 2 the message is unclear for most of the respondents: *"I guess they wanted to show how artistic Budapest is, but it seems more like someone expressing himself but not really sending a message"* (Female, video 2). On the other hand, the slogan lacks of clarity and connection with Budapest and the videos' content: *"It's because of the last three seconds of the video. There is no real connection because if the video would showcase more gastronomy or if paprika would appear more times, then it would make sense"* (Male, video 1). Moreover, the slogan is mainly associated to the gastronomy and the spicy food eaten in Hungary, but does not communicate much about the city.

3.2. HOW RESIDENTS SEE THEMSELVES AND HOW THEY WOULD LIKE TO BE REPRESENTED

Participants identified a lack of self-congruency in the DPVs. In general, local residents felt misrepresented by a small group of people pretending to be locals, behaving and doing activities that residents do not usually do or, are not allowed to do: *"I hate that when in image videos the friends have a party at the Fishermen's bastion. Nobody does that!"* (Male, video 2); *"I really feel it is not fair because I live here too, a lot of people live here and we only see 25 people having fun on the bridge and they are not the only ones who live in Budapest and they are not the only part of the community"* (Female, video 2).

Respondents pointed out that some elements of the culture showcased in the videos, such as music, dance, and costumes, are not authentic and have been modified to make them look more commercial. The majority would like such elements to be portrayed as they are in reality, although they might be famous only for Hungarians: *"Authentic Hungarian folk clothes are not so bad, so they look good why then we try to make it modern design"* (Female, video 2).

3.3. HOW RESIDENTS SEE THE CITY AND WHAT SHOULD BE SHOWN

Interviewed locals perceive Budapest as a very active city with a beautiful landscape and rich heritage, history, architecture and gastronomy. In their view the city offers innumerable opportunities for visitors: *"I think it was very accurate. It showed how colourful Budapest is, there was some traditional historical architecture and the gastronomy was shown also. That we can run over the banks of the Danube, so sport facilities also, yeah"* (Female, video 1).

The majority of respondents agreed on the fact that Budapest has many landmarks, not only one. The most elicited by the participants were: Parliament, Chain Bridge, Buda

Castle, Heroes' Square and St. Stephens' Basilica. However, some others pointed out that view over the Danube river including some of the afore-mentioned buildings constitute the most iconic landmark: *"But I think the most iconic if you search Budapest in Instagram is when you are on Gellert hill and the Panorama with Chain Bridge, Parliament and Buda Castle"* (Male, video 2), *"I think the Parliament and the Danube as a whole might be the most iconic and the most well-known and it was missing in the video"* (Male, video 2).

Opinions regarding the uniqueness of Budapest were diverse. Some respondents find Budapest quite similar to any other city of Europe, with elements that other cities also have: rich heritage (many other cities), opera (Vienna), and architecture (Prague and Vienna): *"The opera is all over Europe, in Vienna, also in Prague so they are quite similar also in architecture. So you need something else than the opera to differentiate it from other European capitals. So, since Budapest has a rich heritage as other cities, most of the cities are quite similar"* (Male, video 1). In contrast, other consider some characteristics of Budapest as very unique: bridges and Danube, thermal baths: *"I think bridges over the Danube are missing because they are a unique important part of the city"* (Female, video 1).

Regarding the experiences promised through the DPVs, interviewees identified some distortions: *"In the underground there are many and there were none besides them when they were there, so I don't say that you should put like a thousand people in the video when they are travelling for example with the underground but just some at least"* (Male, video 2). Participants would like DPVs to depict realistic experiences offered by the city: *"I feel this is not what tourists really do when they are here. So, I don't feel that any tourists ever or most of the tourists have this really deep participation in such activities"* (Female, video 1).

4. Discussion

Findings indicate a clear dissonance between the image of Budapest projected by the DMO and the image perceived by the local residents. The study evidences that the DMO project a desired but unrealistic image of the destination. The three analyzed DPVs are considered by locals as "staged" (not organic). According to the residents' perspective, to some extent the DPVs misrepresent the local culture, the locals' lifestyle and consequently, the experience for tourists. Local residents would rather prefer to see real people, doing real things. In response to the gap between the projected image by the DMO and the perceived image by locals, residents' attitude toward the DPVs and towards the conveyed message is mainly negative (Wassler et al. 2019), which might threaten the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the destination image.

The study reveals a lack of understanding by the DMO on how residents see themselves and the city (Jeuring–Haartsen 2016). Although locals are not the main target audience of the DPVs, echoing previous research, the study confirms the important contribution of residents as primary sources of information and city experts (Stylidis 2020). Who better than the people who live in the destination to recognize its potential? In this vein, local residents can shed light on the 'hidden gems' to integrate a different offer for

certain segments of visitors who are looking for deeper and off of the beaten path experiences (Campelo et al. 2014, Hunter 2016). Before investing huge amounts of money in promotional campaigns, DMOs should leverage on the local residents' perspective and knowledge to portray the best of the destination yet accurately.

Additionally, the study demonstrates the importance of adopting an integrative approach when projecting the image of a destination. Culture and identity are inherent to a destination (Pedeliento – Kavaratzis 2019), as well as its residents (Jeuring – Haartsen 2016). The interplay of all these elements in the planning and execution phases will ensure the authenticity and congruence of the projected image. At the same time it will counteract the creation of false expectations on the target audience regarding touristic experiences (Hunter 2016).

4.1. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

A post-Covid19 era demands a more sustainable tourism which includes a positive impact on host communities, more adventurous and experiential activities, a high appreciation for the local culture – with authenticity as one major aspect –, less crowded and more nature-based destinations (CBI 2021, World Travel & Tourism Council – Trip.com Group 2021). For cultural cities such as Budapest, the post-pandemic era can be seen as an opportunity to re-position the destination – replace the current image with a desired image – (Coronel et al. 2022), following the new travel trends. Based on the locals' perspective, the current research provides DMOs with some guidelines for creating DPVs that can appeal and engage modern travellers in a post-pandemic era:

- Become organic: emulating the vloggers' style when introducing a destination.
- Show the real city: conveying the city's atmosphere, including locals' lifestyle, transportation system, etc., to create real expectations about tourist experiences.
- Showcase alternative locations: not only the ones that are all over the internet and usually located in the crowded city center, but inviting the visitor to explore the city and seek the hidden gems – off the beaten path attractions.
- Do not forget nature: avoid focusing only on the man-made attractions, but also show parks, gardens, and other outdoor areas.
- Identify the uniqueness of the destination: modern travellers look for unique experiences.
- Cautious with storytelling: although it is appealing, it can also distract the audience from the ultimate goal of portraying the destination. In addition, it can influence the audience positively or negatively according to the level of self-identification with the characters.
- Choose authentic and representative elements: avoid using ambiguous and stereotypical elements but instead use those that represent the destination or their inhabitants and generate an emotional connection.

4.2. FUTURE RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

This paper paves the way for further studies concerning the gap between the official projected destination image and the image held by local residents and the effects on the

host community's attitude, behavior and place attachment. In addition, further research should be conducted on post-pandemic marketing campaigns and the most effective ways to target modern travellers. Limitations of the study are associated to the convenience sample. The participants shared a similar age cohort and were non English native speakers.

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