THE IMAGE OF BELGRADE AND NOVI SAD AS PERCEIVED BY FOREIGN TOURISTS

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Abstract: The image of a tourist destination to a large degree contributes to decision-making while selecting and visiting a destination. Therefore, creating a positive image in mind of the consumers is vital for the said destination. In the analysis of image of Belgrade and Novi Sad from the perspective of foreign tourists, it has been established that the image is associated with the domain of entertainment and night life, quality food and drinks, as well as the hospitality of local population. The image of rich history is also connected to Belgrade, while cleanliness is attributed to Novi Sad. The differences in the image of these two cities are most frequently located in the aura of the location, that is, the ambiance predominant in the city. While Belgrade is fast-paced, wild, full of life, Novi Sad is charming, romantic, slow, quiet and peaceful. What can be noted is that neither Belgrade nor Novi Sad do not have any tourist attractions that are extremely attractive for tourist, such as the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Red Square in Moscow, The Statue of Liberty in New York. Creating provocative tourist attractions is necessary to drastically increase the number of tourists. Novi Sad has made a significant step in that sense by organizing a music festival — Exit, however, the downside to using such events as tourist attractions is their temporal limitation (they most frequently last several days a year), which is insufficient for the city to make larger profit from tourism.

Key words: image, tourist destination, Belgrade, Novi Sad

Introduction

The success of tourist destination across the world in the great measure depends on the image that the potential tourists have in their consciousness, and on the ways that those in charge of the destination manipulate the said image (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Sirgy & Su, 2000). The image of a destination influences the subjective perception of tourists, as well as their behavior while selecting a destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Castro, Armario & Ruiz, 2007; Chon, 1990; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Milman & Pizam, 1995; Woodside & Lysonski,

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1989). It influences the expectations formed prior to the travel, on the overall evaluation of the travel after leaving the destination, and the future intentions of tourists to re-visit the said destination or orally promote it (Crompton & Ankomah, 1993; Gartner, 1989; Goodall, 1988). Therefore, researching the image of a destination is of vital importance for marketing activities of the destination. The aim of this paper is to establish the perceived image of Belgrade and Novi Sad, which are the most frequently, visited city centers of Serbia, from the perspective of foreign tourists.

Literature overview

Crompton (1979, p. 18) defined the image of the tourist destination as a "collection of beliefs, ideas and impressions a person has about a destination". Gunn (1972) formed the theory of seven phases of image creation (Figure 1).
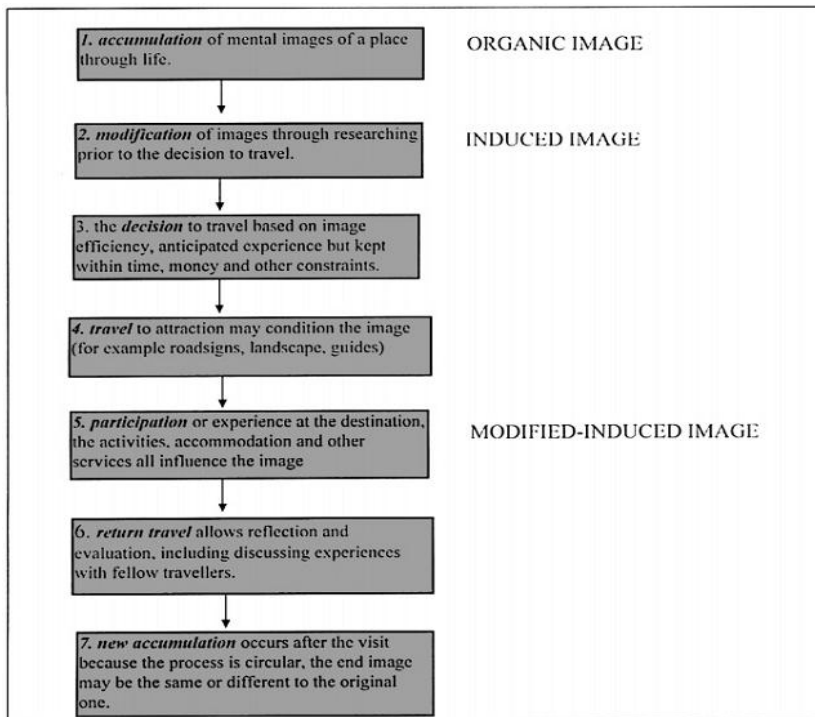

Figure 1. The change of destination image in the consciousness of the consumers before and after the travel.

Source of data: Jenkins, (1999). according to: Gunn, (1972).

This theory incorporates a model based on the consumer behavior while selecting a tourist destination and the modification of image of consumers during all behavioral phases, from the creation of the need to travel to the return home from the destination. According to a theory, initially, the consumer has an organic (initial) image of the destination that was accumulated throughout their lifetime. Then, they subtract the image based on research and gathering of information about the destination. With the departure to the destination and forming of personal experience, the consumer creates a modified image that can be the same as initial (organic) image, or, as it is the most frequent case, it differs in a positive or negative manner (Jenkins, 1999).

Factors of destination image formation

Based on relevant literature, Beerli and Martin (2004) have defined the factors that influence the formation of destination image. The informative sources that are also known as stimuli or agents of image formation (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gartner, 1994) are the influencing forces on the formation of consumer perception. Gartner (1994) believes that the process of image formation depends on different information sources that act independently, and build a unique image in the mind of the consumers. He classifies different image agents into several categories:

- Overtly induced, (found in conventional publishing in mass media created by information provided from relevant institutions from the destination or touristic operators):
- Covertly induced, (known celebrities that are used in promotional activities of the destination, or reports and articles about the destination);
- Autonomous (news in mass media, documentaries, films, television programs, etc. about the destination);
- Organic (people such as friends and family provide information based on personal knowledge or experience) and
- Personal visit to the destination.

The image formed by the first four sources of information (agents) is the perception before departing to the destination that Phelps (1986) calls secondary image, while the primary image is formed by visiting the destination. Information acquired by personal experience, i.e. primary image, can differ from secondary image. It should be added that with the advent of new technologies, social media has become a very important informative sources. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) organize them into six types: blogs, social networking sites,

virtual social worlds, collaborative projects, content communities, and virtual game worlds.

An increasing number of individuals communicates reviews, recommends products and shares experiences with their friends and family through social media. Online word of mouth is vital for successful conversions in today's marketplace. Social media offers travel brands the ability to identify prospective travelers, communicate directly with users and create branded experiences through advertisements and custom-developed applications. For example, Trip Advisor is one of the most popular social media website related to tourism. The image reflected on Trip Advisor by actual tourists may influence the image created in the perception of potential tourists (Kladou & Mavragani, 2015; Miguéns, Baggio & Costa, 2008). Likewise, travel blogs that provide more information, more stories, more photos and more discussions are valuable for understanding and studying holistic image of a tourist destination (Cakmak, & Isaac, 2012).

Model of destination image

Personal characteristics of an individual, or internal factors, also influence the image formation. Perceived image will be formed depending on informational sources of the destination on the one side, and personal needs, motivations, prior knowledge, preferences and other personal characteristics on the other. In this way, individuals build their own mental perception of a place (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Bramwell & Rawding, 1996; Gartner, 1994).

From the standpoint of consumer behavior, personal factors mean internal determinants, i.e. socio-demographic factors of an individual (sex, age, degree of education, social class, place of residence), and those of psychological nature (motivation, values, character, lifestyle etc.) These personal factors influence the cognitive organization of perception that in turn influences the perception of environment, and creates an image (Beerli & Martin, 2004).

Researchers have agreed that the image is a construct consisting of cognitive and affective evaluation. Cognitive evaluation is related on the beliefs or knowledge of destination attributes, while affective evaluation is related to sentiment towards it. The complete image of a destination is formed as a result of both cognitive and affective image (Figure 2) (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004).
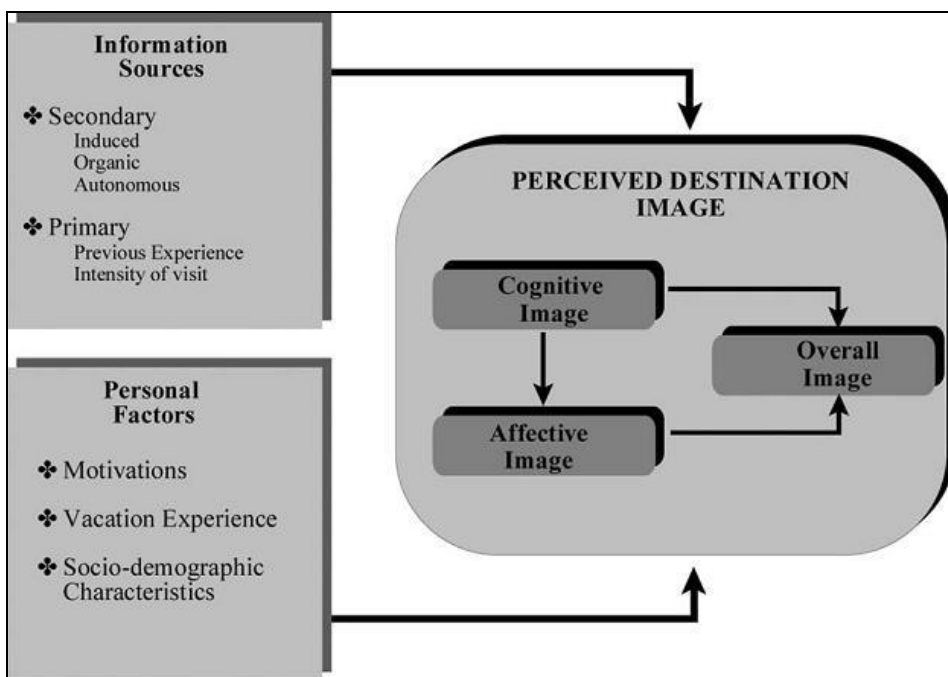
Figure 2. Model of destination image formation Source of data: Beerli & Martin, 2004.

Chon (1992) studied the effects of discrepancy between the image and the expectations from a destination, and the experience on the said destination by connecting it to consumer behavior models. She established that the positive image and positive experience will result in mildly positive grading of the destination, while negative image and positive experience will result in highly positive grading of the destination. The most negative grading comes from positive image and negative experience.

Components of destination image

Destination image presented by Echtner and Ritchie (1991) is frequently used with measuring the term. The Figure 3 demonstrates their model that presupposes three dimensions: attributive/holistic, functional/psychological and common/unique.
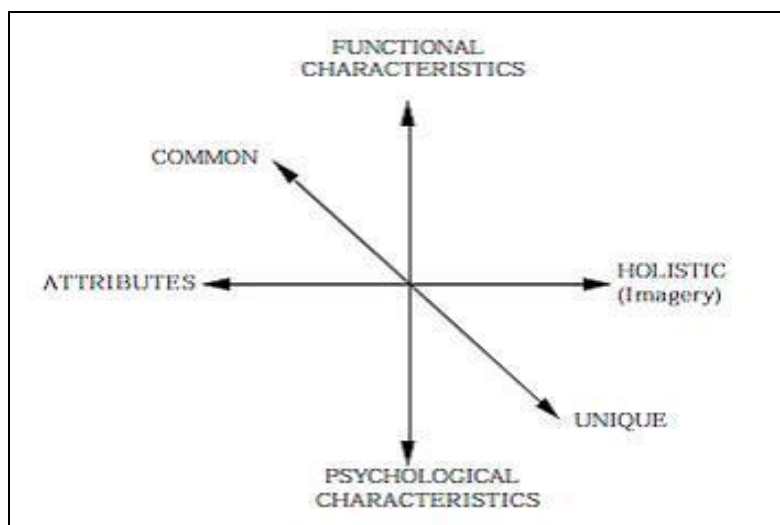
Figure 3. Components of destination image Source of data: Echtner & Ritchie (1991)

The common functional attributes are characteristics that can be compared amongst the destinations (prices, climate, types of accommodation etc.). Unique functional attributes consist of celebrations and special events that form image of a destination, such as: EXIT festival, Oktoberfest, The Eiffel Tower etc. Common psychological or abstract attributes can be exemplified as the hospitality of the local population or the beauty of landscape, while unique psychological attributes are emotions or sentiment related to the places e.g. religious pilgrimage or places of historical events.

Image of Serbia

In previous studies of the image of Serbia, the negative perception among potential tourists prevailed because of wars and destruction during the '90s. Security as an emotional experience related to the destination was a serious reason for failing to appear in Serbia (Howard & Allen, 2008).

Authors Armenski, Zakić and Dragin (2009) investigated the image of Serbia in the perception of foreign visitors of EXIT music festival in Novi Sad, the city of Belgrade and visitors who cruise the Danube. According to their results, foreign visitors of EXIT festival described the hosts as "polite", "open-minded" and "hospitable" with emphasis on the "relaxed" atmosphere. When visitors were asked what they liked best during their stay in Belgrade, they indicated: the

hospitality of the local population (40.5%), historical monuments (29.5%), nightlife (12.5%), national specialties (6.5%) and natural beauty (6%). Lack of currency exchange offices, inability to pay in foreign currencies (primarily US dollars) and a small number of places where they can buy souvenirs, were the main imperfections of the tourist offer of Belgrade.

Methodology

For the research of image destination of Belgrade and Novi Sad, one of the qualitative techniques of research was used, the so called "*free elicitation*" which deals with associations. A question is asked "Which three words best describe the city of Belgrade or Novi Sad respectively, as a vacation destination?" The answers are classified by similarity into categories and published by frequency. Word sorting by categories was conducted by two experts in the field of tourism. Later, destination image of Belgrade and Novi Sad is picturesquely represented in the matrix of Echtner and Ritchie model (1991).

In order to avoid suggestiveness, open-type questions were used. Image research is better presented in this way due to possibility of determining the main stimuli of the destination. The other advantage is that the strength of image can be measured. If the respondents are not able to provide an answer, or if they take too much time to think about the question, it means that the image is not recognizable.

The research was conducted in Belgrade and Novi Sad, the main urban touristic centers of Serbia, during the period of 2013–2014. After studying the time periods and the locations with the largest concentration of foreign tourists in these cities, the questionnaires were distributed. In total, 200 foreign tourists were sampled, a hundred in each city respectively.

From the sample, the largest number of foreign tourists in Belgrade arrived from neighboring countries (36%). Most were tourists from Croatia, Greece and Slovenia. A significant number came from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Montenegro, but also from overseas countries, the USA and Indonesia. Other countries of the emissive area had less than 3% of tourists in the sample, so they are all grouped in the field "other countries". This field contains tourists from Canada, Holland, Norway, The United Kingdom, France, Taiwan, South Korea, Cuba, Australia, Spain, Germany, Austria, Armenia, Sweden, Belgium, Poland, Macedonia, Algeria and Turkey.

Table 1. Emissive area of respondents in Belgrade (N=100)

Emissive area	percent	Emissive area	percent
Croatia	13%	Hungary	4%
Greece	9%	Romania	4%
Slovenia	7%	Montenegro	4%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5%	USA	3%
Italy	5%	Indonesia	3%
Bulgaria	5%	Other countries	38%

Source of data: Author's findings, 2014

In the sample of foreign tourists in Novi Sad, most came from Bosnia and Herzegovina, then Hungary, Holland, Germany, Slovenia and Romania. A significant number of tourists came from the United States of America, Switzerland, Montenegro, Australia, Spain and Norway.

Table 2. Emissive area of respondents in Novi Sad (N=100)

Emissive area	percent	Emissive area	percent
Bosnia and Herzegovina	10 %	Switzerland	4%
Hungary	8 %	Montenegro	3%
Holland	8 %	Australia	3%
Germany	7 %	Spain	3%
Slovenia	7 %	Norway	3%
Romania	7 %	Other countries	31%
USA	6 %		

Source of data: Author's findings, 2014

Other countries of the emissive area had less than 3% of respondents in the questionnaire so they are grouped as "Other countries". This category contains respondents from the Czech Republic, Poland, Austria, France, the United Kingdom, Russia, Turkey, China, Lebanon, Canada, Belgium, Macedonia, Croatia, Italy and Bulgaria.

Research results

In this research, the image of Belgrade and Novi Sad is measured qualitatively, by requesting the respondents to write down three words that best describe Belgrade or Novi Sad as tourist destinations. When it comes to the image of Belgrade, 57 different terms were identified, out of which 28 are repetitions. Most frequently repeated terms are friendly (15 times) and beautiful (12 times), while increased frequency is also noted in terms historical, fun and cheap (seven times each). These terms are classified by similarity into 10 categories. These categories are called hospitality, nightlife, physical (natural) characteristics,

cultural heritage, ambiance, appearance, products and services, safety, communal conditions and climate.

- Hospitality: **hospitable[2], friendly, welcoming, pleasant, polite, love**, comfortable, intimate;
- Nightlife: **party, nightlife, enjoy,** good music, women, "splavovi", Aca Lukas;
- Physical (natural) characteristics: **Balkans, two rivers, nature**, central location, hills;
- Cultural heritage: **history, good food and beverage, architecture,** local brandy, culture, fortress;
- Ambiance: **fun, interesting, live, relaxing**, wild, fast, exciting, calm, happy, surprising;
- Appearance: **beautiful, big, green,** sexy, colorful, scenic, unexplored, real;
- Products and services: **cheap,** value for money, shopping, walk, sightseeing;
- Safety: **nationalism**, open, secure;
- Communal conditions: **dirty streets, traffic jam**;
- Climate: **warm**, sunny.

With the help of analysis of number and frequency of given terms, the destination image of Belgrade can be represented within the matrix of Echtner and Ritchie model (1991) (Figure 4). The common functional and psychological attributes that can be compared with other destinations are found in the first and third quadrant. The unique functional and psychological attributes that are specific for the given destination can be found in the second and the fourth quadrant. Special attention needs to be dedicated to the fourth quadrant, since it contains the destination aura that is, the spirit of the place. The applied qualitative method of destination image research is specifically adequate for describing the aura of the place that is more difficultly measured by quantitative models.

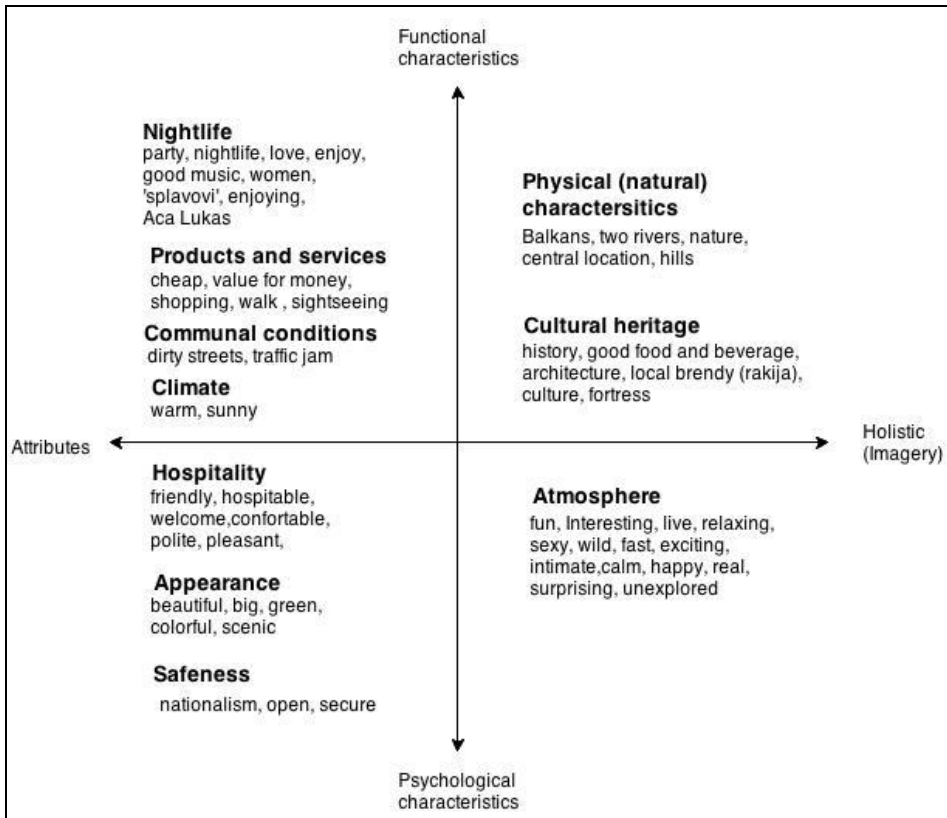---

[2] The bolded terms had increased frequency

Figure 4. Components of the image of Belgrade as perceived by foreign tourists Source of data: Author's findings, 2014

In the analysis of Novi Sad 66 different terms were identified, out of which 30 were noted as repetition. Most frequently repeated are terms friendly (18 times), nice (12 times), cheap (11 times), nightlife (10 times) and EXIT (10 times). Eight categories were identified: hospitality, nightlife, physical (natural) characteristics, cultural heritage, products and services, climate, ambiance and appearance.

- Hospitality: **hospitable, friendly, pleasant, polite, kind, comfortable**, people;
- Nightlife**: nightlife, fun, girls, party**, music, enjoyable, good vibes, pubs;
- Physical (natural characteristics**): beach (Strand), Danube**, easy to reach from the river, quay, wide streets;

- Cultural heritage: **Exit, good food and beverage, fortress, buildings, history**, nice city center, churches, culture, old, tradition, *Jelen* beer, burger (*pljeskavica*), diversity;
- Products and services: **cheap**, walk;
- Climate**: hot, sunny**, cold, good weather, summertime, windy;
- Ambiance: **interesting, relax, quiet**, calm, romantic, charming, amazing, cool, easy, happy;
- Appearance: **nice, beautiful, clean, great, green**, white, light, modern, urban, actual, special, unique, colorful, scenic, cute.
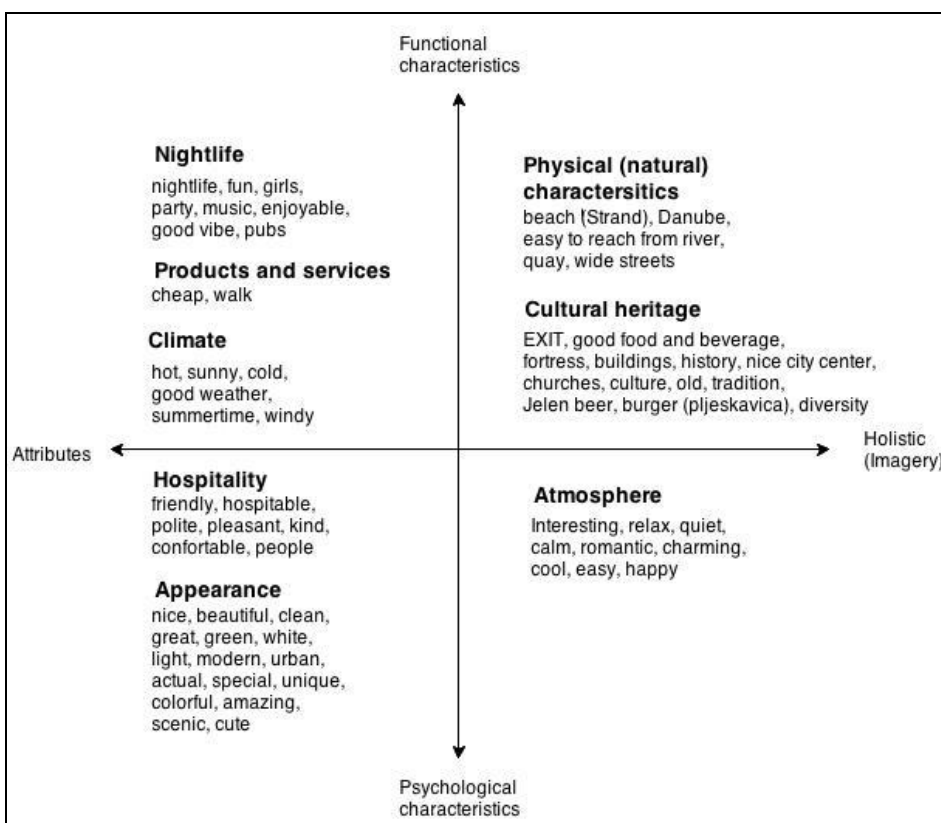

Figure 5. Components of the image of Novi Sad as perceived by foreign tourists. Source of data: Author's findings, 2014

Based on given terms, components of destination image of Novi Sad are represented in the matrix of Echtner and Ritchie model (1991) (Figure 5).

Discussion and conclusions

The image of Belgrade and Novi Sad, according to the survey results, is generated in the sphere of entertainment and nightlife, good food and drink and hospitality of the local population, which does not differ from surveys conducted in previous years. These are the attributes with the highest tourist expectations regarding to these destinations. *Low prices* in Novi Sad in the perception of foreign tourists and *rich history* of Belgrade are also one of the main attractive factors of these destinations.

The results showed that neither Belgrade nor Novi Sad have tourist attractions that have a great attraction power as Paris has the Eiffel Tower, Moscow Red Square and New York the Statue of Liberty. Tourist attractions such as the Kalemegdan, Knez Mihailova Street, the Temple of Saint Sava or the Avala Tower are not strong enough to create the first associations of Belgrade. Creating unique tourist attractions is necessary in order to increase the number of tourists drastically. Novi Sad has done a huge step in that direction by organizing a music festival Exit, however, the lack of events as tourist attractions is time constraints (typically a few days in a year), which is not enough that the city achieves higher revenues from tourism.

The thing which is different compared to the surveys conducted in previous years is security. Foreign tourists state, as the first association about Belgrade, the words *open* and *secure*, which indicates the positive change of image over time.

However, the negative terms exist in the analysis of the image of Belgrade (dirty streets, nationalism and traffic jam). The city should pay particular attention in order to neutralize them because negative image is not beneficial for tourism development. In this regard, Novi Sad is in better position because there is no negative association; moreover, through the terms of *clean, bright, green, white, bright*, cleanliness in Novi Sad was especially emphasized. The differences in the image of the two cities appear particularly in the aura of the city, and the atmosphere that prevails in the city. Tourists state that Belgrade is *fast, wild, vivid*, and Novi Sad *charming, romantic, slow, quiet and peaceful*. The spirit of the city is particularly important for attracting tourists and this should be emphasized in the differentiation of these two cities in the international market.

The most frequent terms in measuring image of Belgrade are: *friendly, beautiful, historical, fun and cheap* and they should be more often used in promotional materials and marketing campaigns of the city in order to attract more tourists.

In Novi Sad the most frequent terms are*: friendly, nice, cheap, nightlife and EXIT.*

From the above it can be concluded that both cities, Belgrade and Novi Sad, recorded a positive change of image, however, to ensure the growth rate of tourists, they need to improve the attractiveness of the destination, and this can only be achieved by better operating of tourist destination management. Hospitality, security and rich nightlife are just core and base, but not additional value that the destination can have.

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