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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study has been find out what is the image that Russian tourists have of Barcelona focusing on the mental destination image perceived by asking the research question: “What is the image that Russian tourists have of Barcelona”.

To find out information, a theoretical framework taking into account the concept of destination image, a general study of the image of Barcelona and an analysis of the Russian tourism market has been analyzed. Furthermore, in order to arrive to conclusions, Russian tourist perception has been studied by doing a qualitative study by using In-depth interviews. This methodology has been chosen as it allows to get inside tourist minds and to know more about their feelings, motivations and in-depth feedback letting them total freedom expression, without influencing them.

After doing the interviews and by analyzing the obtained results, in a general way and without specifying the destination, Russian tourists interviewed are attracted by destinations that offer a variety of cultural issues rather than only sun, beach and weather or also by the ones that offer a mixture between both. When talking about Barcelona, the factors changed and the image that Russian tourists have of Barcelona is the one of a city that offers sea, sun, summer and freedom. It is perceived as a kind of “holiday resort” with beach and good weather by the large majority of the participants although some respondents interviewed claimed that it could be also seen as a city that also offers cultural, architectural and historical attractions, especially with the magic of Gaudí.

To conclude, Russian market perceives Barcelona with a positive image. In fact, after being on vacation the image of Barcelona is even better or the same as the one they previously had before visiting the city.

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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study:

Defining the tourism destination image is a complex process as it has no standardized system of analysis and it has been studied from many different approaches and by many authors since the last century but its importance is growing due to the constant growth of tourism all around the world. According to data extracted from The World Tourism Organization (2014), tourism is growing and “is a key factor on economic growth, job creation, environmental protection and poverty alleviation and continues to be an unstoppable force and a key driver of the global economic recovery” (UNWTO Annual Report, 2014, p.2). Several studies illustrated that destination image is one of the crucial aspects in the decision-making process (Echtner, C.M. and Ritchie, J.R., 2003) and having a positive image for attracting tourists is essential in a world of constant change and evolution due to the constant development of tourism, the increased leisure time and improvements in transport. Due to this changes in society, consumers have a wider range variety of destinations to choose from and more free time to travel and enjoy.

The study of destination image formation is relatively recent and keeps evolving as it is one of the most important aspects for a destination as it influences the travel decision-making process of tourists, perceptions and images that tourists have of a destination. According to Hunt (1971) destination image was seen as the sum of impressions that a person has of a place where the individuals do not reside. During the 90’s, the concept changed into a more complex one as Echtner, C.M. and Ritchie, J.R. (1991) defined destination image as a sum of functional (visible) and psychological attributes (invisible) even considering infrastructures, climate and the sympathy of the locals in the destination.

Andreu et. al., (2000) confirm how complex it can become destination image by affecting external influence such as friends or intermediaries. Huang Li and Cai (2010) provided a definition that evolves into a more mental and psychological aspect seen as the mental structure and values people have of a specific place. As a conclusion, therefore, it could be said that as the years pass, travel decision-making has become more complex and related with interests, emotional and psychological aspects. People act having in mind their perceptions (Boulding, 1956; Chon, 1990) and, for this reason, it is important to preserve the image of a destination in a positive way as represents the tourist’s tendency to choose or reject a destination.

It is fascinating how an image could become differently interpreted among different people and, for this reason, curiosity and desire to learn have led me to undertake this Undergraduate Dissertation on the study of the image Russian tourists have of Barcelona focusing on the mental destination image. My interest in this market started two years ago when I started studying Russian at the EOI-*Escola Oficial d'idiomes* and when I was there I began to know more about Russian culture, values and language. Russian market has grown rapidly in the recent years and, as The World Tourism Organization (2010) established, during the year 2010 Russia was ranked as the world's ninth largest market in terms of spending. Although this growth nowadays is not as high as in previous years, it remains an important market to consider in Spain and Catalonia, especially for the luxury travel market as they are big spenders and demanding.

1.2 Aim and objectives:

1.2.1 Aims of the research:

The overall aim of this study is to find out what is the image that Russian tourists have of Barcelona focusing on the mental destination image perceived by asking the research question: "What is the image that Russian tourists have of Barcelona?" This study aims to provide an accurate and interesting document where the concept of destination image, its evolution as well as the different image theories are explained. This paper will also study the image of Barcelona and a general in-depth interview of Russian tourism market in order to draw conclusions in this complex and relatively recent area. To achieve this purpose, the following objectives have been established:

1.2.2 Objectives of the research:

Objective 1: To study the concept and the evolution of destination image with all the theories that appear in order to provide a clear structure of the concept.

Objective 2: To analyze what is the general image that tourists have of Barcelona.

Objective 3: To find out and generally explore Russian tourism market development as well as the profiles and characteristics to better understand their culture when analyzing what is the image they perceive of Barcelona.

Objective 4: Analyze what image of Barcelona Russian tourists perceive by conducting a qualitative study by using In-depth interviews.

Objective 5: Analyze and evaluate data obtained from the In-depth interviews in order to detect the image that Russian tourists have of Barcelona and what they perceive.

Objective 6: Provide conclusions of the image perceived by Russian tourists of Barcelona. Establish recommendations and limitations to improve its image as is a key point in decision-making process.

Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a theoretical framework of the concept of what is destination image taking into account definitions and theories of several researchers that have excelled over the years in this area in the past century such as Hunt (1971), Gunn (1972), Crompton (1979), Echtner, C. M. and Ritchie, J.R. (1991) and Gartner (1993) as well as in the 21st century with the input of Tapachai, N. and Waryszak, R. (2000), Gallarza, M., Saura, I. and García, H. (2002) and Frías, D. and Castañeda, A. (2008).

This section is, therefore, divided into three main parts: “Destination Image concept” and evolution of the concept through years and authors, “Image of Barcelona” and its history from 1992 up to now and the general image that tourists have of Barcelona as well as a general study of “Russian tourism market” and its characteristics to better understand Russian culture and the perceived mental image that Russian tourists have of Spain and Barcelona.

2.2 Destination Image concept

Defining the tourism destination image is a complex task that has been studied recently from many different approaches and by many researches due to its relevance inside the tourism industry and its importance influencing tourist decision making (Nghiem-Phú, 2014) and, according to what Pearce (1988) lamented, is one of that concepts that is not going to go away. Although it has been studied by many researchers almost all definitions have into account either a cognitive or affective component. Cognitive component is related with beliefs and knowledge about a destination (what the individual knows about a place) while affective component has to be with feelings towards the attributes and environments (how an individual feel about a place) and could be related with the motivation and satisfaction factor as Gartner (1993) pointed out (Pavlovic, 2006).

There are many definitions established by researchers but in this document I am going to focus on the most relevant authors who have excelled with their studies. In this chapter, due to the large number of information provided by researchers and to better study the development of destination image concept, a general evolution and depth definitions have been sorted by chronological order classifying them according to whether they are from the past century or 21st century.

2.3 Destination image evolution

During the nearly 50 years that destination image has been studied, there have been various definitions established that affirm changes over the years in the way how image is perceived.

First definitions done in the area confirm a simple concept of destination image seen as impressions or feelings that an individual has of a place (Boulding, 1956; Hunt, 1971) but without having into account much more agents like the ones introduced posteriorly by Gunn in 1972: Organic and Induced image levels. Organic image is the one transmitted unintentionally by representatives of tourism destination while Induced image is the one transmitted intentionally by the promotions and communications of the tourism organizations. Both levels are based on the type of information transmitted to the tourist and are perceived before going to the destination.

With time, researchers establish an evolution into a more holistic area (overall) but without leaving aside the cognitive and affective component as Crompton (1979) or Kotler (1991) did which still continuing to rely on impressions and beliefs. Holistic and psychological aspects appeared with Echtner, C. M. and Ritchie, J.R. (1991) definition during the 90's where attribute-holistic components (infrastructures, climate, friendliness), functional-psychological components and common unique (perceptions) were introduced.

Later on, steps of the image formation are based on tourist's perceptions considering also the impact of internal and external factors and making the concept a bit more complex. As Di Marino (n.d) stated, it is important to distinguish 3 different perceptions "a priori", related with the mental construction that an individual makes of a place without having been there before, "in situ", experience that the individual has while visiting the place and "posteriori", related with loyalty and repetitiveness factor. Gartner (1993) added the conative component also linked with what the destination causes/makes us to do, act and future intentions.

Image continues to evolve and in the early 21st century it was more about the "preview factor" and "image characteristics" that are the ones that are going to affect in a more direct basis to the destination image (Tapachai, N. and Waryszak, R., 2000, p. 40). Gallarza, M., Saura, I. and García, H. (2002) confirm how complex destination image could be by taking also into account the culture and environment which are part of the decision-making process. Destination image has to be as positive as possible in order to encourage tourists return to the destination and get their loyalty.

Finally, destination image has evolved into a more psychological concept which is more related with interests, emotional factors and perceptions. In a more general way, it could be said that people create their own image of a destination thanks to their knowledge and feelings, our form and external influence taken from friends, advertisements, intermediaries or, also, from own experiences (Andreu et. al., 2000) and it is affected by information, sources, past experiences, behavioral intentions, loyalty, motivation and between other factors.

Thus, image, as The World Tourism Organization (2014) established, can be a factor that influences tourist behavior and destination choice. A positive image is crucial in order to receive the major number of tourists as possible and nowadays, “tourism destinations and enterprises need the right tools in order to adapt and develop in a rapidly transforming global marketplace” (UNWTO Annual Report 2014, p.22). Therefore, have an image, understand how a destination is perceived and if it is necessary to change it is crucial in order to promote tourism and attract tourists in a destination.

2.3.1 Destination Image concept: early studies of the 20th century

The first research about destination image concept and before it gained recognition inside the tourism area was the one established by Martineau and Boulding in the early 50's (1956) who affirmed that the human behavior is dependent upon image (Martineau, J. and Boulding, K.E., 1956) and added that image could be defined as the feelings that people have of anything they are aware of. Later, Reynolds (1965) established in the academic article “*The Meaning and Measurement of Destination Image*” that the formation of image was “a mental construct based upon a few impressions from a flood of information” (Reynolds, 1965, p.3) and that this flood of information and impressions comes from many sources such as promotional aspects, opinions and media.

Measuring destination image has a relevant importance in the tourism area and, almost 30 years ago, The World Tourism Organization made people aware of how important a positive image was for a destination as well as for better understanding the travel behavior and for establishing efficient marketing strategies in tourist destinations (UNWTO, 1979). Although some research has been previously done as mentioned above on destination image concept, the majority of research and studies has been done from the 70's. Hunt (1971) established the concept of destination image as the impressions that a person has of a place that is not where they live and related the destination image with perceptions taken of a place/area.

Gunn (1972) was one of the first with Hunt (1971) to provide destination image concept and established two image levels: Organic and Induced. The Organic image level is the one that has been established from previous experiences, the people who live in the destination or the one established by representatives of tourism destinations (unintentionally) and gives a global image of the destination. On the other hand, Induced image levels refers to the image that individuals perceive of promotions from tourism organizations or external sources. Both images (Organic and Induced) are images perceived before going to the destination and will only change after visiting the destination and will affect for sure to the tourist perception.

Table 1: Organic and Induced image levels

ORGANIC IMAGE	INDUCED IMAGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Locals that live in the destination - Media (radio, television) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Destination promoters - Tour operators

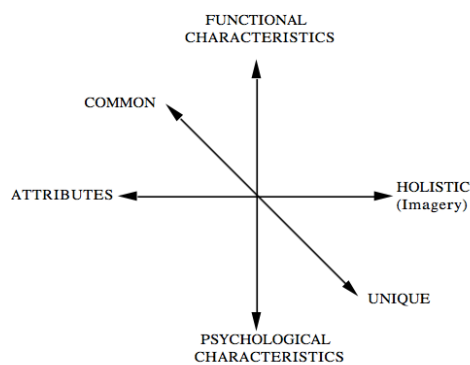
Source: Own elaboration

At the end of the 70's Lawson and Baud Bovy (1977) also related destination image with impressions as Reynolds (1965) has previously established during the 60's but, instead of bearing in mind that the destination image was perceived by a flood of information and impressions (for example other's opinions), it is based on "the mental and emotional thoughts an individual has of a place" (Lauson, F. and Baud Bovy, M., 1977, p.68). Crompton (1979, p.68) also make reference to the impressions that the individuals have of a place as Hunt (1971) established in the early 70's but interpreting it as "the sum of beliefs, ideas, emotional qualities that a person has of a destination".

In the 80's, Embacher and Buttle (1989) go a step further into the area and claim that destination image has to be with "ideas or perceptions held individually or collectively about a destination by people" (Embacher, J. and Buttle, F., 1989, p.68). This cognitive perception of destination image could be also seen during the 90's in Kotler's definition (1991, p.68) where beliefs, impressions and knowledge continue to have a leading role in the destination image concept and destination image was defined as "sum of beliefs, attitudes and impressions that a person or group has of an object and impressions may be true (real) or false".

As is stated in the academic article entitled *“The Meaning and Measurement of Destination Image”*, Echtner, C. M. and Ritchie, J.R. (1991) affirm that although there have been many researchers focused on the area, there is still no accurate definition of destination image that includes the holistic component and not constantly describing the impressions or perceptions of an area. According to them, destination image is structured by the functional (visible) and psychological (invisible) attributes and based on three components/dimensions: attribute-holistic component (specific attributes that the consumer perceived of all the products, information and impressions such as the type of infrastructure, if locals are friendly or not, climate...), functional-psychological component (from the more easy to observe to the most difficult one) and the common unique component (individual perception about characteristics of the destination, more common or more unique).

Figure 1: The components of destination image



Source: Echtner and Ritchie (1991)

Gartner (1993) suggested that destination image should be based on cognitive component, affective component and conative component. Gartner, incorporated the conative component into the destination image area which reflects the future intentions of the individual going a step further than the previous researchers and considering the loyalty factor and what the image provokes us to do.

During the 20th century, destination image was frequently described as “impressions of a place” or “perceptions of an area” taking into account the cognitive component based on the tourist’s beliefs and knowledge of a destination and, as time passes, other components were introduced making destination image concept more complex.

2.3.2 Destination Image concept: 21st century

The most recently studies about destination image have been made throughout the 21st century and nowadays it is still being studied as tourism and its importance keeps increasing all around the world as well as its role in the economy and growth engine. To get an idea of the importance of tourism, only last year according to reports made by The World Tourism Organization in 2015, “the volume of international tourists (overnight visitors) was 1,138,000 in 2014, 51 million more than in 2013” (UNWTO, 2015). Destination image, therefore, “is one of the most popular research topics in tourism” (Nghiem-Phú, 2014, p.147) and affects tourist’s perception and decision- making process.

Tapachai and Waryszak (2000) continued with the idea of matching destination image with impressions and perceptions that a tourist held but, in this case, having in mind the expected benefit or consumption values (Tapachai, N. and Waryszak, R., 2000). It is not only about the impressions an individual has of a specific place, it is about the experiences individuals think are going to have on the chosen destination.

Although initially destination image concept seemed simple, Gallarza, M., Saura, I. and García, H. (2002) studied how complex could become destination image concept and added four characteristics: complex, multiple, relativistic and dynamic. Complexity refers to an analytical dimension, multiplicity refers to multiple factors that participate in destination image (natural environment, culture, climate, friendliness...) relativistic refers to subjective aspects and the different ways to understand image and, last but not least, dynamic which is involved with change and how things change over time. Following in the 21st century, Kim and Richardson (2003, p.40), established that destination image as the “Totality of impressions, beliefs, ideas, expectations, and feelings accumulated towards a place over time”.

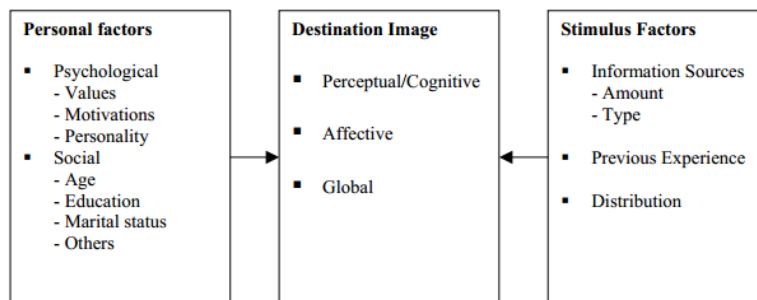
Five years later, several researchers agreed with the fact that destination image contained psychological and mental background and, as Nghiem-Phú (2014) stated on the academic paper entitled “*A review of destination image studies from 2008 to 2012*”, destination image “is a mental picture (Gil and Ritchie, 2009; Li and Stepchenkova, 2012, p.40), a mental notion (Consuegra, 2010, p.40), a mental expression (Kestic, T. and Pavlic, I., 2011, p.40) or a mental perception” (Jamaludin, et.al., 2012, p.40) and affects tourist psychological characteristics, motivation and satisfaction aspects.

2.4 Importance and formation of Destination Image

Over the years, destination image concept keeps being studied by researchers from all over the world in order to establish a precise definition of this multi-dimensional term as is one of the most important elements of a tourist destination and also important for the DMOs, in the marketing policies context (Stepchenkova, S. and Mills, J., 2010). As Nghiễm-Phú (2014) confirms, the study of destination image started with the perceived image of a destination which is the key component for individuals when deciding where to go.

Destinations, and more in a world full of competition, depend on their image for attracting tourists and a positive image is essential for being a pointer destination and also when creating loyal tourists. So that individuals can perceive a positive image, destinations need to know what is destination image concept and how it is formed. Figure number 2 shows in a general way how a destination image is formed according to Baloglu, S. and McCleary, K.W. (1999) taking into account several factors such as personal (values, motivation, personality, age...) and stimulus (previous experience, sources...) that will definitely affect destination image.

Figure 2: General framework of destination image formation

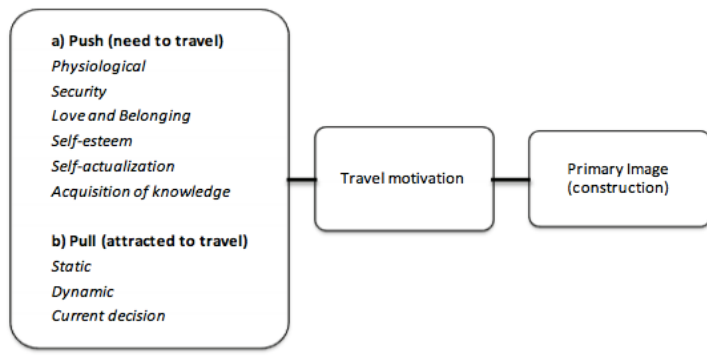


Source: Baloglu and McCleary (1999)

On the other hand, Lubbe (1998) proposes in Figure number 3 another way of conducting and forming the image of a tourist destination by having in mind push and pull factors that could affect in the decision of traveling to a destination or not (Kassean, H. and Gassita, R., 2013).

Push factors are internals and the ones related with the need to travel (Physiological, Self-esteem, Love, Security...) while Pull factors are externals and related with the attraction to travel (Static, Dynamic, Current decision).

Figure 3: Primary image construction



Source: Lubbe (1998)

As the concept of destination image is interpreted in a different way by authors, the formation of destination image also varies from one theory to another one although there are many factors and concepts which are overlapped in many cases.

2.5 Image of Barcelona

Not all tourists perceive the image of a destination in the same way although destinations and organizations tried to promote and make efforts to establish an image to individuals. The image that a destination wants to promote has been previously studied and developed and then distributed through communication channels especially now in the 21st century with the importance and significant role of technologies and social networks (Donaire, A. and Galí, N., 2011). The image promoted and sponsored and the image received could match or could be contradicted but “what they have in common is its peculiar stereotyped and superficial shape of converting the image in an ideal projection of the destination itself” (Rubio, 2006, p.13).

It is necessary to explore the image of a destination and, in this case, it is important to explore the image of Barcelona in order to know how it is perceived nowadays by tourists and if needs changes in the way how it is promoted or distributed. As Mackay and Fesenmaier (1997) established, “Marketing has the ability to establish and change the image of destinations” (Mackay, K.J. and Fesenmaier, D.R., 1997, p.538).

2.5.1 Background and tourist image of Barcelona

Tourism has been one of the fastest growing, social and economic impacts in Barcelona especially over the recent years. When an important flow of tourists started to come to Barcelona and it was a reality, Barcelona started to implement re-imagining strategies for appealing to a variety of external audiences and, nowadays, still keeps implementing changes for further development (Smith, 2006). The city of Barcelona evolves over the years and, as it is

established in the *Pla Estratègic de Turisme de la Ciutat de Barcelona* (2015), Barcelona arises new challenges such as the reestablishment of the touristic management model and its growth and the study of the relationship between tourists and locals, which also affects the image of a destination.

The growth of tourism in the city started with the Olympic Games in 1992, where the promoted and received image of Barcelona changed to an international image, completely renovated and with new values to offer to the emerging markets such as business economic dynamism, revitalization of the cultural sector, extension of infrastructures, between the most important ones (*Pla Estratègic de Turisme de la Ciutat De Barcelona*, 2015).

The Olympic Games were the perfect reason for starting to change the image of Barcelona and it started with an urban transformation providing better communication, new projects such as the creation of Las Rondas (Barcelona ring road), MACBA (Contemporary Art Museum) or Port Vell (transformation of an obsolete dock) (Pauné, 2012).

Urban transformations and the host of such an important sports event was only one part of the changes and, thanks to that, a significant amount of jobs for local people were created and the city was showcased to the entire world. The fact of hosting the Olympic Games successfully helped even more to bring sports and non-sports events to the city (Olympic Movement, 2012).

As Dick, D. and Wang, Q. (2010) stated, Mega sports events generally affect positively to the host country's economy and are more likely to have a significant economic impact. In the case of Barcelona, the Olympic Games helped Barcelona to become a more cosmopolitan city with more jobs, remodeling the city and an international projection placing the Catalan capital on the map (Rubio, 2006).

Due to the Olympic Games, *Turisme de Barcelona* appeared and is the organization responsible for promoting Barcelona as a tourist destination. It was founded in 1993, after the Olympic Games by the Barcelona City Council and *La Cambra de Comerç* and it works for attracting tourists to the city (Barcelona Tourism Statistics, 2011).

As discussed in the previous sections, define a destination image is a complex task that has been evolving over years as well as its definitions, which vary according to authors and years. It has been one of the principal areas studied in tourism due to its importance not only for the destination, also for the marketing and branding (Stepchenkova, S. and Mills, J., 2010). The way in which image is perceived can, therefore, vary from one individual to another one obtaining

different images of the same destination (Rubio, 2006) and, in order to be adequately and successfully promoted, has to be different from competitors “or positively positioned in the minds of the costumers” (Echtner, C. M. and Ritchie, J.R., 2003, p.37).

After the Olympic Games in 1992, the potential tourism of the city of Barcelona was highlighted by the administration and Barcelona started to be a fashionable destination thanks to tourists, students and professionals arrived from all over the world (Antich, 2004). Reynolds, in 1965, affirmed that the formation of an image was mental and was based by impressions from a flood of information and this flood of information can be taken from promotional aspects, opinions and media. To have a positive mental image of a destination without living in it is not an easy task since many factors can influence on it whether personal factors or stimulus factors. Thus, in the case of Barcelona image its representation could be established with the help of the tourism enterprises in the previous phase of the journey and, when talking about the stay in the city phase, the consortium of *Turisme de Barcelona* comes into play (Rubio, 2006).

As Rubio (2006, p. 14) stated, the tourist gaze before visiting the city of Barcelona is “the one done with outside eyes, with foreign visitor eyes and it contains the expectations and desires that enable companies and institutions to continue designing and redefining the image promoted”. Because of this, it is important to meet with tourist’s needs and that when they leave the destination still had the same image as before coming and induce the loyalty factor (Rajesh, 2013). To satisfy tourists needs and expectations it is necessary to know what are they looking for and Rubies (2004, p. 18) defined it generally with one word: “authenticity”. Authenticity as the fact of searching something different, distinct and link historical and cultural elements with identity.

Social networks and the evolution of technology begin to be indispensable in the 21st century and are tools for helping to establish the image that tourists receive from destinations as well as tools for the DMO’s for knowing what tourists think about a destination and obtaining feedback and information of the visitants that later on would be useful for the administration of the country visited (Donaire, J. and Galí, N., 2011). Digital media is, therefore, having an increasingly considerable importance in the construction and dissemination of the tourist image and tools such as Facebook, blogs, Twitter, Trip advisor or Flickr allow the dissemination of images to the maximum number of individuals as possible (Donaire, 2008- 2010; Gretzel, 2010). In the academic article entitled “*La imagen turística de Barcelona en la comunidad de Flickr*”, Donaire, A. and Galí, N. (2011) tried to study what is the image that Barcelona has from the pictures posted on Flickr by tourists from different nationalities and know the most relevant

aspects in the images taken through 3,100 selected photos. The result of the study was: although the touristic image of Spain was characterized by religious architecture, the image of Barcelona was more based on civil architecture (palaces, contemporary buildings...) and, with less presence, based on streets, gastronomy and leisure (2011).

As a conclusion, it could be said that the image of Barcelona considering the previous academic paper has to be with “a succession of sights, principal monuments and landmarks that includes Sagrada Familia, Parc Güell, La Pedrera, Casa Batlló, La Boquería, Harbour, MNAC, Cathedrals, Colon Monument and Montjuic” (Donaire, J. and Galí, N., 2011, p. 298).

Image could be also projected through blogs and can also help to introduce the image perceived by tourists. Added to this, there are also blogs and webpages for Russian tourists such as [ФОРУМ ВИНСКОГО](#) (Foro Vinsky) that could also help to influence the image of Barcelona. This blog provides useful reports for Russian tourists from several cities of Spain, tricks, how to arrive to Spain, principal airlines, Visa information, gastronomy and what to visit, between others. Although image can be perceived and influenced by other channels in various ways, “the manufacturers of images inside the tourism and hospitality industry can alter the experience that the tourist has” (Crick, 1992, p. 381).

2.6 Russian tourism market

In order to know “What is the image that Russian tourists have of Barcelona” it is imperative to analyze the development of Russian tourism and the movements from the 90’s to the present, who where the years where more studies related to the Russian tourism industry and its benefits began to be done. Learning about how is the Russian tourist travel profile, behavior, culture as well as the different ways of doing tourism could be very beneficial in order to know and understand a little bit more about this culture when analyzing what is the image they perceive of Barcelona.

2.6.1 History development of Russian tourism

According to the Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat,2015), Russia, in 2015, had a total population of 146,267 million people and a total of 12,108 million people in its capital, Moscow. Apart from being the capital, Moscow is considered the largest city in the country as well as the economic and political center and Saint Petersburg, the second important city in Russia, has about 5 million people.

Most of the population lives in these two cities and, therefore, most tourists that come to Spain generally come from these cities (Federal State Statistics Service, 2015) which have connection flights with the major European airports.

As Ovcharov, A., Vasiljeva, M. and Shirin, S. (2015) established, the competitive ability of Russia on the World Tourist Market and the processes of international tourism started with the growth of population, free time, the increasing number of paid holidays, the household incomes and savings as well as the demand of Russian citizens for travelling and visiting foreign countries.

The beginning of tourism outside Russia started to bloom in 1991, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union after approximately 69 years of mandate and the development of tourism inside Russia, as Stepchenkova, S. and Morrison, A. (2008) stated. From 1991 until 2002 it was a difficult period characterized by political, social and economic instability due to the recent breakdown of the Soviet Union, the difficult economic situation that was already dragging on from the previous years as well as the beginning of the market reforms and the lack of attention to the problems of tourists during the first years of reforms. "Russian outbound travel fell during the second half of the 1990s, reaching a low of 17.9 mn trips in 2001" (European Travel Commission, 2010, p. 1).

Since then, from 2002 until 2008 there has been consistent increases and this period can be defined as a "tourism boom" thanks to an economic recovery and the rising of living standards as well as an external increased trade turnover and investment in Russia (Ovcharov, A., Vasiljeva, M. and Shirin, S., 2015). "Russian outbound travel increases, exceeding 36.5 mn trips in 2008, according to official data – representing an average increase of 11% a year in 2001-08" (European Travel Commission, 2010, p. 1). Furthermore, a third stage started with the arrival of the economic crisis and its effects as well as the recent conflicts with Ukraine and the devaluation of the ruble in 2014 but it has had a relatively fast recovery (Ovcharov, A., Vasiljeva, M. and Shirin, S., 2015).

2.6.2 Russian tourist travel profile

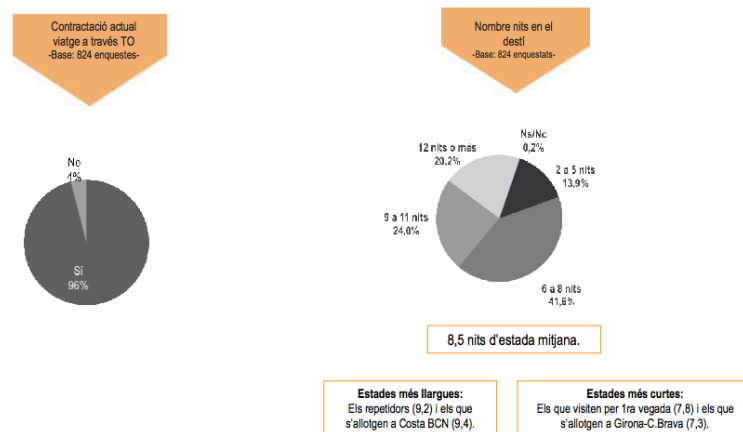
With the chance to please and gratify the Russian tourism market, some studies but not many have been done so as to analyze the type of Russian tourists that come to visit Spain and Barcelona, its profile, travel habits and key destinations.

According to the study done by *Diputació de Barcelona* and Serhs (2013), the Russian tourist travel profile in a general way has a high level of repetition and a high purchasing level. Russian tourists aged between 35-45 years old have a high purchasing level and normally stays in 4 and 5 star hotels. Moreover, a more popular class has been recently detected, aged between 18-34 years who normally visit the area of Girona. The tourist profile that spends more money is the one aged between 35-54 years old or older who come generally with a partner and not only for sun, but they are also interested in cultural offer, art and architecture.

According to the Russian market study established by *Diputació de Barcelona* and Serhs (2013), the main reasons why Russian tourists visit the city of Barcelona are knowing the city, go to the beach, visit historic places, go shopping, weather and culture. This data is similar to the one provided by Domingo (2014) where it is stated that the tourism product preferred by Russians is the “sun & sea tourism model” although, more and more, the “cultural tourism” has an increase demand and, cities such as Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia and Mallorca could still benefit. On the other hand, Atorus (2014), the Russian Tour Operator Association, established that what Russian tourists valued more from visiting Spain were its landscapes, culture, weather, social environment and, in the last position, gastronomy.

As figure 4 shows, most Russian tourists have similar travel habits since most travel through a tour operator which makes plane, hotel and excursions package offering them more comfort. Usually, as it is represented in figure 4, Russian tourists that come to Catalonia spend an average of 8,5 nights, a very high average compared with other tourists from other nationalities and normally stayed on the coast of Barcelona.

Figure 4: Travel habits



Source: *Diputació de Barcelona* (2013)

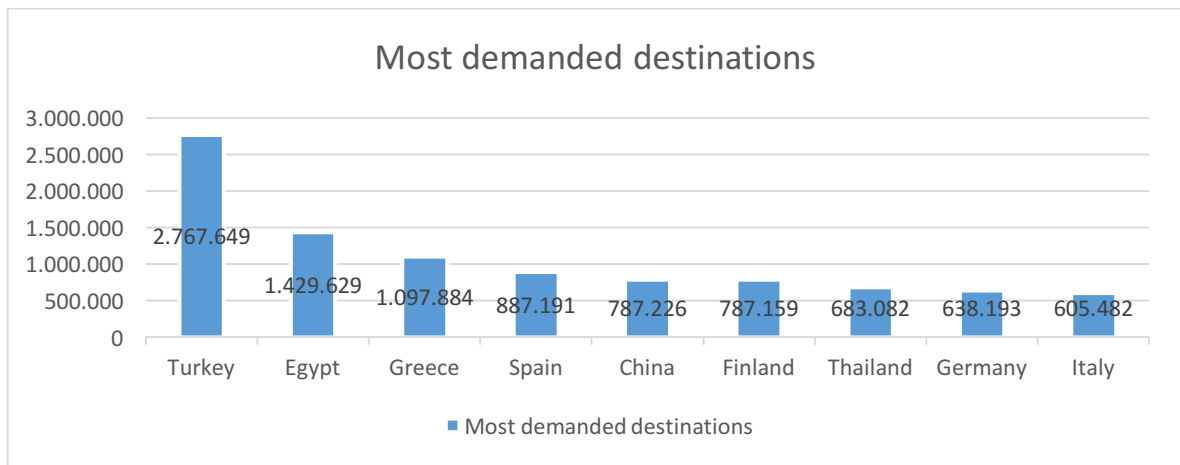
2.6.3 Main destinations for Russian tourists in 2016

Since tourism is “one of the sectors that provides main contribution to the economic development of countries, income, employment and enrichment of many related industries” (Kandampully, 2000, p. 263), it is crucial to know what are the main destinations chosen by Russian tourists to spend their holidays, what is the situation in Spain and what drives them to travel (Chen, Y., Mak, B. and McKercher, B.,2011). Understanding motivation for travel is a key factor when attracting tourists (Hemant, K. and Gassita, R., 2013) and this motivation could sometimes be the wish to run away from routine.

Ukraine and Turkey were the main destinations chosen by Russian tourists during the early 21st century and during 2008, Ukraine received 7,638,000 Russian tourists and Turkey 2,866,000 (European Travel Commission, 2010). From 2010, Ukraine, Turkey and Egypt started to descend and Spain appeared as one of the most popular destinations with a total of 1,202,073 tourists in 2012 (Frontur, 2012). Moreover, to simplify procedures with Russian tourists that come to visit countries of the European Union, from July 2012 an agreement has been started which is providing simplification when receiving visas as were required in the majority of countries in Europe (Korotún, 2012).

One of the reasons why Turkey has become more popular between Russian tourists is the facility offered on visas as well as Egypt, Croatia and Montenegro (visa- free or visas on arrival) (European Travel Commission, 2010).

Figure 5: Data from Russian Federal Tourism Agency on most demanded destinations



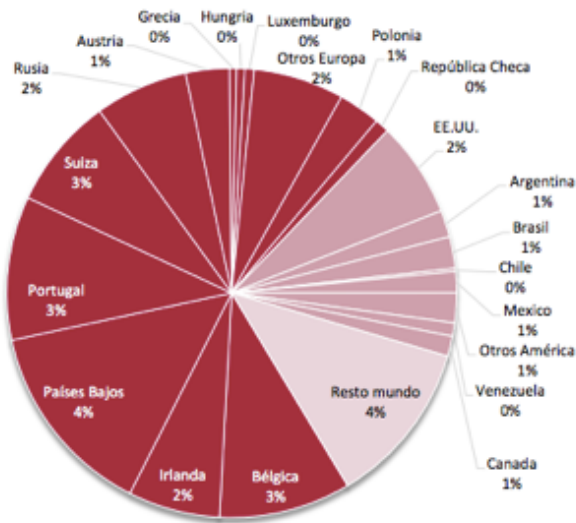
Source: Own elaboration based on data from Tourspain (2013)

Spain, on the other hand, is turning to the visa simplification process due to the importance Russian tourism has had during the last few years by being more flexible with the economic ties although Russian citizens still need a visa application to come to Spain (Tourspain,2016).

From 2009 until 2013 were the best years in Spain for Russian tourism market due to the increasing arrival of tourists. According to the data collected by the Tourist Movement Statistics (Frontur) published by the National Statistics Institute (INE, 2012) "Russian market has been the most prominent which in 2012 was responsible for the 2,1% of the arrivals and started a significant advance of 40 % in Spain and is the third most important in absolute terms of the total of the markets" with a total of 1,202,073 tourists and, in 2013, 1,583,609 tourists (Frontur, 2012). Furthermore, according to data analyzed by The World Tourism Organization, Russia was during 2012 in the "9th position of international tourist arrivals worldwide and in the 5th position of international tourism expenditures" (Ovcharov, A., Vasiljeva, M. and Shirin, S., 2015).

Figure number 6 shows which where the other source markets in Spain during 2012 apart from the main ones that where: United Kingdom, Germany, France, Nordic Countries and Italy.

Figure 6: Tourists from other source markets in Spain



Source: Frontur (2012)

According to the study carried out by *Diputació de Barcelona* and Serhs (2013) about Russian tourism in Catalonia; Italy, Spain, France and Greece will become the leading destinations for Russian tourists and, this study composed by 824 interviews, was not wrong. Although the devaluation of the ruble, 79,4614 rubles per dollar (Central Bank of Russia, 2016) and the economic situation does not play in favor of tourist arrivals in 2016 around Europe, Spain and the Spanish Tour Operator companies are going to try to attract Russian tourists due to the recent events in Turkey and Egypt, key competitors until now (Hosteltur, 2016). Barcelona is not going to be marginalized and will attract the largest number of Russian tourists as possible as it has a variety of accommodation, culture, shopping and history attractions to offer.

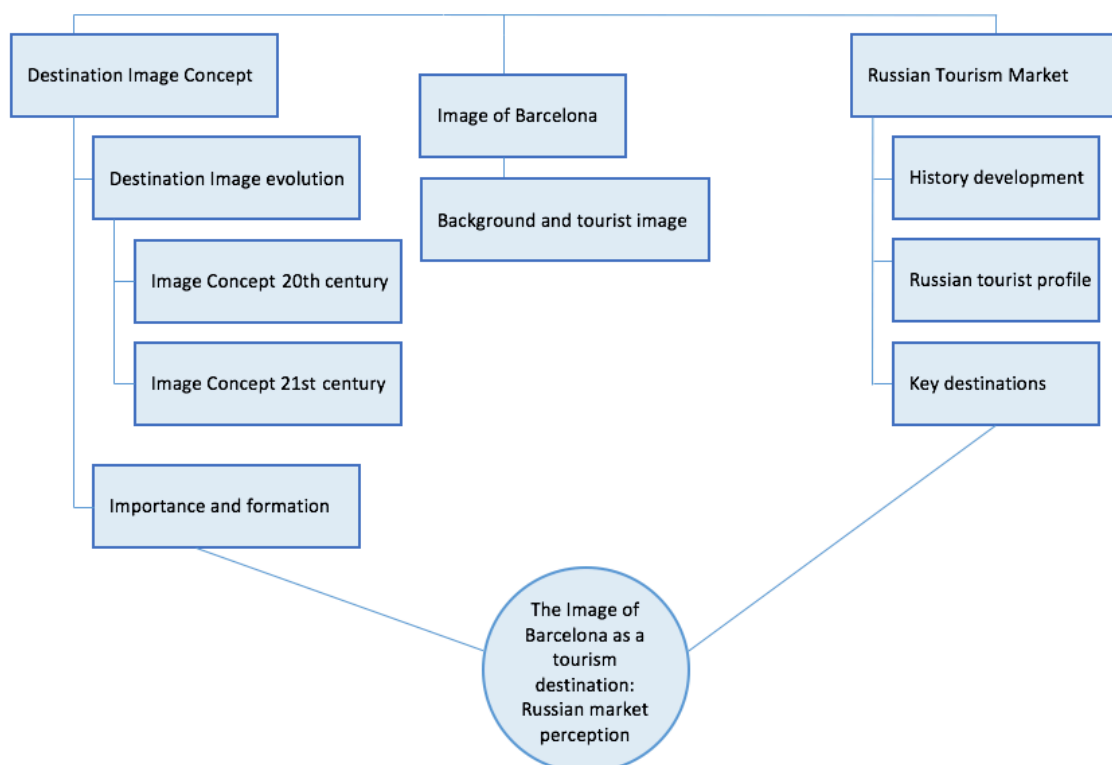
Finally, apart from Spain, Greece could become another popular competitor due to its quality and price and, furthermore, Thailand could be a very demanded winter destination for individuals that are living in Siberia or the eastern Russia area (Tourspain, 2016).

2.7 Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework is an analysis of the data explained in the literature review where the different points established have been studied in order to help to find answers to the research question.

In order to reach results, destination image concept, its evolution and importance has been analyzed through many authors that have excelled over the years from the 20th century until the 21st century. Destination image concept has been studied due to the tourism increase and, nowadays, remains being a complex term essential for understanding the decision-making process.

Furthermore, a general study of the image of Barcelona and its background has been done for knowing more about the development of tourism in the city with the Olympic Games as well as how the city is perceived by tourists and what it has to offer them. To conclude, an analysis of the Russian tourism market and characteristics has been studied for helping to achieve the goals and better understanding them for completing the gap of the image that Russian tourists have of Barcelona, focusing on the mental image perceived.



Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide information about the research approach and methodology chosen in order to explore on what is the mental image that Russian tourists have of Barcelona, what they perceive, their beliefs, thoughts and further information and knowledge about its culture to better understand them and getting answers to the question “What is the image that Russian tourists have of Barcelona”.

3.2 Research methods applied

Due to the complexity on finding information and limited literature found about Russian tourism and their perceived images of Barcelona, an inductive study has been done. Inductive approach “starts with the observations and theories formulated towards the end of the research and as a result of observations” (Goddard and Melville, 2004, p.7) and “begins with detailed observations of the world, which moves towards more abstract generalizations and ideas” (Neumann, 2003, p.51). Information about general image concept, image theories and image evolution according to various authors has been found but finding data and theories about Russian image and perceptions especially of Barcelona has been more difficult or even impossible maybe because of its recent growth inside tourism and hospitality world. On the other hand, having in mind the lack of information has no sense to do a deductive research as it is based on creating a hypothesis from theory and carry out some observations while, in the inductive approach, there is no theory or not too much at the beginning of the research “Inductive approach essentially reverses the process found in deductive research” (Lancaster, 2005, p.25).

Thus, this qualitative exploratory study attempts to know more about Russians mental image of Barcelona. Qualitative studies allow to get inside tourist minds and to know more about their motivations and feelings. It allows to explore in deep as it is an open-minded research and by doing in-depth interviews it is possible to arrive to their in-depth feedbacks and opinions. As Avraham, E. and Ketter, E. (2008) stated, “In-depth interviews is one of the methods that may be used to evaluate a place’s image among specific target audience” (2008, p. 21).

In-depth interviews allow to know information about the individual in a more specific and personal way in order to get the “inside feedback/opinion” and, as Avraham, E. and Ketter, E. (2008) agreed, these interviews could be a good form to extract data by knowing how the place is perceived, disadvantages and how to be removed. They were not the only ones that prefer in-depth interviews, Ashton (2014) restates that in-depth interviews provide free flowing conversations which are needed to obtain the desire answers.

3.3 Data collection process: In-depth interviews

The image that Russian tourists have of Barcelona has been analyzed through In-depth interviews with open-ended questions. The participants have been encouraged to talk and explain further their experiences and knowledge always with a quiet and friendly atmosphere so they can still be authentic.

The participants in the interviews have followed the same pattern:

- Russian tourists (individual tourists).
- Visited Barcelona.
- More than 18.
- Not living in Barcelona.

There is variety of men and women and each interview had a total of nine questions focused on different aspects but always related with the main goal: know what is the image that Russian tourists have of Barcelona, focusing on the mental image.

Find participants that meet with the requirements has not been an easy task and, in the majority of the times has been thanks to “Snow bowl method”, where a participant gets me to another person. In some cases, I had to go to Barcelona airport specially to flights departures with destination Moscow in order to find more potential participants for my study.

Therefore, a total of ten in-depth interviews have been done until the saturation point has been reached and when responses began to overlap from one interviewee to another one.

3.4 Implementation

The method settled down has worked as it was expected. Interviews have been done always in a relaxed place where a pleasant and friendly conversation can flow without forcing or influence in any decision.

For the comfort of participants, questions have been translated into Russian as there were many who do not speak neither Spanish or English and thus prevent misunderstandings for language reasons. Furthermore, after having done ten interviews I reached the saturation point in which the responses among the participants seemed almost identical. Once answers were obtained, a transcription stage, analysis and evaluation of the data has been done in order to extract the information reached and develop the findings where data has been categorized by themes and providing real examples from the interviews done.

To conclude with this chapter, my reflection of the research experience has been positive in general as I had the opportunity of met new people and talk with them as well as sharing their opinions and beliefs of the theme. I have been able to listen the participants carefully and obtain the maximum number of information as possible while passing a good time and enjoying with them.

Chapter 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, after having done ten in-depth interviews and the transcription stage, an analysis of the data obtained has been studied for developing findings, have a clear presentation of the results and interpretations. This chapter wants to solve the aim and objectives that have been described in chapter 1 and find an answer to the research question of the dissertation. For doing it, data has been categorized into themes. Last but not least, a number has been given to each respondent due to data confidentiality.

4.2 Findings and Discussions

Data obtained was classified in different categories and topics. Regarding “What Russian tourists look when choosing a destination”, as a global vision, there are mainly three types of answers given: cultural issues; sun, beach and climate and a mixture between both depending on what they would like to visit. The majority of respondents answered that cultural issues were the most important and relevant factor when choosing a destination while a number of participants stated that sun and beach is also considered when choosing a destination. For instance, the interviewed 1 said “The priority is always a place close to the beach”, and interviewee 5 mentioned that looks more for cultural and historical issues “Something that has a history behind”. Participants that have answered cultural aspects have into account history, architecture, art and that the destination is rich in culture.

On the other hand, also many participants affirmed that when they are looking for a destination it depends on what are they looking for, participant 2 said “If I want a relaxing holiday, then I will be looking for sunshine. If I would like to see new places, then I would look for a location with history” or participant 6, “If I want to rest or take a breath I go to the sea but if I want to get familiar with a new city I will look for its culture and architecture of the country”. A mixture between both (combining cultural issues and sun & beach culture) could become what Russian tourists are looking for.

Generally, people travel for different reasons to destinations and, as it is stated on the academic article written by Yong, C., Barry, M and Bob, M. (2011), motivations arises to “meet individual needs, including alleviating psychological disequilibrium and obtaining social recognitions” (Crompton, 1979; Dann; 1977; Fodness, 1994, p. 1219). As Plog (2001) stated, destination

evolves over time and destination choice is mostly related to personality and attracts particular types of travelers whose personalities are identical. Mill R, C. and Morrison, A, M. (1998) argue that motivation to travel starts when a need wants to be satisfied and, Hemant, K. and Gassita, R. (2013) reached to the conclusion that motivation has to be with the wishes to run away from routine.

Kristin (2010) stated that tourism products might differ according to tourist's nationality and probably, what Russian market looks for it is different of what other markets are searching for. Taking into account the results obtained from in-depth interviews, in a general context and in most of the times, Russian market looks for a destination that offers cultural attractive, architecture and some history behind or a destination that offers a mix between sun & beach and cultural aspects.

These results are very similar to the ones established in the study done by the Market Intelligence Group of the European Travel Commission (2010) which stated that Russian travelers have preference for combining a beach holiday with sightseeing. Although it was said that the preferred tourism product by Russians is the "sun & sea tourism model" (Domingo, 2014), according to the data obtained from the in-depth interviews, cultural tourism has an increase demand and the proof is that the majority of respondents answered that cultural issues were the most important when deciding destination in a general way without specifying the destination. On the other hand, when explicitly talking about the city of Barcelona, "sun & sea tourism model" reappears as the main one.

Respect to what Russian market looks for when choosing Barcelona as a tourist destination, the main reasons were related to the weather and accessibilities that the city offers (Barcelona and Catalonia are next to France, Barcelona is near Madrid and there is the possibility of choosing between going to the mountain or going to the beach), people and sea. The majority of interviewees explained that the main reasons why Barcelona has been chosen as a destination were related to the weather, beach & sun culture, the accessibilities and its people.

Regarding this, Interviewee 5 stated "For me Barcelona is a holiday resort" which is very similar to the feedback received from participant 7 that affirmed "Beach and walk through it". About the diversity that the city shows and its accessibilities, the comment set by participant 4 "Facilities such as good flight connections" or the one established by interviewed number 8 "It is a Mega polis and in one hour you can go to the mountains and it is in the center of Europe" are some of the ones that best summarized this point.

Last but not least it could be said that the opportunity of doing cultural discoveries linked with Gaudí and the old *quartiers* were the second most abundant comments of respondents. Interviewed 1 said “Visit the old *quartiers* such as Las Ramblas or Sagrada Familia” and interviewed 9 “Combination of the modern and old part of the city”. On the other hand, it has been also affirmed that both parts are equally important while deciding to come to Barcelona (even beach bar culture as well as exploring Sagrada Familia).

These results are similar to the ones established in the academic paper entitled “*La imagen turística de Barcelona en la comunidad de Flickr*” where Donaire, A. and Galí, N. (2011) reach conclusions somewhat similar through the analysis of pictures done by tourists of all nationalities in Barcelona. Although the result of the study was more focused on the architecture that defines Barcelona (Sagrada Familia, Casa Batlló...), the results of the interviews were more focused on having in mind weather, accessibilities and beach when choosing Barcelona as a destination. Although most Russian respondents agreed with the previous result, others stated that when choosing Barcelona as a tourist destination, cultural and architecture aspects are taken into account.

Respect to the mental image and what comes first when saying the word “Barcelona” there have been several answers of how the city of Barcelona is mentally perceived by Russian tourists. Most participants interviewed have defined Barcelona as a sunny city with beach, sea, eternal summer and freedom. Interviewed 3 stated that sees the image of Barcelona as “sea” because although Russia has coast it does not offer the same conditions as the Mediterranean Sea. Others, have been a step further by taking into consideration our mentality, people and happy feelings such as interviewee 2 who said “I think sunshine, beach, interesting people, definitely happy feelings come to your mind” or in interview 9 “open-minded happy people”.

Moreover, Barcelona mental image it is also related to it’s architecture, there were participants that what come first to their minds was architecture, Gaudí and even Sagrada Familia. For instance, participant 8 said “First thing is architecture and Gaudí”, very similar to the answer given by participant 10 and participant 1 “First thing that comes to my mind when I hear the word Barcelona is Sagrada Familia”. In the end, gastronomy was also cited, participant 6 named gastronomy (*paella*, ham). Russian market, in a general way, is open to try new things that are not usual for them and gastronomy and Mediterranean food could even be a factor that comes to mind when thinking about Barcelona and a reason to choose the city as main destination.

Another factor positively influencing gastronomy are the terraces and the outdoor dining because in Russia it is not very usual as well as the Mediterranean diet and its properties.

As The World Tourism Organization established in the Annual Report, image can be a factor that influences tourist behavior and destination choice and, for this reason, a positive image is crucial to receive the major number of tourists as possible (UNWTO Annual Report, 2014). It is important to know what is the mental image that tourists have of a destination in order to know how it is perceived and if it is perceived as it is wanted. As Rubio (2006) stated, it is important to know the perceived image that individuals have of a destination although sometimes, the promoted and received image could be the same or could be contradicted.

Sometimes, the mental image of a destination it is not only previously “created” by organizations. It could be the case that other factors get involved such as the film industry, as it appeared in the in-depth interviews conducted such as participant number 7 who affirmed that when thinking about Barcelona “I remember the film *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* and how beautiful the city was”. Movies can influence when choosing a destination and, as Hudson (2006) established, film tourism is a growing phenomenon worldwide and with marketing factors encourages film tourists to visit the destinations that appear in the movies. In the case of Barcelona, with *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*.

To conclude, last question of the in-depth interview was about finding out if the image previously perceived about the city of Barcelona has changed after visiting the city and, the majority of respondents affirm that the mental image that they previously had has changed but to a better one. Some participants already had a mental image that, after spending a few days in Barcelona, had change but in a positive sense. There have been few reasons why the image has changed, among the most prominent ones: know more deeply the culture and set aside stereotypes and realize about the diversity that the city offers. Participant 1 stated that “Before, I imagined a few must see places, now, I see the city as a whole with cuisine, people, celebrations and energy” and participant 5 also refers to the statements previously established “Barcelona is not only a resort as you have it in your mind and it is possible to find out business people working”.

It could be said that stereotypes about Spanish culture such as “*siesta* time” are being leaved aside and that it is not only about sun, beach and palm trees, Barcelona it is also about a real city with more tourist attractions that the ones people can think or imagine. Finally, the other

part of participants stated that they had the same image as before and that they were not disappointed such as interviewee 2 “I was not disappointed in any way, if anything I left more impressed as it is always better to experience a destination than just seeing the adverts” or participant 4 “Has no changed, is the image of a traditional place, beautiful, sea, happy people...”.

About their first time in Barcelona and its link with loyalty factor, almost all respondents said that was not their first time visiting Barcelona and of this individuals, a great part of them had already come once. A significant number but not as high as the previous one have been at least twice. Few participants argued that was their first time in Barcelona and, in general, the feedback obtained was positive. An example could be interviewed 7 that said “First time, I would like to come again”, participant 8 said “I came several times”, number 6 stated that “I have been in Barcelona 6 times” and even number 10 “This is my 8th time in the city”. So, all respondents have in a general way a positive image of the city and many of them are repetitive visitors.

Thus, positive previous experiences can affect in the purchase decision, destination choice and to the loyalty factor. Destinations, for attracting tourists, depend on their image and a positive image is essential for being a pointer destination and also when creating loyal tourists. As Gartner (1993) stated, it is important to be aware of tourist’s needs and not only before choosing the destination, also during their stay and after. When tourists leave the destination, if the mental image they had has not disappointed them and matches with the destination, a positive image will be carried out and will induce to the loyalty factor. Creating loyalty and positive image will not only convert tourists into repetitive visitors, it can make them become ambassadors of the city and recommend it (Nghiem-Phú, 2014).

The fact of having previous explanations or perceptions about the city of Barcelona by relatives, family or friends has influenced in the decision making of most participants encouraging them to visit the city. Most of the participants said that their friends are the ones who recommended them coming to Barcelona. Interviewed 1 affirmed that his friends give him some advices when coming “Is a place where anyone can find something and enjoy” while interviewed 4 confirmed that “My friends come to Barcelona in Easter, summer, new year... and I came”. On the other hand, interviewed 7 also had recommendations form friends but also a list of restaurants and places to visit.

Participants agreed with the fact that if a trusted person or if there are several people explaining how is a destination and encouraging to visit it, finally, the participant will visit the place.

In this case and for this specific sector, the word of mouth is incredibly important since the fact of passing the information from person to person by oral communication is a reality.

All participants agreed with the fact that most things that have listened about Barcelona were positive and among these positive comments stand out the fact of being known for having friendly and cheerful people, good gastronomy, *cuisine* and diversity. An example could be testimony of Interviewed 2 who said that “Everybody who has been to Barcelona has nothing but good things to say about the city” or participant number 6 “I listened that Spanish people are very friendly and cheerful and also, my friends told me that Barcelona is a beautiful city where architecture is the best thing”.

On the other hand, not all the perceptions heard in advanced about Barcelona have been explained by friends or relatives, interviewed 5 affirmed that has heart about the city of Barcelona thanks to a relative but also thanks to television although at the moment there is very few content broadcast on that channel and through internet. Respondent 10 affirmed that was the music what encourages him to come to visit Barcelona, “This song talked about *La Sagrada Familia* and I looked for a photo”.

Photos can induce to a destination image, the desire to travel and know more about a destination. Photography was born about the same time as the tourism boom and, as Donaire, A. and Galí, N. (2011) stated, photography can affect to the symbolic construction of a destination and, according to Barthes (1989) could display multiple realities. Urry (1990), considers that the act of photography is a symbolic construction of symbolic elements of a destination and are issued images that, in most of the cases, have been generated from organizations or tourists promoting in a direct way or indirect way a tourism destination (Lutz, A. and Collins, L., 1994).

In the majority of the cases there was a third person who has explained about her or his experience to Russian tourists before coming to Barcelona and the feedback and perceptions provided by a relative or a friend have been positive while a minority of respondents agreed that although the information provided about Barcelona was positive, has arrived to them through other channels. It is amazing how still being in the 21st century, the importance and trust which is given to the word of mouth continues being huge. Most of respondents already have prior information thanks to family and friends and, this reflection suggests how important it becomes

for a destination to have a good image in order to have loyalty factor but also for being recommended.

Thanks to this, each time more the number of Russian tourists traveling around the world increases and countries have seen this arrival as a kind of challenge to which various sectors of the tourism industry are still trying to accustom. Apart from the measures that hotels, shops and tourism establishments are taking, a question in order to know if Barcelona is prepared to receive Russian tourism and if it has been adapted has been asked to participants. All participants affirm that Barcelona is prepared to receive Russian tourists although it has been confessed that the level of English should be improved. It has been recognized the efforts to translate, for example, the menus to Russian or having sellers trying to speak Russian that at the end project an image of effort which is generally perceived positively. An example could be participant number 1 who said that “Since it has become much easier to find a guide, more Russian tourists are excited to visit Barcelona” while other participants such as number 10 established that “There is a lot of people who speaks Russian and I think people here love Russians”.

Strategies that could help Barcelona to improve its image have been asked according to feedback established by Russian market, different results have been given. Most of the participants stated that languages have to be improved (especially English and Russian).

Interviewed 4 said “Need Russian guides for helping to understand in hotels, restaurants and when going shopping” as well as interviewed 9 “The citizens should have a strong base of English knowledge in order to understand tourists freely”.

Apart from improving in English and learn a bit of Russian, another recommendation has been given such as the ones related with time “Change schedules for the touristic attractions” (interviewed 7) or “Reducing time to get a tourist visa” (participant 6) or doing more promotion about the city, especially taking into account the word of mouth.

At the end, some participants stated that no strategies were needed to improve the image of Barcelona as participant 3 said “I think is good as it is” or participant 2 “I personally think the image out there is great and portraying Barcelona as it is”.

In general, participants that agreed on the fact that Barcelona does not need any strategies to improve its image have in common that they know languages (especially English) and, for this reason, there is no special concern about the fact of needing someone who knows Russian, although it is recommended (this segment is relatively young).

The increase of Russian tourism in the city of Barcelona during last years, and the actual economic situation leads to know if Barcelona will remain as a key destination for Russian market or not during the next years. All individuals who participated in the interviews affirmed that Barcelona will remain as a key destination for Russian tourists but all gave different reasons in its forecast. Most of the participants responded that Barcelona will remain as a key destination as it is a demanded destination due to location and what it offers. Participant 8 said “Its location as it is close to the beach” or by monetary questions as participants 2 and 7 “The destination has a lot to offer and is also relatively cheap”. These responses fit with the results established by Anglés (2014) where it is stated that Barcelona will remain attracting Russian market as has a variety of accommodation, culture, shopping and history.

Another plus in order to remain as a key destination for Russian tourists is the location and accessibility as it has been stated in the in-depth interviews realized. The accessibility for a destination is an essential element and, in the case of Barcelona, has airport, port and a good rail and road network. Barcelona Airport has daily flights direct to Moscow, and, when summer approaches, there are flights to Saint Petersburg operated by “Iberia”, “Vueling”, “Air Europa” and the Russian official airline “Aeroflot”.

The actual circumstances, especially with the terrorist attacks, may have helped Barcelona to become a main destination for Russian market as participant 10 stated “In Russia, several touristic destinations have been closed because of terrorism, Turkey for instance” or participant 6 “The demand in Spain has increased due to the fact that Russian authorities have imposed a ban on some flights”. Although this factor could have helped arrivals, is not the main one and there were other reasons such as the ones mentioned above as Spain and Barcelona as interesting destinations, the facilities and the current reduction in time for obtaining visas, privileged location, its offer and diversity.

The fact that all participants in the in-depth interview process have recognize Barcelona as a main destination for Russian tourists affirms and demonstrates once again the positive image that they have of the destination and, as it has been stated in the study carried out by *Diputació de Barcelona* and Serhs (2013), the 71,6% of the Russian tourists that have visited Catalonia will recommend the destination and 61,9% of the Russian tourists that come to Catalonia have especially come to visit Barcelona.

Chapter 5. CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

In this chapter, answers to the research question, aims and objectives previously established have been given in order to reach and draw conclusions from the research.

The overall aim of this study has been to find out what is the image that Russian tourists have of Barcelona always having in mind and focusing on the mental image perceived. An accurate and interesting document has been elaborated in order to find answers to the previously established objectives linked with the core idea, the mental image established by Russian tourists of Barcelona.

According to the first established objective; to understand the concept of destination image and its importance for a destination, a study has been carried out and an analysis of the concept, its evolution and formation has been done in order to achieve the ultimate goal of the research. The concept of destination image has been studied taking into account definitions and theories of different authors that have excelled over the past years because, as it is stated in the literature review chapter, defining destination image is a complex task that has been studied from different approaches (Nghiem-Phú, 2014).

There have been several authors who have decided to study the concept as well as various definitions given. Early studies saw the concept of destination image as something simple which takes into account the feelings and impressions that an individual has of a place (Boulding, 1956; Hunt 1971) whereas, as time passes, it could be said that the concept becomes more complex by adding different perceptions and elements. Di Marino (n.d) stated that destination image is composed of the mental construction established before, “a priori”, the experience that the individual has while visiting the place, “in situ”, and the appearance of the loyalty factor “posteriori” while Gartner (1993) added the conative factor (what the destination makes us feel).

Reynolds (1965) and, years later, Andreu et. al., (2000) remember the fact that at the end individuals create their own image of a destination in which, more and more, is influenced by knowledge provided by third persons and external sources rather than feelings that the individual has of a place.

As a conclusion, I can say that it is fundamental to know the concept of destination image due to its crucial role when attracting tourists as it forms part of the decision-making process when choosing a destination.

The second objective; an analysis of the general image that tourists have of Barcelona and its tourism backgrounds has been studied in order to know what has been said about Barcelona, its perception and what are the facts that attract Russian tourists to visit Barcelona.

The second objective was achieved thanks to data obtained and in-depth interviews carried out. Knowing and having in mind that not all tourists perceive the image of a destination in the same way (Donaire, A. and Galí, N., 2011), the majority of the participants stated that when they are choosing Barcelona as a tourist destination they are looking, in the majority of the cases, for good weather (beach & sun culture), accessibility and its people.

Pleasant weather could be a factor when deciding destination and, in this case, Barcelona would benefit from it and also from the fact of having a beach. Providing good accessibility is another factor that could make tourists opt for Barcelona as a destination as participants stated that everything was near and that there is good infrastructure. The Infrastructure and accessibility that the city offer are relatively new from when the tourism started to increase exponentially in Barcelona due to the arrival of the Olympic Games. Olympics promoted and changed the image of Barcelona by giving a more international and open image to the world (Pauné, 2012).

Although the first reason when the Russian market is looking at Barcelona as a tourist destination is sun, sea, weather, infrastructure and accessibility, the second most mentioned comments stated that Gaudí and the *old quartiers* such as Las Ramblas are the second ones which attract more the attention of the Russian market. This result is very similar to the one that Donaire, J. and Galí, N. (2011) established that affirms that in a general way and without specifying nationalities, the image of Barcelona is a succession of sights and principal monuments that includes Sagrada Familia, Parc Güell, La Pedrera and Casa Batlló between the most prominent ones.

About the third objective; exploring the Russian tourism market profiles and its culture, has been analyzed and the history about Russian tourism development has been studied to better understand them. During the 21st century, the number of Russian tourists began to grow thanks to the growth of population, free time and paid holidays and, as a result, their arrival to Barcelona. With the economic crisis, conflicts and the devaluation of the ruble, Russian tourist

arrivals began to fall from 2014 although, nowadays, its is recovering (Ovcharov, A., Vasiljeva ,M. and Shirin, S., 2015).

According to the collected data from the in-depth interviews, the Russian tourist profile that comes to Barcelona has, in a general way, a high level of repetition and loyalty as the majority of the participants claimed that it was not their first time in the city and that they will come again. Otherwise, participants stated that Barcelona can become a good key destination for Russian tourists although some respondents agreed that it will depend on the economic possibilities of each person due to the current economic circumstances.

The fourth objective is about the methodology that has been used in order to find out the answer to the research question previously established. In order to come up with conclusions, a qualitative study by using in-depth interviews with open-ended questions has been done. As Avraham, E. and Ketter, E. (2008) stated, this method has been selected as it allows us to know information of the participants in a more specific and personal way and without putting pressure on responses. This method has been implemented and an evaluation of the data obtained has been done. The evaluation is part of objective number five and, when questions and answers have been analyzed, it is when I realized the positive impact that Spain and Barcelona gives to the Russian market.

Finally, regarding the objective number six and taking into account the literature review and the obtained data, the following conclusions about what is the image that Russian tourists have of Barcelona have been made.

In a general way, when Russian tourists are looking for a destination they are guided by the attractions that a destination has and, as appeared in most of the interviews conducted, most of them are attracted by destinations that offer a variety of cultural issues rather than sun, beach and weather or also by the ones that offer a mixture (destinations that offer cultural attractions with sun, beach and climate). Whereas, on the other hand, when Barcelona is the tourist destination for the Russian market it is seen as a city that offers sea, sun, summer and freedom.

Although most of the participants perceive Barcelona as a kind of “holiday resort” with beach, sunshine and warm weather, there have been respondents who have been interviewed who claim that Barcelona is also perceived as a cultural, architectural and historical city (especially highlighting the importance given to Gaudí) and, considering the results obtained, focusing and promoting other attractions that forge the image of Barcelona apart from the “sun & sea” model could be one of the solutions as well as to continue promoting the “Barcelona *Modernista*”.

From this, marketing strategies to continue giving strength and promoting the “Barcelona *Modernista*” could be a good option and besides giving importance to world-renowned architects such as Gaudí, other architects of the Catalan modernism could be promoted such as Lluís Domènech I Montaner or Josep Puig I Cadafalch.

5.2 Recommendations

Tourism has experienced a continued growth and, nowadays, is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. More and more destinations try to attract more tourists and between the most reliable benefits of tourism it can be found the economic well-being factor, social benefits and environmental benefits, among others.

In order to attract tourists, the image of a destination and how it is perceived is crucial and it is an important factor in decision-making process (Echtner, C.M. and Ritchie, J.R., 2003). Before studying an image of a destination, a clear definition of the concept has to be known and, my first recommendation is to start studying the different behaviors and images perceived by several tourism markets of Barcelona. Although some markets have been studied there are some gaps that still have to be analyzed and even though they may not be the most representative in terms of number of tourists, have to be considered even to improve in marketing aspects (Mackay, K.J. and Fesenmaier, D.R., 1997).

After performing and analyzing in-depth interviews, it is possible to confirm that many of the Russian tourists interviewed affirmed that when choosing a destination (without specifying it) its decision was more focused on the cultural, architectural and historical attractions or even on a mix between sun, sea and beach and cultural aspects. While, on the other hand, when specifically talking about Barcelona as a tourist destination and the reasons for traveling the response changes as Russian tourists perceive Barcelona’s image as a city that offers summer, sun, sea, beach and kind of “freedom” although some participants (not all) also perceive Barcelona as a cultural and architecture lovers destination.

Although Barcelona is also well known for its cultural and architectural attractions, the public and private sector related with the tourism industry in Barcelona should try to promote more cultural and historical factors in order to leave aside stereotypes of “sun & beach” tourism. Thus, other types of products when announcing Barcelona as a touristic destination could be promoted such as Catalan Modernism or the medieval Barcelona.

5.3 Limitations

There have been some factors that have limited the research and that have made it more complex when analyzing the image of Barcelona as a tourism destination taking into account the Russian market perception. This field has not been studied in-depth and there is a gap which I wanted to cover in order to know what is the mental image that this relatively “new tourism market”, Russian tourists, have of Barcelona.

There have been difficulties in finding academic articles, information and literature about Russian tourism image of Barcelona although general information about destination image, its importance, evolution and general information about Russian market characteristics have been found due to an increase and the important role of tourism in destinations. Having in mind the lack of information when focusing on the Russian tourism, it could be because of its recent and fast growth especially in the European Union and inside the hospitality industry.

The limited amount of time and the complexity of the Russian language have become an important limitation; it has been difficult to understand Russian tourists that only speak Russian. To solve the problem of the language barrier, the interview has been fully translated into Russian and, thus, made them feel more comfortable and obtained the maximum amount of information as possible. Another limitation which is directly linked with the ones above is the difficulty of finding Russian tourists as it is not high season and the number of flights in summer increases as well as their visits. Although the lack of Russian tourists has been an impediment, finally I have done the in-depth interviews until the saturation point.

Cultural differences were also an important limitation when doing the in-depth interviews as in a general way Russian tourists are resistant to answering questions and this was a real impediment when making contact and when creating the necessary confidence to perform the in-depth interviews to access their in-depth opinions and feelings. At the same time, their strong character made me feel sometimes not comfortable even though some respondents were also very friendly, participatory and willing to help.

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