Brand architecture management: The case of four tourist destinations in Catalonia

Jordi Datzira-Masip a,*, Alessio Poluzzi b,**

a La Trobe University, Australia
b International Tourism Destinations Consultant, Australia

A R T I C L E   I N F O

Article history:
Received 1 May 2013
Accepted 20 December 2013
Available online 23 January 2014

Keywords:
Branding
Brand architecture
Tourist destinations
Catalonia

A B S T R A C T

Much literature in tourism is dedicated to brand management; nevertheless, even in a sector characterised by the coexistence of several brands, little research has been carried out on the critical issue of brand architecture. This study focuses on the process of developing and managing a set of interrelated brands and contributes to an understanding of how the concepts of brand architecture are practically applied, specifically in four tourist destinations of Catalonia. The results show that brand architecture concepts are only partially applied, despite the fact that a structured system of brands would stimulate synergies, adding more value to each brand.

1. Introduction

Tourist destinations are increasingly dedicated to developing and managing their brand in order to gain a strong differentiated position within a competitive market. To some extent, their whole marketing efforts are moving towards a branding-related perspective. This is mainly due to the fact that organisations, with the responsibility of attracting visitors, generally do not have (or have only a partial) control of all the tools of marketing, e.g., price of services and product development; although they could influence the image communicated to the market. The fact is that the general marketing concepts, de fact that tourist destinations are facing in the implementation of the relationship among the different tourist brands, and how brand management is implemented in the case of Catalonia and its practical implications in the four tourist destinations selected as case studies. Thus, strategic relations among tourist brands and the brand architecture management will be analysed and described, through the definition of the roles and responsibilities of the different administrative levels, along with the challenges that tourist destinations are facing in the implementation of the theoretical background on brand architecture management.

2. Theoretical framework of brand management and brand architecture

According to Keller (2003), a brand helps consumers organise their knowledge about products and services. Currently, as highlighted by Simoes and Dibb (2001, p.217), "there is general agreement in the marketing literature that the brand is more than a name, given to a product; it embodies a whole set of physical and socio-psychological attributes and beliefs". The fact is that still many tourism professionals identify the brand with its name, logo and slogan, while these elements are only the small tip of the iceberg, which could remain visible only if it is adequately supported by a bulk of other less evident (but more significant) elements, values and benefits that characterise the personality.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34 610276308.
** Corresponding author. Tel.: +34 605616030.
E-mail addresses: jordi.datzira@ddservices.eu (J. Datzira-Masip), a.poluzzi@tin.it (A. Poluzzi).
of the brand. Keller (2003, p.7) observed that many managers ‘refer to a brand as more than that—defining a brand in terms of having actually created a certain amount of awareness, reputation, prominence and so on in the marketplace’. Furthermore, Kapferer (2001, p.3) highlights that ‘there is no brand without a product, a mark and an image (collective representation). The brand is both, the part and the whole; it is the mark on the product or service, but it is also the overall value conveyed with promises of tangible and intangible satisfaction’. Thus, Aaker (1996) define brand identity as providing direction, purpose and meaning to the brand, and Kapferer (2001, p.4) stated that ‘the brand is here to differentiate between two products or services; it is part of an approach that carves up and segments the market’. In this sense, Diko and So (2011) stated that a brand serves to differentiate a product or service by relating it to a unique identity.

In terms of branding tourist destinations, Ekinci (2003) stated that successful destination branding involves establishing a reciprocal relationship between destinations and tourists by satisfying their needs. Anholt (2007) highlights that developing a brand, or branding, is the process of planning and communicating the identity of the destination. Furthermore, Cai (2002) stated that it is necessary to select a consistent mix of elements to identify and differentiate a destination through building a positive image. Furthermore, it is also relevant that the concept of place branding is defined as the practice of applying brand strategy and management to places such as towns, cities, regions and countries (Anholt, 2004). Thus, Papadopoulos (2004, p.36) stated that ‘the term refers to a broad set of efforts by country, regional and city governments, and by industry groups, aimed at marketing the places and sectors they represent’.

Qu, Kim, and Im (2011) highlight that it is of utmost importance for a destination to have an adequate and strong brand image in order to reinforce a positive and identifiable brand identity, which should be structured according to the needs and expectations of the demand. Thus, according to Leisen (2001) a destination brand is a powerful tool with the ability to create emotional appeal, so brand image is considered important to the success of marketing a tourist destination. Ekinci (2003) suggests that the most important part of destination branding starts when the assessment of destination image includes a strong emotional attachment. According to Cretu and Brodie (2007), some of the most substantial benefits of branding are related to a positive impact on the perceived quality of the product or service. Thus, Michell, King, and Reast (2001) also define the positive perception of the brand as providing an identity, a consistent image and as conferring uniqueness to the product or service. Thus, in a wider context, branding means defining unique values that describe a distinctive branding personality; for instance Tourism Australia associates its brand with the characteristics of being welcoming, irreverent, high spirited, and down to Earth. These values should be reflected in all activities, and at all times, when a tourist proposition comes in contact with the market. For example, they should influence the content and the images used in advertising, the attitude and clothing of the human resources, among other considerations. All these elements communicate the destination’s character to the consumer and need be taken into consideration when structuring a brand strategy. Then, considering that the customer gets in touch with the brand, interacting with several companies and other actors (Moinianen & Rainisto, 2009), it is also important to make the brand features explicit to all the destination stakeholders. As stated by García, Gómez, and Molina (2011), the creation of value to the demand is the final aim of the brand, while for the local population and entrepreneurs it is an intermediate goal and a necessary condition for the success of the destination branding strategy.

The strategic process to determine the personality of the destination should involve all the tourism stakeholders who are in touch with tourists, to make them support the initiative, to share common views and to agree upon branding strategy, in order to apply it with a positive sense of belonging. Gilmore (2002) stated that stakeholders should include several segments that are not mutually exclusive, and which Hankinson (2004) divided into four categories: consumers; primary services; secondary services and the media. Therefore, it has to be stated that stakeholders play an important role in tourism branding, due to the strong relationship among the destination’s attributes and characteristics and the development of the branding. Furthermore, Webster (2000) considers that to create a brand value it is also important to take into consideration not only the relationship with the final consumer, but also the rest of the stakeholders participating in the marketing network. In any case, due the nature of the stakeholders and the diverse interests among them, some conflicts might arise among public and private stakeholders’ interests as in the case of New Zealand (Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2003). It seems clear that, since stakeholders are a key component of the tourist destination, they should be involved in the brand management. It is important to consider that the different processes of brand management will occur, according to Hanna and Rowley (2011, p.433), ‘whether or not any agency takes an active and strategic approach to brand management’ and that ‘without such proactive interventions, the outworking of the process may be a disappointing brand experience, negative word of mouth, and ineffective marketing communications’.

In order to be described properly, the personality of a brand should be defined by stating its proposition and all its benefits. Often in the literature, the elements that should characterise it are graphically represented by a pyramid: even if the sections may differ according to different authors and applications (Baker, 2009; World Tourism Organization and European Travel Commission, 2009; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2010), some common features could be highlighted, such as the characteristics and attributes of the destination, the rational and emotional benefits, and, at the top of the pyramid, the brand values and brand essence or character. In fact, the basic requirement for positioning a brand is for it to be distinctive, so that the elements emphasised should be relevant to consumers and different from those communicated by both direct competitors, as well as by other related brands. This concept was reinforced by Baker (2009) and Phillips (2010) who define the destination’s points of parity and points of difference in order to help destinations to differentiate from their competitors.

According to Harish (2010), brand architecture refers to how to structure and organise a portfolio of brands and how to establish a valuable relationship among them. In fact, the strategic organisation of brands would help, not only to avoid internal competition, but also to achieve synergies and a leverage effect that adds even more value to each brand. Therefore, brand architecture is a crucial issue to be planned for tourist destinations, considering the articulated structure of the sector and the coexistence of several brands. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2002) previously stated that brand architecture is an organised structure of the brands portfolio that specifies brand roles and the nature of the relationship among them. The authors proposed a spectrum of models to manage the architecture of a portfolio of brands, ranging from an unbound (house of brands) to a tight (branded house) relationship among them.

- **House of Brands.** This is the case of a company that structures independent brands, with its own values and characteristics. For example the multinational Procter and Gamble manages autonomous brands, such as Gillette, Pantene and Pampers. The advantage of this model is that each product can have differentiated positioning and the possible problems occurring to one brand do not affect and are not transferred to the other. When applied to tourist destinations, Balearic Islands apply a model that can be linked to the concept of House of Brands.
Indeed, the individual islands such Majorca, Minorca, Ibiza and Formentera, are more recognised for their specific offerings than the brand name of the archipelago.

• **Endorsed Brands.** This is the case of a supra-brand that is associated with a series of related brands: for example, Courtyard by Marriott, AC Hotels by Marriott and Residence Inn by Marriott. This strategy allows an endorser brand to provide credibility and reassurance to the buyers. When applied to tourist destinations, some Argentinean regions apply a model that can be linked to the concept of Endorsed Brands, as they take advantage of the awareness of the country name by adding it to their logo: Cuyo Argentina, Litoral Argentina, Norte Argentino, Patagonia Argentina.

• **Master/Sub-brands Relationship.** This case occurs when there is a tight relationship among the supra-brand and the sub-brands. For example, Nestlé is closely interconnected with the brands Nes-café, Nes-tea and Nes-quick. This relationship can create positive associations in the mind of the customer, with the master brand adding attributes by the sub-brands, while the latter are benefiting by the reputation of the master brand. When applied to tourist destinations, Centroamérica applies a model that can be linked to the concept of Master/Sub-brands Relationship. In fact, the brand identity created for the joint promotion of Central American States is dependent on the attributes of its different nations. However, the single country brands are designed in order to benefit from the promotion of the Centroamérica brand.

• **Branded House.** This is the case of a company that transfers the corporate values to all of its brands. For example, Virgin applies the same company essence to Virgin Airlines, Virgin Active and Virgin Mobile. The advantages rely on increasing the multi-national brand recognition and support the products with the confidence generated by the corporate brand. When applied to tourist destinations, the Maldives apply a model that can be linked to the concept of a Branded House. Indeed, the names and the characteristics of the single islands are almost unknown. On the contrary, the islands are recognised for the characteristics they have in common. However, each one is associated with the overall brand attributes of the archipelago.

In terms of tourist destinations, branding is a relatively new concept and, therefore, there are few cases in which the brand architecture has been thoroughly planned. As a result, it is quite difficult to find examples of brands portfolio management models that could correspond accurately to those explained in the literature and applied in other economic sectors. Positively, the growing concern about branding will possibly lead to more elaborated strategies of brand architecture, resulting in more clearly defined examples of models. Fig. 1 shows practical examples of brand architecture in a tourist destinations context.

In any case, it is important to highlight that proper market research should demonstrate the effective application of these models and their perception by the customers. An important aspect to be taken into consideration when defining the architecture of a...
system of brands is related to their territorial spread and their administrative and socio-cultural connections: the “umbrella” brand has to be integrated with the personality and the features that will be communicated by the brands of its various destinations (Agence Française de l’Ingénierie Touristique, 2002). In practice, country brands tend to communicate overall values and to create confidence in the minds of consumers; while, destination and/or product brands tend to highlight specific features, in order to reinforce the promotion and commercialisation of more specific offers. Indeed, in order to avoid internal competition, each destination should have distinctive features that distinguish it from others. However, the “supra-brand” or umbrella brands need to consolidate all of them and highlight their common aspects. Thus, it must be considered that various products are developed in different destinations and many tourist resources are shared, so apart from the geographical perspective, the branding system should consider the transversal dimension related to product brands.

Harish (2010), analysing India’s brand architecture, considers that, as the country is becoming a relatively more familiar and accepted tourist destination, future visitors would look for a more differentiated positioning of the various tourism products. The conclusion of the author is that a single brand as “Incredible India” cannot meet this requirement. According to Dooley and Bowie (2005), in the case of South Africa, the disintegration and feeble institutional capacity of the different destinations marketing levels supposed that it was difficult to market the country as a single consistent tourism brand. Thus, regions and cities operated in isolation and on splintered budgets, resulting in important administrative overlaps and duplication of marketing actions. In the case of Spain, Fig. 2 shows a practical application of the effort to manage a system of brands. In a former campaign, that ran from 2005 to 2009, a graphic structure was meant to manage the coexistence of the national brand, destination brands, specific products and quality labels.

In conclusion, the brand architecture should be directed to the integration and structuring of relations among the brands that are communicated to the market. On one side, it should harmonise the messages of the various brands and subsume them in the supra-brand. On the other side, the supra-brand should prompt a uniform character to the tourist products/destinations, stimulating quality improvement processes.

3. Methodology

The research contributes to a better understanding of the challenges that tourist destinations are facing when they try to implement the theoretical background on brand architecture management. The research carried out is based on primary and secondary data gathered during the months from March to June 2011.

The primary data were collected through 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a panel of representatives of tourism marketing organisations from public and private sectors at different administrative levels. They include local tourist departments, county tourist consortiums, industry associations, as well as regional and national tourist boards. The interviews were focused on the relationships and responsibilities of managing the brand at different levels, as well as the definition of the brand characteristics, including the image and the positioning, the decision-making process as well as the activities performed by the tourism organisations. The main purpose of the research was to understand the following key questions:

● Are the concepts of strategic branding and brand architecture effectively applied?
● How are brands of tourism destinations created and managed by the different marketing organisations?
● How can the management of brand architecture be improved?

The research also was carried out through secondary data, including the analysis of tourism information, such as brochures,
maps, guidebooks, statistics about the performance of the industry, organisations activity reports, strategic and operational plans. In addition, Internet research was carried out in order to analyse the messages communicated to the market.

Furthermore, the research is focused on the practical cases of four tourist destinations in Catalonia:

- City of Barcelona, as an urban destination.
- Costa Brava, as a coastal destination.
- National Park of Aigüestortes and Sant Maurici Pond, as a nature-based destination.
- Port Aventura Theme Park, as a man-made destination.

These destinations were chosen for their representativeness of the territory and their heterogeneity. They are recognised brands with complementary characteristics, in terms of different geographical scope and different management models. Thus, they could be considered as four representative examples of the tourism phenomenon in Catalonia and help to better communicate how the brand management system is organised and structured.

4. Current situation of tourist destination brands in Catalonia

In the case of Catalonia, in order to know how destinations are applying the concepts and methodologies of brand architecture, it is important to understand how the system of tourist destination management is working in practice.

4.1. Administrative situation

Spain is composed of 17 Autonomous Communities and 2 Autonomous Cities, which are divided into 50 provinces and 8116 municipalities. In the Autonomous Community of Catalonia there are 4 provinces (Barcelona, Girona, Lleida and Tarragona), 41 counties and 946 municipalities (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2011).

In terms of tourism, the Spanish government has the responsibility to promote the whole country at an international level, and to this purpose, the Instituto de Turismo de España (Turespaña) was created in 1988. Nevertheless, Autonomous Communities have the responsibility to promote the tourist destinations within their territory; and for that reason they have created their own tourism organisations.

The first Catalan tourism organisation, called Turisme de Catalunya, was created in 1980 by the Generalitat de Catalunya (Autonomous government), with the function of promoting Catalonia as a tourist destination. However, in 2007, the Catalan government created a new tourism organisation called Agència Catalana de Turisme (ACT), in charge of promoting Catalonia as an international tourist destination according to its diversity, its quality and its social and economic profitability. The ACT is composed of public and private organisations, including the provincial tourism organisations, Turisme de Barcelona, chambers of commerce, and associations. All of them are represented in the steering committee of the ACT, although the weight of the private sector players is dependent on their economic contribution to the total budget. Furthermore, in Catalonia there are four tourism organisations at the provincial level, one for each administrative area, besides the tourism organisations created by most of the counties and some municipalities. Fig. 3 shows the different administrative levels in Catalonia and their corresponding tourism and marketing organisations.

This rather complicated structure is characterised by five different administrative levels, each one with a series of tourism organisations. At each level, organisations are independent, as they are not hierarchically related to each other. However, they are inextricably linked in various ways as they interact when implementing specific marketing actions.

4.2. Tourism brands in Catalonia

Tourism in Catalonia contributes nearly 11% of GDP and employs almost 17% of the working population in the service sector. Over 13 million international tourists arrive in Catalonia every year, spending 101 million overnights, with an estimated expenditure of more than 10 billion Euros (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2011).

According to Arcarons (2008), today tourism in Catalonia is defined under the umbrella brand Catalunya and 10 brands that represent the totality of its territory. Arcarons (2008) claims that the tourism brands are the territorial division into tourist destinations and accordingly, they have been promoted by the Generalitat de Catalunya. It is worth noting that the Catalan government defined the tourism brands in a law approved by the Parliament. In 1985, a first map of tourism brands defined six different brands that lasted until 2000 when it was modified, including two new brands. In 2009, it was further modified, reaching the current number of 10 brands. At present, this model is under discussion and revision, meaning that its adequacy is still being debated (Benvenuty and Justícia, 2011).
In Catalonia, the 10 brands follow basically provincial and county boundaries, and are not based on the characteristics and perceptions of the tourism demand and supply. In fact, as recognised in the interviews, “the brand Catalunya is not known and not recognised”. Although the creation of the brand system was promoted by the Catalan government, in practice, the definition of their strategies and management has been delegated to the four provincial organisations, which, in some cases, do not share the same visions and objectives. As shown in Fig. 4, the provinces are overlapped with more than one brand, such as the case of Barcelona province in which there are four brands, plus the Barcelona city brand. Tarragona and Girona provinces have two brands each, while Lleida has three brands.

In terms of brand architecture, Catalonia could be represented as organised in a “House of Brands” model since each brand has its own characteristics in terms of positioning, management, as well as graphic features. The only exception may be the brand Pirineus, that, being managed by the ACT and integrating the Catalonian logo, could be considered as in a Master/sub-brand Relationship. As shown in Fig. 5, the brands have been developed through a graphical representation of different logos, each with specific colours and designs, which should reflect their strategies. The result is that, in visual terms, there are no common elements among the 10 logos, and between them and the Catalunya tourist image-brand (umbrella). Furthermore, most of tourist destinations have defined their strategic marketing plans, but do not apply a model to structure and describe their branding features. In fact, the few tourist destinations that have defined their brand identity describe it with basic characteristics and attributes, and they do not take into consideration the definition of other important issues such as the benefits, the values and the personality.

Moreover, it must be noted that at a local level there is a proliferation of tourism organisations that are creating and developing their own brands. For example, in the Osona county (in Barcelona province, belonging to the brand Catalunya Central) there are five local tourism organisations plus a tourism organisation at county level, each one promoting its own brand, as shown in Fig. 6.

The last survey, on the opinions and the perceived images of Catalonia, was carried out by Turisme de Catalunya in 2007, by means of computer-assisted telephone interviews on 3627 domestic and international potential tourists and personal interviews.
with 3766 actual tourists. The results, shown in Fig. 7, indicate that the brand name of Catalonia is missing a clear positioning in the minds of potential domestic tourists, since all the elements associated with this destination have approximately the same weight and there is not one unique characteristic that is more relevant than others.

Accordingly, international tourists (interviewed within the frame of the aforementioned survey) do not understand the nature of Catalonia. Most of the interviewees who are actually spending their vacation in Catalonia are not able to define its competitors or destinations that should be compared with it; the positive answers compare it either with cities and countries, indicating that visitors do not even perceive the dimension of the area investigated (Fig. 8).

5. Case studies

Fig. 9 shows the location of the four destinations chosen as case studies, highlighting the provinces and counties to which they belong.

5.1. Barcelona

The city of Barcelona is the capital of Catalonia and has 1.5 million inhabitants in the municipality with a metropolitan area of more than 3 million inhabitants. It is a very interesting case of how an industrial city, in 20 years, has become one of the most recognised international tourist destinations, multiplying by 3.12 its arrivals and by 2.7 its overnights [Turisme de Barcelona, 2011].

In terms of management, Turisme de Barcelona is a mixed public and private Consortium created in 1993 by the Ajuntament de Barcelona (City Council), the Chamber of Commerce of Barcelona and Barcelona Promoció Foundation, in charge of the promotion of the city to both domestic and international markets. Given the relevance of the destination within the Catalan tourism, Turisme de Barcelona is the only tourism organisation at a local level that is represented in the Steering Committee of the ACT, at the same level as the four Catalan provinces, including the Barcelona province itself. In 2007, the Barcelona City Council created a tourism and economic development department in charge of policy, regulations, strategic development and management of tourism. In 2010, this department presented a new strategic plan for the city by 2015. A logo of Barcelona does not exist as such, while the Turisme de Barcelona logo is the one used in promotion supports (Fig. 10).

From a branding point of view, it should be noted that the City Council is intending to develop a new brand not specifically for tourism purposes, but to promote also the rest of the city’s cultural and economic activities, based on the programme “Do it in Barcelona” concept of “living, working and enjoying”. As mentioned in the interviews, “the attributes presently associated with the brand are quite well related to the intention of visiting the city. But it would be beneficial to establish an equilibrium with attributes related to the quality of life, to study and to do business”. Indeed, the brand name Barcelona is often used by other commercial brands (e.g., Custo, Mango and Damm) in order to complement their positioning and linking them to the values commonly associated with the city, but with little control by the Municipality.

In terms of tourism, Barcelona has a brand that is so powerful that it is ‘envied as a tourist destination by other cities’, as recognised in the interviews. Barcelona has such a high awareness, esteem and strength, that its neighbouring areas are aiming to be associated with its name, such as the Costa del Maresme and Costa del Garraf that expanded their brands, including Barcelona, and creating the new brand of Costa de Barcelona with the idea of the “Greater Barcelona”, a share strategic approach promoted by Turisme de Barcelona and Diputació de Barcelona (provincial organisation). The advantages for the costal destinations in being associated with a powerful brand, such as Barcelona, are clear, but no evidence has resulted from research carried out to define whether the influence of their sun and beach features could be positive on the image of Barcelona as a tourist destination. This concept has gone so far that even Catalonia has been assimilated into its capital when promoting in long-haul markets, such as...
Japan, China and USA, as the ACT presented in the Expo Shanghai 2010 in China the slogan ‘Catalonia, the land of Barcelona’ (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2010).

5.2. Costa Brava

Costa Brava is one of the first coastal tourist destinations in Spain, starting back in the early 1950s and 1960s. It includes some areas that could be defined as international “Sun & Beach” destinations and others more related to second residences and domestic tourism. The name comes from an article which appeared in “La Veu de Catalunya”, that described the costal line as Costa Brava for its characteristics (Agulló, 1908).

It should be noted that the extension of the destination is not clearly defined, neither in terms of its coastal length, nor in terms of the inclusion of its hinterland municipalities. For example, there is no agreement on including the city of Girona in the Costa Brava destination, as it is traditionally perceived as a hinterland urban destination. As well, the Alt Empordà county is part of the Costa Brava brand and simultaneously ‘somehow’ it is part of the Pirineus brand.

In terms of management, the Patronat de Turisme Costa Brava–Girona, is the tourism organisation based in the city of Girona, that is in charge of promoting two brands at the same time: Costa Brava and the Pirineu de Girona. In graphic terms, there is one single logo that is representing the two different brands (Fig. 11): one mountain destination and one coastal destination, and both are symbolized by the G! of Girona (a destination brand that is not included per se in the 10 tourism brands at Catalan level). A new marketing plan has been recently presented by the Patronat de Turisme Costa Brava–Girona, in order to improve the brand strategy and management activities within the territory.

From a branding point of view, within the Costa Brava area there are several counties and municipalities, which are promoting their area as part of the destination Costa Brava. Furthermore, other public and private organisations have been created within the area, in order to develop and promote specific parts of the Costa Brava. As a result, Costa Brava is currently used by various smaller tourism organisations and private companies included in its territory, and the communicated image may be fragmented, as ‘everybody wants to brand his territory: municipalities, counties and consortiums’. Additionally, the promotion of destination brands is crossed with the promotion of various tourism products by the different organisations. This may provoke duplicity of marketing actions, low efficiency of the available resources and a proliferation of brands, leading to a situation of unnecessary confusion and distortion that may disorient customers. Therefore, it was recognised that ‘it should be a strong brand and everyone else inside, offering variety of products and services under the umbrella brand Costa Brava’.

5.3. National Park of Aigüestortes and Sant Maurici Pond

The National Park of Aigüestortes and Sant Maurici Pond is situated in the heart of the Pyrenees and known for its impressive mountains, with its nearly 200 ponds as well as rich fauna and flora. The Park was created in 1955 and its protected area has been increased up to more than 14,000 ha, as well as a peripheral area of the Park of about 27,000 ha.

In terms of management, the area of the Park is shared between two different counties, l’Alta Ribagorça and the Pallars Sobirà, a situation that is also reflected in the internal organisation, having two different managers, one on each side of the park, and therefore, ‘each one promoting the Park in a separate way’, as mentioned in the interviews. The park belongs to the Network of Spanish National Parks and is regulated by the Spanish Law on National Parks. However, the management was transferred to Generalitat de
Catalunya in 1980. At present, the Departament de Medi Ambient i Habitatge (a department responsible for environment and housing policies) is in charge of the management, conservation and promotion of the National Park. In practice, there is an institution, called Patronat, that is responsible for the daily activities of the Park, and which is formed by the public administrations at different levels as well as local associations. Therefore, the strategic management decisions are not taken locally, by the Park, the municipalities or the counties, but they are taken by different institutions at Autonomous Community and State level. Thus, the relations with the tourism organisations at different levels are sporadic and are not held to define strategies in terms of branding, but they are basically held for operational purposes (Fig. 12).

From a branding point of view, there is no explicit brand strategy for the National Park, neither have the neighbouring municipalities at least, three different existing brands:

- Pirineu de Lleida, brand managed by the province tourism organisation.
- Pirineus, brand managed by the ACT and referring to the Catalan part of the mountain chain.
- Pirineos, brand managed by Turespaña and referring to the Spanish side of the mountain chain.

As mentioned in the interviews, ‘each one of them is doing their own job and activities and there are no regular or periodical meetings to share common guidelines’. This situation, of different brand names referring to territories with overlapping borders and responsibilities, may tend to lead to misperception by the customers, as well as creating certain internal competition among the various Pyrenees destinations.

5.4. Port Aventura Theme Park

Port Aventura is a Theme Park created in 1995 and owned by private shareholders. Since its inception, it has been one of the most important man-made attractions of Catalonia. Port Aventura has a marketing department with a strong budget for marketing campaigns in the media, as well as cooperative marketing actions with other companies, such as tour operators and transport companies.

In terms of management, an alliance called A Step Away, has been created among Port Aventura and the tourism organisations of four surrounding municipalities. The aim of this alliance is to enhance the effectiveness of the marketing actions, as well as to empower the image of a destination. Each of the five alliance members has the same share in terms of its contribution to the budget and decision power, and it is ‘a voluntary agreement to collaborate between the five represented entities’. As a result, the tourism organisations of the area are taking advantage of the popularity of Port Aventura to reinforce the proposition of their tourism supply. It is interesting to note that two municipalities belong to Baix Camp County and two municipalities to Tarragonès County. This shows that when the initiative of creating a tourism organisation comes from the stakeholders at local level, it is quite independent from administrative boundaries.

From a branding point of view, Port Aventura is promoting its own brand while the alliance members have created a new brand to promote themselves as an integrated destination (Figs. 13 and 14). In any case, each municipality is also promoting their own brand independently, although they are increasingly being involved with the alliance marketing actions. This alliance is an example of how destinations can cooperate and coordinate their efforts in order to be more effective and to work together in a share strategy for the reinforcement and promotion of their tourist destination brands.

5.5. Case studies brand architecture in Catalonia

Currently, periodical meetings are held among tourism organisation managers at Catalanian and provincial level, with the basic objective to coordinate specific operational marketing activities, while rarely dealing with strategic and managerial issues. It was recognised that ‘there is a duplication of marketing actions among provincial governments, especially in famtrips, presstrips and workshops’. The fact is that the tourist destination brands of Catalonia are not fully integrated as a system, and their strategic relations are not articulated and structured. As mentioned in the interviews, ‘each destination defines its own plan, with its own methodology and with different levels of detail: these processes are parallel and unrelated; only afterwards is there the interest of finding common issues’. Fig. 15 displays a summary of the current situation of brand architecture in Catalonia, which shows that the structure of Catalanian destination brands is not clearly delineated and organised with a defined scheme. Some area brands are in a “Master/sub-brand Relationship” structure such as Catalunya and Pirineus, and other brands are organised as a “House of Brands” structure. A number of issues are related to the fact that, some destination brands such as Barcelona, are considered to be at the same level as the ones that refer to more extensive areas, such as Costa Daurada or Pirineus brands, as well as that in some cases, it is not clear if a destination belongs to one brand area or another, such as the case of the city of Girona that is considered as belonging to both Costa Brava brand and Pirineus de Girona brand. Furthermore, the proliferation of brands leads to the fact that each area brand is associated to a relatively large number of destination brands, as is the case of Costa Brava with more than 15 destination brands. The case of Osona is emblematic, indicating that, in
absence of a clear brand architecture strategy, the relatively small territory of a county can even develop five internal sub-brands, further adding to this process of proliferation.

At a local level, the managers of the marketing organisations are aware of the relevance of branding their destination, though most of them do not have enough power, skills and resources to develop a structured and strong brand strategy. Furthermore, political changes may influence the management of the tourism organisations, resulting in a lack of continuity of the strategic visions and the implementation of the defined action plans. The research shows how a brand architecture model is implemented and managed in the case of Catalonia and its four destinations used as a case studies. It is also an example of how a theoretical model, defined by Aaker and Joachimsthaler in 2002 on brand architecture, can be analysed and implemented at a tourist destination level.

6. Conclusions

It is crucial for tourist destinations to properly apply the concepts of branding and brand architecture and the way in which the brand portfolio is implemented, managed and developed at local, regional and national level. There are several challenges and influences that tourism organisations have to deal with, such as the political interests, the administrative borders within the territory, the assignment of responsibilities among the organisations, the budget constraints and control, the human resources’ technical skills and the power of the private stakeholders, among others. Consequently, the brand management within destinations should be improved through better reinforcement of the coordination and management strategies at local, regional and national level. It is necessary to define a common scheme for the destination brands to fit together, like pieces of a puzzle, where each one should have its own shape (positioning) that fits together to draw a general picture. Further research could contribute to the debate whether the system to develop powerful brands should be left to the local initiative or should come from an integrated and homogeneous programme. However, it should be possible to find an approach that combines these two perspectives. On one side, a government at the top level could define a methodology to apply to all the destinations of the territory. Its brands and sub-brands, should be a unique model to be homogeneously structured and implemented in order to systematise the way to develop the brand strategy at destination level, taking into consideration the rights and obligations for the use of brands at private and public level. On the other side, the process of creating and/or modifying brands should be developed at local level, because in order to be effective, a brand strategy must be shared by those who are intending to implement it. This means that local stakeholders should be
involved in the definition of their tourist destination brand strategy and therefore, the clusters’ supra-brands should be the result of the aggregation of homogeneous destinations, following a bottom-up process. Thus, the research provides a practical approach to the theoretical background about the brand architecture management and it contributes to the understanding of the limitations and challenges that tourist destinations are facing in order to implement a coherent and structured brand architecture management. To this purpose, an appropriate brand architecture model should:

- cope with each destination’s vision on a long term basis;
- assign a priority of customer segments and target markets for each brand;
- fill in the supply and demand gaps among the brands, without overlaps; and
- define strategies to effectively address the prioritised segments and markets.

Indeed, it could be unproductive trying to communicate and explain an excessive number of brands, without having understood to which type of customers they should be addressed and without a clear and shared strategy.

The fact is that, in tourism, a variety of public and private marketing organisations operate at several levels, each one managing different resources, often with overlapping responsibilities. In this sense, there is a need to improve the collaboration and coordination among tourism organisations in order to implement strong brands structured in a systematic way. The development of an integrated system to manage the tourism brands would create synergies and increase the overall efficiency, resulting in a better exploitation of the market opportunities.

References


Web pages (accessed in December 2013)

Agencia Catalana de Turisme: (http://www.act.cat).
Ajuntament de Barcelona: (http://www.bcn.cat).
Centroamérica: (http://www.visitcentroamerica.com).
Institut Baleàric del Turisme: (http://www.illesbalears.es).
Instituto de Turismo de España (Turespaña): (http://www.turspain.es).
Maldives Islands: (http://www.visitmaldives.com).
Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, Medio Rural y Marino: (http://reddeparquesnacionales.mma.es/patrimonio/nacionales/expres/index.htm).
National Park of Aiguistories and Sant Maurici Pond: (http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/parcnaturalis).
Oficina Tècnica de Turisme de la Diputació de Barcelona: (http://www.turismeprop.barcelona.cat).
Osona Turisme: (http://www.oonaturisme.cat).
Patronat de Turisme de la Costa Brava: (http://www.costabrava.com).
Port Aventura Theme Park: (http://www.portaventura.cat).
Tourism Alliance: (http://www.tourismalliance.co.uk).
Turisme de Barcelona: (http://www.barcelonaturisme.cat).

http://www.visitcentroamerica.com
http://www.illesbalears.es
http://www20.gencat.cat/
http://reddeparquesnacionales.mma.es/patrimonio/nacionales/expres/index.htm
http://www.oonaturisme.cat
http://www.costabrava.org
http://www.costa-daurada.cat/ctd
http://www.costabrava.com
http://www.portaventura.cat
http://www.tourismalliance.co.uk
http://www.barcelonaturisme.cat

http://www.visitcentroamerica.com
http://www.illesbalears.es
http://www20.gencat.cat/
http://reddeparquesnacionales.mma.es/patrimonio/nacionales/expres/index.htm
http://www.oonaturisme.cat
http://www.costabrava.org
http://www.costa-daurada.cat/ctd
http://www.costabrava.com
http://www.portaventura.cat
http://www.tourismalliance.co.uk
http://www.barcelonaturisme.cat