

The ambiguous image of Linz: Linz09 – European Capital of Culture

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ABSTRACT

The importance of destination image is widely recognised for its significant effect on the behavioural intentions of tourists. As such, efforts to build and/or improve destination images are critical to the success of destination tourism development. An important prerequisite for the successful long-term destination image improvement and promotion is the knowledge of tourists' perceptions of the attributes of the destination's image. This exploratory paper seeks to obtain some insight into this particular knowledge and to provoke discussions by contrasting the projected image of Linz as a tourist destination promoted by its policy makers with the perceived image held by Linz's potential tourists in the context of the European initiative, "Cultural Capital of Europe" 2009. The paper juxtaposes the results of Linz's 2008 image monitoring survey conducted by its policy makers with those of an exploratory survey conducted for this study. The latter was designed to capture the image components of Linz held by a convenient sample of domestic and foreign potential tourists to Linz.

KEYWORDS

Destination Image, Linz, European Capital of Culture, Cognitive, Affective

INTRODUCTION

The significance of tourist destination image has been broadly acknowledged as it correlates with people's perceptions of a place and can affect the destination selection process (Gartner, 1993), tourists' behaviour in terms of revisit and recommendation (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Bigne, Sanchez and Sanchez, 2001), and the levels of experienced satisfaction (Hose and Wickens, 2002; Chon, 1990, 1992). It has also been established that destination image influences the earliest stage in the decision making process by encouraging individuals to form expectations and assumptions about the destination prior to their actual experience of it (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991). Baloglu and Mangalolu (2001) argue that destinations mainly compete on the basis of their perceived image relative to those of their competitors. Hence, the identification of the image of a destination held by its tourists is much more significant than the promoted image in understanding the destinations' attributes.

Bramwell and Rawding (1996) discuss the current projected and received place images in the place marketing literature (Kotler, Haider and Irving, 1993) by using the destination image formation model proposed by Gunn (1972). This model consists of 'organic', 'induced' and 'modified induced' images. The organic image is based primarily on information assimilated from non-touristic, non-commercial sources and the opinions of family and friends. The altered, induced image is formed through accessing additional, more commercial sources of information; whereas the modified induced image is based on first hand information and destination experience.

Bramwell and Rawding (1996) describe projected place images as the ideas and impressions of a place that are available for people's consideration. They may be created deliberately as the result of marketing efforts (induced image) or they may emerge without premeditated planning and from information sources not directly associated with the destination (organic images). They suggest that the interaction between these projected images and the tourist's own needs, motivations, prior knowledge/experience, preferences, and other personal characteristics, form the received place images.

Baloglu and Brimberg (1997) have analyzed destination image in terms of an individual's mental representation of knowledge, beliefs, feelings, and global impressions about the destination. The cognitive component of destination image is related to the tourist destination's attributes – the beliefs and knowledge one holds

regarding a destination (White, 2004). The affective component expresses the emotions (e.g. pleasure, excitement) that a tourist destination is able to evoke in individuals (Martin and Bosque, 2008; Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997) or an individual's feelings about a destination (White, 2004). Baloglu and Brinberg also suggest that the sum of both perceptual (cognitive) and affective components create a destination's overall image.

Echtner and Ritchie (1993) made a significant contribution to the destination image literature by proposing a model of destination image that consists of attribute-based and holistic components that are made up of functional (the more tangible aspects of the destination) and psychological (the more intangible aspects) characteristics. These researchers argue that destination images can be arranged on a continuum ranging from traits which can be commonly used to compare all destinations to those which are shared by very few destinations, and could include unique features, events or 'auras/atmospheres' (e.g. the aura of the Vatican, the mystique of Nepal).

Since it is generally recognized that tourists use both cognitive and affective dimensions in the process of destination image formation (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999), marketing campaigns may have to stress both the physical attributes of a place, and the amalgam of emotions and feelings that it is able to evoke in the tourist's mind (Martin and Bosque, 2008). Furthermore, recent studies (Pike, 2002; White, 2004) suggest that destination image research may also benefit from exploring both the cognitive and affective dimensions. Pike's (2002) review of 142 destination image papers from 1973 to 2000 shows that only six studies took into consideration both the cognitive and the affective image components. Similarly, White (2004) finds that past studies have concentrated on items that represented respondents' perceptions of the more physical characteristics of a destination rather than exploring both cognitive and affective dimensions (see for example, Baloglu and Mangaloglu, 2001; Baloglu and McCleary 1999; MacKay and Fesenmaier, 2000). Martin and Bosque (2008) emphasize that a tourist destination image should be recognized as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that includes not only beliefs or knowledge about the place's attributes, but also the individual's feelings toward the destination. Emotions, White (2004) points out, are better predictors of destination visitation and customer purchase intentions than the more commonly used cognitive component.

In addition, Martin and Bosque (2008) urge destination image researchers to pay attention to the role of cultural values, as individuals' perceptions could be filtered by the preconceptions engendered by the culture of their country of origin. Cognitive and

affective destination image components may also be distorted by socio-cultural stereotypes caused by cultural and physical distance (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007). A study conducted by Martin and Bosque (2008) partially supports the proposition that the shorter the cultural distance between destination and tourist, the more favourable the cognitive/affective image of the tourist destination. Hunt (1975) and Scott, et. al., (1978) also find that destination image formation is determined partly by geographical distance from the destination; people are more likely to have visited the places near their homes or gathered information about particular destinations through the mass media or from friends and family.

Significant in destination image research is the fact that the number of studies using structured methods (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999) outweighs the number of studies utilizing unstructured ones (Reilly, 1990; Perdue, 2000; Jutla, 2000). Pike (2002) reports that the majority of the 142 papers he examined used structured techniques. In a structured method a variety of general image attributes are specified and integrated into a standardized instrument, whereas in an unstructured method, the participants are allowed to more freely describe their impressions about a destination. Both approaches have advantages and shortcomings that have to be considered when designing a particular research project. For instance, structured methods are easy to administer, simple to code and the results can be analysed using sophisticated statistical techniques (Marks, 1976 in Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). However, as structured methods focus their attention on destination image attributes, where respondents are asked to evaluate a list of previously selected attributes, they fail to capture the holistic and unique components of a particular destination. This disadvantage is neutralized by the unstructured method, which allows the holistic components of a destination image to be captured. Nevertheless, capturing the image's holistic components still depends on the participants' verbal and writing skills, and their willingness to share their opinions and knowledge about a particular destination. It can, therefore, be argued that in order to explore all the components of a destination image, both structured and unstructured methods need to be employed (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Iordanova-Krasteva and Wickens, 2008).

LINZ: A CASE STUDY

The European Capital of Culture (ECC) Initiative

The ECC initiative was launched in 1985 by Melina Mercouri. Its main aim is to bring the member states closer together through the “expression of a culture which, in its historical emergence and contemporary development, is characterized by having both common elements and a richness born of diversity” (European Commission, 1985). The ECC has earned itself a reputation as a platform for sharing the diverse cultural wealth in Europe, attracting enormous attention and public interest. The competition for recognition as a capital of culture is so intense that it compares to that of the Olympic games nomination (Richards, 2000)

The majority of hosting cities use the ECC to: improve the international profile of the city and its region, attract visitors, enhance pride and self-confidence, promote themselves and their countries as cultural centres, and occupy a solid place on the cultural map of Europe (Palmer/Rae Associates, 2004). However, Bologna (2000), Bruges (2002), and Genoa (2004) used the ECC to transform their images; for example, to move from superficial tourism towards contemporary cultural tourism and to renew or regenerate their image.

Linz's Bid

Linz is Austria's third largest city with a population of 190,000. The intention to develop Linz from an industrial city to a future-oriented cultural and technological city was underpinned by a Cultural Development Plan in 2000. The consequent establishment of technology and new media businesses, open spaces, the 'Independent Art Scene'¹, “culture for all”, along with the lively, well developed cultural infrastructure provided an exceptional starting point for the city's desire to host the ECC. Three big hallmark events are considered as the cultural trademarks of Linz and dot its cultural calendar: the International Street Artist Festival, the Ars Electronica Festival, and the Linz Cloud of Sound (Linz Culture, 2009).

The nomination of Linz (the capital of the province Upper Austria) for the title of European Capital of Culture (Linz09) was submitted in 2004. The main focus of its

¹ Independent Art Scene consists of alternative cultural initiatives (initiatives that are not integrated in public institutions) as well as small, independently working artistic teams

presentation was on its attempts since 1985 to change itself from an industrial to a high-tech cultural city. Linz's representatives, thus, presented the Austrian town as a creative, cultural and dynamic one, having worldwide significance (The Selection Panel for the European Capital of Culture 2009). Linz's authorities think of the ECC as a project that:

"is endowing its [Linz's] image with interesting new contours ...offers a big chance – already during the lead-in to the big year but especially during the time thereafter ... for an ambitious cultural program and for tourism marketing. Linz09 has the potential to significantly increase international awareness for this city...." (www.linz09.at).

Developing this line of thought, Martin Heller (2008), the artistic director of Linz09, argues that:

"...Linz will be the most interesting city in Austria in 2015. That may sound utopian to many, yet it is also imaginable within the logic of contemporary reality. For Linz is already an interesting city today. A city with a brisk pace, a city that enables, an unconcernedly solution-oriented city, a social model city, a rural city, a wealthy city, a globally open-minded city. And a city where culture, industry and nature can enter into a symbiosis like hardly anywhere else..."

This ambitious mission statement is provoked by Linz's image problems not only because of its association with Hitler, being the place where he grew up, but also because Linz, despite its diverse cultural life, has always stood in the shadow of Vienna and Salzburg. The objectives, however, required to realise this ambitious vision are two-fold: firstly, to give international audiences an idea of what Linz is all about and secondly, to change the clichéd stereotype of Linz as a blue-collar town of chimney stacks (Linz Europa Tour 2007 – 2009).

Linz's Nazi Past

The panel evaluating Linz's bid to host the ECC Event recommended that a display of material relating to the city's history in the context of the Third Reich would be a real benefit and should be included as part of the programme (The Selection Panel for the European Capital of Culture, 2009).

Adolf Hitler was born in the outlying village of Braunau and only grew up in Linz. Linz is 'Hitler's town' in the same way that Salzburg is Mozart's. During the Nazi period Linz was transformed from a small town into an industrial city with a potential to become a cultural metropolis on the Danube as Hitler had planned. After 1945 the main concern of the Linz's authority was to distance the city from Nazi culture and Hitler, highlighting

traditionally humanist cultural values (Cultural Development Plan 2000). Traces of the Nazi's past, however, are still part of everyday life in Linz – in the appearance of the so-called 'Hitlerbauten'² and in the materials used for buildings - Mauthausen granite was paid for with the lives of concentration camp prisoners (Mission Statement, 2009). Linz's policy makers have decided to accept the challenge to exploit, rather than ignore, the most disgraceful associations of the town. For many people Adolf Hitler is one of the last names that would be expected to be incorporated into a destination promotion campaign. Visitors to Linz can explore Nazi remnants in the town, for example, by watching footage of survivors being led through a residential area or by visiting a former underground aircraft factory that was part of the Mauthausen/Gusen concentration camp complex. Ulrich Fuchs, the deputy manager of Linz09, states with regard to the Hitler issue: *"..whenever you come to Linz in the coming year, you will find something related to this topic. We are not sweeping Hitler under the carpet."* The point of view of Martin Heller, the artistic director of Linz 2009, is similar to that of Fuchs. He stated that: *"...the only way of dealing with Hitler is to be completely honest..."*

The director of the Upper Austrian State Museums, Peter Assmann, recognized that an exhibition about Linz's Hitler past might be seen as going too far, because Hitler's legacy is still a very difficult and sensitive topic, however; he elaborates: *"I don't see any glorification of Hitler in the exhibition. Hitler is fact, so we just face this fact and we face it with many arguments..."* (Pierce, 2009).

Linz's Projected Image

The organizers of Linz09 conducted Linz's image monitoring survey and presented the results approximately six months before the official start of Linz09. This survey had several objectives: to identify the position of Linz amongst its direct competitors – Graz, Innsbruck and Klagenfurt; to uncover the image held by the respondents; and to find out how strongly Austrians support Linz hosting the ECC.

The sample consisted of three groups – 500 non-local Austrians, 500 people living in the Province of Upper Austria, and 513 citizens of Linz. For the purposes of this paper, however, only the responses to those questions related to the image of Linz are considered.

One survey question which sought to elicit the respondent's spontaneous associations with Linz, prompted similar responses from the three groups. They all firstly associated

² Cheap homes that Hitler built for industrial workers

Linz with its tourist sights (most frequently, Poestlingberg, the main square, the old town); secondly with its cultural life (most frequently, the Brucknerhaus /Anton Bruckner/Bruckner Festival, the Ars Electronica Centre, the Cloud of Sounds, the Lentos Museum, the Pflasterspektakel and even the ECC); and thirdly with its shopping facilities.

Another question was designed to find the attributes of Linz, and was phrased thus:

“I will read out several attributes and your task is to say which attributes fit which city - Linz, Innsbruck, Graz or Klagenfurt. One attribute can be applied to one, several or none of the cities.” Respondents described Linz as an industrial city (89 respondents), modern (65), with attractive cultural range (61), friendly city (60), high tech oriented city (59), famous for digital art in Europe (56), dynamic (56), and an interesting city (53).

Being closed in structure, the pre-selected sets of answers to these two questions predetermined the answers. The resulting responses, therefore, represent “vox auctoritas” rather than “vox populi” and reveal the image of Linz through the eyes of its authorities. The survey missed the opportunity to expose a more comprehensive and nuanced account of the image of Linz which might have been held by these respondents. Of more concern is the fact that, even though Linz’s authorities are aware that *“Linz09 has the potential to significantly increase international awareness for this city....”* (www.linz09.at) and aim to make Linz *“....the most interesting city in Austria in 2015”* (Martin Heller, 2008), international tourists were not included in this image monitoring survey. Nor did the survey design allow respondents to express their feelings, opinions and perceptions of Linz. It is also of note that the predetermined responses did not allow respondents to express a view about Linz’s recent historical past, despite the recommendation of the ECC evaluation panel and Linz authorities’ response to that recommendation.

Methodology

As the first stage of a broader study, an online survey was conducted (January to March 09) consisting of three open-ended questions. The main aim of this survey was to acquire an exploratory knowledge of Linz’s cognitive and affective image components as held by its potential visitors, and gain a better understanding of the multidimensionality of this image. A link to the online survey was posted on the homepage of Linz09 and on several online platforms for travellers. The outcome of this first stage of the study is to inform the design of a comprehensive, structured

questionnaire to be administered in the field as part of the second stage of the study conducted in the summer months of 2009 in Linz in the context of the ECC

The open ended questions design allowed respondents to share their feelings, perceptions and knowledge of Linz; thus acknowledging Martin and Bosque's (2008) suggestion that destination image should be analysed as a multi-faceted phenomenon that includes not only beliefs or knowledge about the place's attributes, but also the individual's feelings about the destination. This approach also eliminates the likelihood of a particular type of research bias that can arise with predefined sets of answers (Jenkins, 1999). The online survey was aimed at both repeat and first-time domestic and international tourists with no geographical limitations, in an attempt to capture some of the multi-faceted aspects of the image of Linz. This allows the various socio-cultural stereotypes caused by cultural and physical distance to be reflected in the responses (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007)

Analysis and Discussion

The total number of responses was 88, of which 74 were completely filled in and analyzed. The majority of the respondents (55) were international potential tourists of Linz from, Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, Portugal, Italy, Cyprus, France, Poland, Bulgaria and the USA. There were as many male as female respondents, and the age distribution corresponded to all the age groups mentioned in the demographic questions

The first question focused on the respondents' spontaneous associations with Linz, in an attempt to capture as many aspects as possible of the image of Linz as a tourist destination. This question was answered by the majority (59) of the respondents. Only two Austrians left the question unanswered. For 13 international respondents, however, Linz did not evoke any particular association; neither knowledge or beliefs nor feelings or emotions.

The majority of the respondents were aware that Linz is in Austria and near the River Danube. This may suggest that Linz, on the one hand, benefits from its "umbrella mark", Austria, as being a popular and favourite destination for many people; and, on the other hand, suffers from being overshadowed by the "big names" in Austria - Vienna and Salzburg. For example, a Bulgarian respondent wrote: *"I associate Linz mainly with music and with the New Year concert of the Vienna philharmonic orchestra"*. Other respondents from Switzerland and Austria concurred: *"... Linz is in Austria, usually they have lots of monuments and museums, therefore, I associate it*

with cultural and historical heritage and of course traditions!”, *“I associate it with nothing else but with Austria...”*. This coin has a reverse side, however, as a German respondent wrote: *“Linz is small, old-fashioned Austrian town, nothing else”*. Linz’s richness of monuments and museums, Pöstlingberg (a mountain), culture, history and traditions also emerged as spontaneous associations with Linz in respondents’ minds. They, however, failed to name any particular museum or monument. Traditional cuisine as part of Linz’s culture found its place in the responses: *“I associate it with delicious chocolate and Austrian traditions, and probably with provincial lifestyle...”* (a Cypriot respondent) and *“with its symbol – the Linzer Cake”* (a German respondent). Only two respondents (Austrians) wrote that the European Capital of Europe 2009 represents their association with Linz.

Music also contributed to the spontaneous associations with Linz: one Bulgarian respondent said that Linz is *“...a centre of live music and arts...”*, and an Austrian respondent associated Linz mainly with Anton Bruckner³ and Dennis Russel Davies⁴.

Indications that Linz is still struggling to shed its industrial image in favour of high-tech cultural one were found in some of the answers: *“unfortunately my first association with Linz is with the steel industry in the town...”*. It is also interesting to note that only Austrian respondents mentioned the steel industry.

Two domestic and two international respondents (from France and Bulgaria) mentioned Hitler as the first association with Linz and its dark history - a woman from France wrote: *“the first word that comes to my mind is Hitler?”*, and a man from Austria added: *“I think, I associate this town mainly with Hitler and his ‘view’ of the world...”*

The next question sought to elicit information about the feelings and emotions evoked by Linz as a tourist destination. There were two main reasons for this question. Firstly, the authors’ concern that the physical characteristics of a place are evoked and instilled into an individual’s mind more easily than affective associations (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993) and therefore would probably prevail in the answers to the first question and distort the paper’s findings. Secondly, emotions, as White (2004) suggests, are better predictors of tourists’ pre and post-behaviour and also form an indivisible part of marketing campaigns (Martin and Bosque, 2008).

³ Anton Bruckner is a famous composer born in Linz

⁴ Dennis Russel Davies is an American conductor and pianist currently working in the Brucknerhaus in Linz.

For 22 of the respondents (9 Austrians and 13 international), Linz does not arouse any feelings or emotions and the answers were neutral at best: *“...nothing, even though I live in Austria I do not know much about Linz”*. However, to the majority of respondents, Linz brings to mind more positive than negative feelings or emotions. Linz evokes feelings and emotions in tonality: *“...beautiful, modern and enjoyable”*, *“one single word – home, sweet home...”*, *“...love, happiness, party”*, *“...nostalgia for my childhood”*, *“day-dreaming”*, *“joy, pleasure”*, and even *“curiosity”* and *“wish to visit it”*.

On the other hand, more negatively oriented answers were given by a few respondents, who sketched a profile of Linz as being boring, cold, unpleasant, and even, in the words of a German respondent, *“...darkness and poverty like in the books of Dickens...”*. The assumption that Linz either benefits or suffers from the consequences of its association with the “umbrella” of Austria was further evidenced by some respondents: *“...Austrian order, therefore unpleasant feelings”*, *“unpleasant emotions, order and discipline”*, and *“I cannot really say...probably Austrian order?”*. It is interesting to note that respondents who mentioned Hitler as a spontaneous association had more positive than negative feelings about Linz. However, respondents who did not have any other associations with Linz apart from being an Austrian town near the Danube, projected negative feelings and emotions such as, boring, dark, and unpleasant.

The third question was designed to elicit some of the attractions of Linz, based on the respondents' knowledge about Linz. Half of the international respondents stated that they did not have any particular knowledge about Linz, and some of them have never been there; nevertheless, one Austrian wrote: *“nothing particular in fact”*. For others, the ancient origin of Linz, Hitler, and its culture are linked, as one Austrian wrote: *“...originated in the place of the ancient Rome town Lencia, it should become Hitler's capital city”* and *“...Austria, Hitler and rich in cultural events”*.

Twenty one international respondents mentioned different cultural events in Linz (Bruckner festival, Cloud of Sound, International Street Artist Festival), museums (Lentos, Ars Electronica Center). Frequently used words/phrases included: cultural life, cultural heritage and/or historical heritage and traditions. Seven respondents (only one was Austrian, the rest were from Portugal, Germany and Bulgaria) mentioned Hitler, thus lending support to the assumption that knowledge of Linz's association with Hitler is not necessarily a negative factor in the formation of the overall image of the city. Two respondents (one from Switzerland and one from Austria) mentioned the European Capital of Culture 2009; the Austrian respondent wrote: *“Linz is the European Capital of*

Culture 2009 and I am sure they will show the beauty of Linz!". The River Danube also found a place in the answers; one Austrian described it as: "...perfect for chilling out in the sun at the Danube...", and "the old Danube, playing with the sunset", mentioned by a Swiss

Although the sample was small, the open-ended questions, even online and with limited space for answering, offered the researchers more than a glimpse of the unadulterated Linz through the eyes of its potential tourists. Through these responses, the authors were able to elicit some of Linz's unique characteristics and understand aspects of its individuality. Following from Echtner and Ritchie's (1993) suggestion that destination image includes unique features, events or 'auras/atmospheres'; Linz's personality is seen to have been formed through a myriad of the controversial Hitler's heritage, the steel industry (whose roots can be traced back to the Nazi's period); the amazing architecture and the well-preserved old town; the new face of Linz presented by the Ars Electronica Centre, the Lentos museum and Brucknerhaus; the natural and eternal beauty of Postingberg, the River Danube, as well as its ancient origin and cultural and historical heritage. These unique characteristics of Linz appear to have influenced Linz's affective image components, making it for the majority of respondents, a pleasurable, enjoyable and modern place.

CONCLUSION

The study, though exploratory, makes an important contribution to the understanding of projected and perceived images in the context of tourism destination promotion; Baloglu and Mangaloglu (2001) argue that destinations mainly compete on the basis of their perceived image relative to those of their competitors. What emerged from this study also suggests that there is a difference between the projected image of Linz as promoted by the city's authorities and its perceived image as viewed by the respondents. This tentative finding complements Bramwell and Rawding (1996) who argue that projected images may be created deliberately by marketers, while perceived images reflect tourists' views of the destination. The finding also suggests that better understanding of destination image can be reached by listening to the "vox populi" rather than relying on a predefined set of answers that reduce respondents' opinions to several ticks. It also shows that destination image research should not underestimate

the unstructured method (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003), as it allows participants to more freely describe their impressions about a destination.

It can also be argued that the official image monitoring survey failed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Linz's image, as the list of attributes used by the officials did not include, for example, sensitive issues such as the Hitler's "heritage". As a consequence, it is difficult to see how Linz's authorities intend to improve Linz's image if they choose to remain unaware of its' weak attributes as perceived by its tourists.

The authorities' survey also failed to capture the uniqueness of Linz, its "soul", mainly because Linz's officials did not consider the multi-dimensionality of its image. The constituents of such image encompass not only beliefs or knowledge about the destination but also individuals' feelings towards the destination. The refusal to consider the multidimensional aspects of Linz's image is surprising, as the literature broadly acknowledges that tourists use both cognitive and affective image components to form a destination's image (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999, White, 2004). These gaps in the authorities' knowledge, expressed mainly in the lack of understanding of the tourists, might militate against reaping the full benefit of the ECC, particularly, as the latter is designed to change the chosen destination's (Linz) image. It might also lead to inconclusive results of a short-term nature and misleading conclusions, as marketing campaigns should emphasize both the physical attributes of a place, and the amalgam of emotions and feelings that it evokes in the tourist's mind (Martin and Bosque, 2008). Another critical shortcoming of the official image monitoring survey is the fact that the officials of Linz did not include international tourists in their sample and relied on Austrians only. This is of concern, as there is evidence to suggest that the shorter the cultural distance between destination and tourist, the more favourable the cognitive/affective image of the tourist destination will be (Martin and Bosque, 2008). People are also more likely to have visited the places near their homes or gathered information about particular destinations through the mass media or from friends and family (Hunt, 1975; Scott, et. al., 1978). The online survey of this study despite its exploratory nature, however, showed that international tourists' knowledge about Linz is rather limited; thus confirming Martin and Bosque's (2008) findings concerning the relationship between geographical distance and knowledge about the destination.

Notwithstanding the above, it is apparent that Linz evokes feelings and emotions mainly by benefiting from the image of Austria, and this should be capitalized on.

The findings of the online survey also suggest that despite the Cultural Development Plan 2000 and the buzz about the European Capital of Culture in 2009, Linz in the minds of its potential tourists has a meagre rather than pompous image; the reason why Linz was selected to host the ECC.

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