



## BSR Heritage Tourism Image Analysis - Stock-taking on existing documents -

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## **1. Key message**

The aim of this paper is to undertake an image analysis of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) with special regard to heritage tourism, based on desk research. The reviewed literature clearly shows that there are different common traits that can be considered as characteristic for the BSR, especially with regard to the natural and cultural heritage of the region, but that these common traits do not amount to a shared image or identity of the BSR.

## 2. Background, aim and methodology of this paper

AGORA 2.0 is part of the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. The rationale for the project is that the countries in the Baltic Sea Region have a long common history throughout the centuries and a great variety of natural and cultural resources. However, the area is still not well recognised as one common region outside its formal borders.

**Rationale for  
Agora 2.0**

Therefore, the project aims to improve the common identity of the Baltic Sea Region, based on its rich natural and cultural treasures. Heritage assets – used in a sustainable way – are not only interesting tourist attractions, but also relevant preconditions to enhance the business environment.

**Improving the  
common  
identity of the  
BSR**

Strongly related to the issue of identity is also that of the image of the Baltic Sea Region and its heritage as perceived by people within and outside the region. This image is important as it is crucial for the successful marketing of these heritage aspects.

Hence, the aim of this paper is to carry out an image analysis of the Baltic Sea Region and its heritage assets, i.e. the natural and cultural heritage of the region. More specifically, the following question will be answered:

- ▶ Is there a common image of the Baltic Sea Region overall and what is it like, especially regarding its natural and cultural heritage?

**Image  
analysis of  
the BSR**

This image analysis should in turn provide useful information for tourism suppliers in the Baltic Sea Region for successfully marketing their products.

The analysis is based on desk research or secondary research, i.e. no primary research was carried out. Therefore, existing studies, papers and other available material have been reanalysed in order to answer the above stated research question.

### 3. Theoretical foundations

Before analysing what has already been researched and discussed in relation to a common image of the BSR, a few terms such as (destination) image and (brand) identity need to be defined and clarified as these are often used in connection with this issue.

The term **image** refers to the internal impression a person has of a certain subject (e.g. a person, organisation, company or product, town or country). It is a multidimensional construct of attitudes (Fishbein & Aizen, 1975). These attitudes can be divided into three categories, i.e. cognitive, affective and conative aspects (Nadeau et al., 2008). *Cognitive* aspects refer to information, experiences and knowledge about a destination, for example. These are the conscious, memory-based contents for assessing a subject, whereas the *affective* aspects focus on feelings like 'dislike', 'sympathy' etc. The third category includes *conative* aspects like choice and action which drive people's behaviour.

In the tourism industry, the **destination image** is especially important due to the intangible nature of the tourism product and even more so due to the increasing competition among destinations worldwide. Only those destinations that the consumer is aware of and has 'suitable' image of will be included in the 'relevant set' of the consumer from which he chooses his holiday destinations. Hence, the '[...] perceived image and the match of the location's image with the individual's image are expected to be highly influential [...]' (Veloutsou, 2002, p. 74).

This perceived image can very subjective, i.e. it is not necessarily correct in an objective way. Nevertheless, it influences and controls our behaviour when choosing a product or a travel destination, for example. Moreover, the less factual information and knowledge about a product or destination we have, the stronger this effect is. Furthermore, it needs to be said that the perceived destination image is not only influenced by the tourism industry, but rather by all sources that are available to us (e.g. media, personal experience, culture, politics etc.).

The term **brand** can be defined as a sign, name or symbol that is used to distinguish one product from the other. The core of any brand is its **identity** which can be defined as 'a unique set of brand associations [which] represent what the brand stands for' (Aaker 1996, p. 68). As such, a brand does also have a **brand image** 'which is created by marketing programs that link strong, favourable and unique associations to the brand in the memory [of a person]' (Keller, 1998, p. 51).

This definition shows that the terms **brand image** and **destination image** are not identical. The destination image is a much larger concept in the sense that it is influenced by many different sources (as mentioned above) and not only by the image projected by e.g. destination marketing organisations.

**Images consist of cognitive, affective and conative aspects**

**Destinations need to be in the relevant set of consumers**

**Destination image: subjective, but effective**

**Definition of brand identity and image**

Last but not least, it needs to be said that the terms **image** and **identity** are frequently used interchangeably when talking and writing about the BSR. Of course, these concepts are closely linked with each other and overlap in many ways, too. But there are not completely identical either as the following citation by Melissen (2005) in Mockutè (2008, p. 15) shows: 'Image-building specialists [...] often remind us that image creation will be successful only when it has a real ground, i.e. when it is based on identity. Image creation is also called the articulation of identity (the understanding of what one is) and projection of identity (communication of that understanding to others)'. In other words, the foundation for any image is identity.

**Difference between image and identity**

This is also referred to by Hess (2011) who states that a common identity is the prerequisite for an image of the BSR that is perceived inside and outside of the region. In turn, attempts to market the image of the BSR can help to build the identity of the BSR.

Fig. 1 provides a visualisation of the different described concepts and their relations to one another.

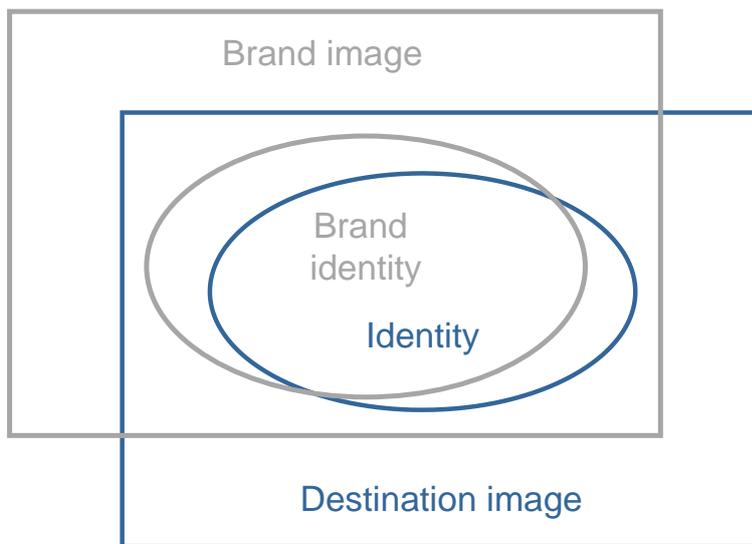


Fig. 1: Image and identity dimensions and relations

The following image analysis will therefore include secondary literature on a common identity as well as a common image of the BSR in order to provide a complete picture of the topic.

#### 4. Stock-taking on existing documents with regard to the image of the BSR

The question of whether there is a common image of the BSR can be answered with a yes and a no. Yes, because there are different image traits or aspects which can be regarded as being common for the BSR overall. No, because these common traits or aspects do not amount to a shared image or identity of the BSR (see e.g. Andersson, 2010; Henningsen, 2011).

So what are the traits or aspects that can be considered common for the BSR? Henningsen (2011, p. 60) mentions quite a collection of relevant characteristics: 'Ultimately, there are real, substantial regional characteristics, which encompass its essential components and give the region its unique beauty and attraction. Its nature, its landscape, its climate, its history of cooperation and conflict, the beauty of the cities, the high level of educational accomplishments among its people, an auspicious political and economic transformation after the end of the Soviet system and its many cultural highlights. [...]' And last but not least there is the Baltic Sea, of course, as the most important link within the region (see e.g. Henningsen, 2011; Working Group on Heritage Cooperation, Baltic Sea States, 1999; German Bundestag, 2007).

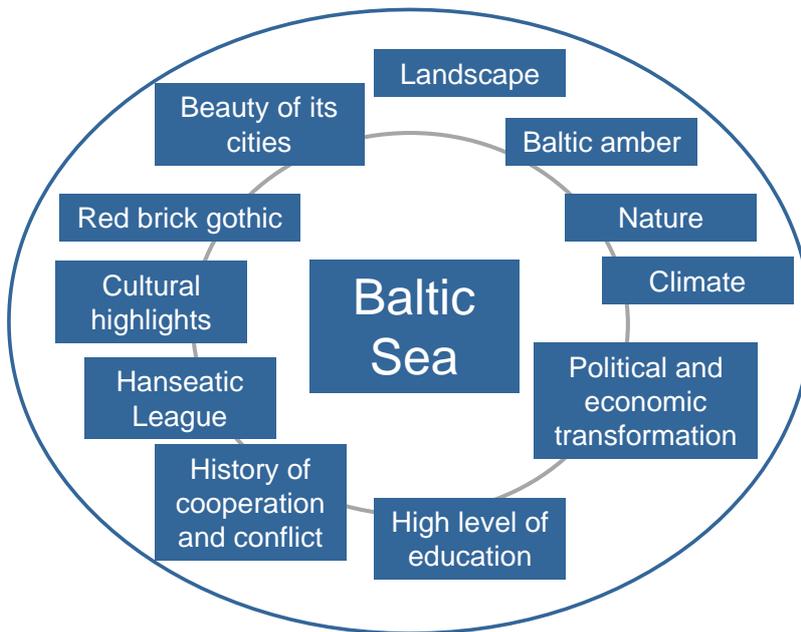
One issue that Henningsen does not mention directly is that of the Hanseatic League. For more than 300 years this association of cities has dominated the economic and cultural life within the BSR and is therefore also frequently mentioned as a common denominator for the BSR (see e.g. Andersson, 2010; German Bundestag, 2007; Catellani, 2003).

Another common legacy of the Hanseatic League is that of a common architecture around the BSR. The German Bundestag (2007) states that brick gothic and the Hanseatic way of building cities are predominant throughout large parts of the BSR. This is also supported by Björnsson (2009) and Andersson (2009). Furthermore, Hess (2011) mentions the Baltic amber as a common characteristic.

Fig. 2 on page 8 provides a visualised summary of the mentioned common characteristics of the BSR.

**Existence of common traits within the BSR, but no shared image**

**Baltic Sea as the most important common denominator**



**Common characteristics especially within culture and nature**

Fig. 2: Summary of common characteristics of the BSR

Summing these few, but nevertheless important aspects up, it can be said that the BSR does have common characteristics and several with regard to culture and nature as the above illustration shows.

On a lower level, i.e. on a sub-regional or country level, some image studies do exist. One example is the study “Image of the North” which researched the image of Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland among German students (see Schrödl, 2009). The outcome of this study shows a mainly positive image of the ‘North’, but image differences between the individual countries can also be seen here. In contrast to this, the image of the Baltic States is rather negative or to be more precise ‘not of interest’. Anholt (2007, p. 2) describes this disinterest in e.g. Latvia with the following sentence: ‘People I don’t want to know, living in a country I don’t want to visit, making things I don’t want to buy.’

**Images on a sub-regional level**

Clearly, these examples illustrate some of the difficulties that have to be overcome in order to build a common identity or image within the BSR. Nevertheless, it can only be repeated that ‘there is little evidence to support that there is a clear image of the region [i.e. BSR] in the public mind: the surveys and studies that have been carried out point in the same direction – there is no clear brand image, either internally or externally’ (Andersson, 2011, p. 86).

**No shared image or identity of the BSR (yet)**

Furthermore, Hess (2011) doubts that the above mentioned characteristics have the potential to form the basis for a common BSR identity. Instead, she suggests by citing Henningsen (2002) that it is rather the cultural, economic and political heterogeneity which is characteristic for the region and could possibly provide its unique trait and potential basis for a common identity.

Last but not least, it needs to be said that there are also good reasons for the non-existence of a common image or identity of the BSR. First of all, there is the large size of the BSR and secondly, the unclear definition of what actually constitutes the BSR (Hess, 2011).

Furthermore, Kalunzynska (2009) adds that 'the peoples around the Baltic Sea do not have a strong regional identity, and they do not know very much about each other'. This lack of knowledge can also be considered as one of the reasons for the lack of a shared identity among BSR residents.

### **Reasons for the lack of a common identity**

Originally, a further aim of the image analysis was to place special emphasis on the four focus areas of WP5 of the Agora 2.0 project, i.e. the Baltic Sea Red-Brick Gothic Route, Baltic Sea Castles, Baltic Sea Forest Products and Baltic Sea Moving Landscapes and to analyse what people have in mind when they think of these aspects. However, as the above results of the image analysis have shown, there is hardly any secondary data on an overall image or identity of the BSR, let alone on the specific images of the mentioned aspects.

What the image analysis has shown though with regard to these aspects is that red brick gothic, nature and landscapes as well as cultural highlights play a role within the shared characteristics of the BSR.

## 5. Conclusion and outlook

The previous section has shown that a common image or identity of the BSR does not (yet) exist. Nevertheless, several common traits or characteristics that are shared throughout the whole BSR were identified. Several of these common traits are based on culture and nature around the BSR and thus provide at least a small starting point for the marketing of heritage tourism in the BSR. Furthermore, it has been suggested that another common trait or characteristic of the BSR is actually its heterogeneity in a cultural, economic and political sense.

**Common characteristics especially within culture and nature**

Of course, it would be more beneficial for heritage tourism marketing within the BSR if there was a stronger common image or identity, but this is simply not the case yet. Andersson (2010, p. 10) also adds to this point by stating that 'it has been argued that this low visibility comes at a price: at a time when global competition between countries and regions is heating up, being unknown or having a weak image becomes a serious handicap'.

**Low visibility of the region = disadvantage**

Hence, until there is a common identity and image (in whatever way that may be achieved), tourism marketers can only try to profit from and build upon those common characteristics identified here and thereby also 'doing their bit' to strengthen the image of the BSR. By incorporating the identified characteristics into the marketing of BSR heritage tourism, i.e. integrating suitable aspects into product development and/or marketing communications, suppliers can try to profit from what little common ground there is with regard to a shared BSR image or identity.

**Marketing BSR heritage tourism**

The discussion clearly shows that more work needs to be done in order to achieve a common identity or image within the BSR. For approximately the past ten years this has been the aim of many projects in the BSR and it is also an aim of the AGORA 2.0 project, as stated in the beginning. Hence, one task within the project is to undertake a survey with the aim to find out identity forming characteristics of the Baltic Sea Region (see <http://www.bsr-identity.net/>). Furthermore, other projects in this direction are already being planned and Andersson (2011, p. 87) especially mentions the 'BaltMet Brand-ID' project which is planned for 2012 and will include 'a well-needed image study'. Hopefully, these surveys can shed some more light on the issue of a common image of the BSR.

**More research & more effort is needed**

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