**Doctoral School of
Business Administration**

THESES OF PH.D. DISSERTATION

Barbara JENES

Theoretical and Practical Issues in Measuring Country Image

Dimensions and Measurement Model of Country Image and Country Brand

Supervisor:

Dr. Judit SIMON
professor

Budapest, 2012

Department of Marketing Research and Consumer Behaviour

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CONTENTS

1. Focus of the dissertation and research questions

The following dissertation is about the defining and bulding a model to measure country image and country brand.

Academic literature has progressively discovered the field of country image since the 1960's, with special regards to defining the so-called *Country-of-Origin Effects* i.e. the effects that determine the choice and purchase of foreign products. Moreover a handful of sources study the field of *generic country image*. The majority of the publications are related to the marketing science although the subject is not exclusive to marketing-focused literature. The latest publications follow a new approach, focusing on *country image as brand value* and country branding. These most recent studies already consider national image to be something that can be positioned and valued on the marketplace, as can be products and brands. This approach has gained academic recognition through the formation of a distinct field of science. (Gertner, 2011)

Academic literature agrees that today, as a result of globalization, a conscious country branding strategy and creating a strong, positive internal and external country image is a main tool of competition between countries. (see e.g. Kotler et.al., 1993; Friedman, 1999; van Ham, 2002a; Anholt, 2002; Plavsak, 2003; deVicente, 2004; Jaffe – Nebenzahl, 2006) A successful appearance can be influenced and shaped by several methods and the quality of the resulting image is suitable to be measured and tested by appropriate scales. Thus *the goal of the present dissertation is to unveil all the relevant factors that have a significant influence in the evaluation of country image.* Another goal is to give a hint on whether a country ought to strengthen or weaken each of these in shaping an appropriate image. Moreover, a special emphasis is placed on the study of interaction effects between the dimensions and influence factors of country image and country brand.

Beside the *practical utility* of the dissertation it has a considerable added value to the *theoretical field*. The scientific interest of the dissertation lies in the combination of traditional measurement practices with new techniques (structural modeling) which not only has *methodological* effects but it also contributes to *theory building*. The methodology of structural modeling can be justified by a number of reasons. First, it is capable of addressing the complex research problem undertaken in the dissertation. Second, it was used to improve the validity of the theoretical model. Third, the use of structural modeling in the present field can be considered a novel methodology and therefore adds to the originality of the dissertation. The study contributes to the literature of complex country image analyses by unveiling the relationship between the dimensions of country image, the attributes of country brand and the value of country image and analyzing the theoretical, practical and methodological issues related to the measurement.

The research question: What factors influence the rating and measuring of country image and country brand, with special regard to the field of destination evaluation?

Sub-questions related to the main research question:
 i.   What are the relevant components of country image in the evaluation of a country?
 ii.   How can these components be organized and ranked based on their effect on the evaluation of a country?
 iii.   How can brand equity be interpreted in relation to a country and what value does it carry for stakeholders?
 iv.   What measurable effects does the image-building activity of a country have in the target audience's behavior? What additional fields can be subject to the effect thereof?
 v.   By what means can the image-building activity of a country and the effects thereof can be measured and quantified?
 vi.   How the value of country image can be quantified?

The main aim of the doctoral dissertation is to develop and test an extended Country Equity Model (CEM) which incorporates country image, elements of (country) brand equity and the effects of them on destination evaluation in one common, complex model.

The goal of our empirical research is to explore, within a complex model all the relationships and assumptions discovered in the literature that were further refined by the preliminary exploratory research phases. Beyond unveiling the dimensions of country image and the influencing factors of country equity, we aim to divide the equity of a country into factors of the cosumer-oriented approach as well as to identify the effects of country equity on destination choice. Beyond this practical significance, the present work's scientific contribution must not be ignored either. The brand equity approach account among the most recent advances in the field, and it is, for that matter, still relatively underdeveloped and is not, in some cases, devoid of contradictions.

The scientific importance of the present work lies in the fact that it combines traditional measurement methods with novel techniques (i.e. structural equation modeling and path analysis). That not only has methodological implications, but also contributes to theory building

2. Theoretical background

The dissertation is built upon several theoretical pillars. It addresses the issues of country image and its dimensions as well as those of country branding. Moreover it discusses several considerations on questions of measuring and methodology and introduces destination choice into its framework as an output (behavioral) variable for the study of interaction effects.

The framework of the empirical study is given by a synthesis of the above. The author strives to consolidate the different theoretical models by presenting their commonalities and also by including and studying all the factors that the literature agrees on being determining.

From the field of the study of **country image** the conceptual distinctions, dimensions and measurement and methodological issues are being treated. Three major concepts have to be distinguished within a study on country image: (1) *Product image* (PI), (2) *Country image* (CI) and (3) *Country of origin image* (COO or CoI). According to the above, one can find three main *types* of country image definitions: (1) *general definitions of country image*, (2) *product-country image* definitions and (3) definitions of *product image related to a country*.

The first group is that of overall country image (CI). The definitions thereof build upon the main aspects of the formation of a country image. They claim that a country image is an overall effect of a country's economic, political development, cultural, historical traditions and other factors. (see e.g. Bannister – Saunders, 1978; Desborde, 1990; Allred et.al., 1999). We delimited the area of country image in general as a starting point for the present dissertation.

As to the dimensions of country image, the following elements can be referred to as the *main dimensions* (according to the content analysis of relevant literature): (1) *economy*, (2) *politics*, (3) *history*, (4) *culture*, (5) *geographical attributes*, (6) *people*, (7) *resemblance*, (8) *feelings*.

One can define the following as *sub-categories*: (i) job market (in connection with the economic dimension), (ii) *international relations, conflicts* (in connection with the political background), (iii) *environment* (in connection with the country's geographical attributes).

The first five dimensions (economy, politics, history, culture, geographical attributes) can be referred to as cognitive elements whereas the remaining dimensions (the evaluation of and resemblance to a country's inhabitants, feelings) are the affective dimensions of the country image.

Literature on **country as a brand** strongly relies on *consumer-based brand equity* approaches (Aaker, 1991, 1996; Keller, 1993) and indirectly on the *associative network memory model* (Anderson, 1990, 1993). This latter stems from the field of cognitive psychology and was already used by Keller (1993) to develop the original brand equity model. According to Anderson (1993, in: Pappu-Quester, 2010, p. 277.) cosumers' memories store information hierarchically in a node-link structure, where, in some cases, to a given piece of information given associations would be joined. Accordingly, information about a country will lead to

associations which will be stored in a hierarchical order in consumers' minds, i.e. in a network. Each of these associations ca can have direction and strength and can therefore affect each other in several ways (e.g. having a bi-directional, back and forth effect between pieces of information and associations).

The associative memory model serves as an adequate base in understanding and defining the dimensions of the value of country image as a brand. This led to the birth of **country equity** theory which is *an extension of traditional brand equity theory to countries*. Country equity can be defined as the value of the associations of consumers when hearing the name of a country (Pappu – Quester, 2010). As a result one can define the factors of country equity as follows: (1) *country awareness*, (2) *country associations*, (3) *country loyalty* and (4) *perceived quality*.

The third main pillar of the dissertation is the field of **destination evaluation**. In the literature on country image it is generally accepted that the evaluation of a country or that of its inhabitants does have an effect on consumer behavior and decisions about, among others, product choice, investing and evaluating and choosing a destination. In order to unveil the aspects of the latter, the literature review dedicates a part on the study of the interaction effects of destination evaluation. It can be established that country image along with products' country-of-origin image and tourist destination image earlier were two distinct research areas (with each having a distinct academic literature and a community of researchers), a need has emerged lately (for the reasons presented above) to merge the two fields of study and to jointly research them (Mossberg – Kleppe, 2005; Nadeau. et.al. 2008).

The literature agrees on the fact that places' image has a strong effect on consumer behavior (Elliot et.al., 2011), when choosing, among others, a travel destination (Pearce, 1982; Woodside – Lysonski 1989).

Recent research on the topic shows that the attitude-based approach might offer a common ground in the joint study of the two research fields (Nadeau et.al., 2008). White (2004) points out that attitudes are a fair representation of places for research aiming to understand their effect on destination choices. It is widely accepted within the literature that destination image affects consumer perception, consumer behavior and destination choice (see e.g.: Hunt, 1975; Goodrich, 1978; Pearce, 1982; Woodside-Lysonski, 1989; Echtner-Ritchie, 1991; Chon, 1992; Milman-Pizam, 1995; Baloglu-McCleary, 1999; Chi-Qu, 2007; Tasci-Gartner, 2007). At the same time there are only a few examples of research on the relationship between country image and destination choice. *There is also no known example of a comprehensive empirical study on the effects of countries as brands on destination rating*.

The joint study of country image and touristic image can be based on the approach followed by Nejad and Winsler (2000) who defined image as a hierarchically built mental representation. Following this reasoning, Elliot et al. (2011, p. 523.) state that this can effect that "a country's overall image [...] might influence its image as a destination". This
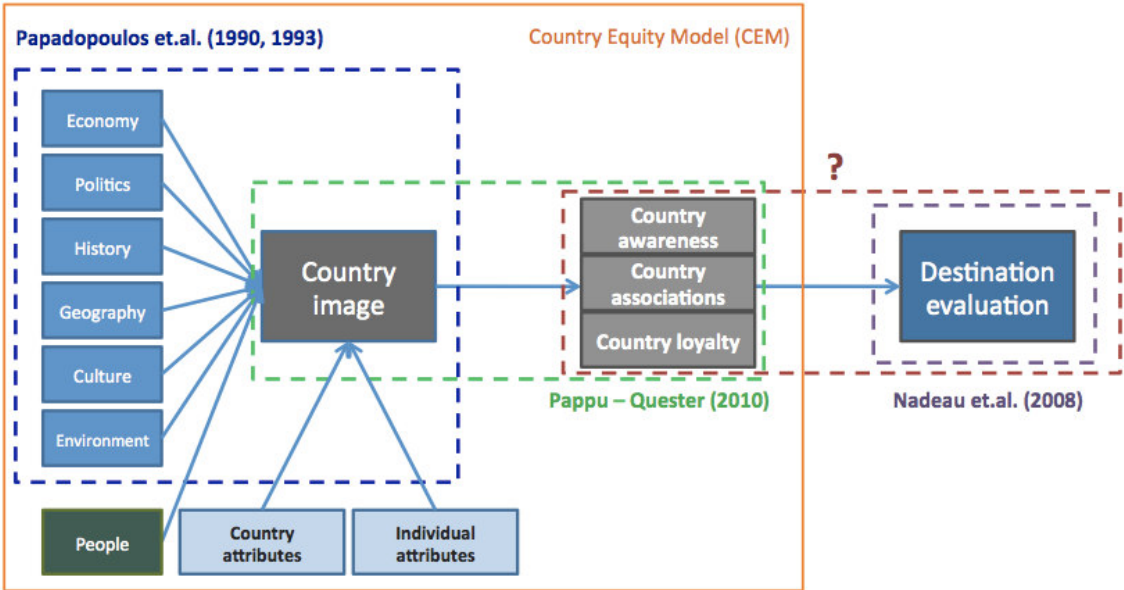
relationship might surface under several ways. According to a first pool of authors, consumer behavior influences the evaluation of a country (Baloglu-McCleary 1999; Beerli-Martin 2004a, 2004b) while others characterize country image as an independent variable that influences the behavior of individuals (Murphy-Pritchard-Smith, 2000; Bigné-Sanchez-Sanchez, 2001; Nadeau et al., 2008).

Based on the pool of research presented beforehand and the level of development of this field of study one can argue that it is still underdeveloped as much in empirical studies as in a methodological point of view. Above all, the theories presented in the dissertation can be subject to substantial criticism. For this reason, while embracing relevant parts of country image theory, in an aim to contribute to theory building the present dissertation addresses and focuses exclusively on the constructs of and relationship between country image and destination evaluation and studies the influencing factors of the latter.

The use in most recent publications of *structural equation modeling* and the aim by researchers of the field to examine new connections and to elaborate new models by merging (already studied, tested, validated) models all add to the present dynamics of the field. This merging of research models as well as the inclusion of latent variables with indicators into new models are of common practice in this research area (see e.g.: Nadeau et.al., 2008; Elliot et.al. 2011; Pappu – Quester – Cooksey, 2007; Pappu – Quester, 2010).

Figure 1. shows a simplified theoretical model that serves as an initial framework for the dissertation.

Figure 1: Initial theoretical model
(Source: own elaboration, 2011)

3. Methods of research

As presented beforehand, most empirical studies on places as brands are short of complex study methodology. Zenker (2011) points out in his literature review that complex, i.e. mixed methods are required in the research on places as brands.

Mixed method (multi-method) research design is not new within social sciences. Literature on research methodology in social sciences agrees on the fact that the design of a study is determined above all by its goals and the research questions involved (Crotty, 1998; Babbie, 2001; Malhotra, 2002).

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2006 p. 11.) consider that a study is based on a mixed-method study when it includes both qualitative and quantitative methods for data acquisition and analysis in either parallel or sequential phases. The combined use of different research methodologies in the research process holds a number of advantages. It can help in better responding to the research questions and in drawing conclusions. One is able to draw better and stronger conclusions in case the chosen methods for the research complete and reinforce each other through overcoming potential weaknesses and limitations of each individual method (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2006).

Considering the prospects and directions and the underdeveloped state of the subject, *the use of a mixed-method research design in the present dissertation turned out to be justified and instrumental.* Moreover the mixed-method research design enabled the better understanding of each research question and the better determining, in every stage, of an appropriate subsequent research phase.

The mixed-method research has been carried out as follows. In a first phase we proceeded to exploratory quantitative studies followed by another exploratory phase, this time, qualitative. This qualitative phase enabled us to better comprehend the results of the preceding phase and to prepare a subsequent quantitative phase. The second quantitative research phase served as a direct theoretical and empirical preparation of and pre-study for the final model. This phase was once again followed by a supporting qualitative phase. The sequential built-up of the research process which thus included both qualitative and quantitative phases (carried out gradually) led to prepare and support the final stage of our research, i.e. the test of the research model.

A thorough analysis of the theoretical background on the subject preceded the empirical research with a role in supporting theory building and preparing the design of the research model. Considering that the dissertation mostly follows a conceptual approach the content analysis of the relevant literature can be considered a first main, exploratory research phase. During this we unveiled the dimensions of country image and country as a brand which enabled model building.

The first exploratory quantitative research was carried out in March 2008 by the study of the dimensions of country image and the relationship thereof with other factors. The research sample was composed of Hungarian, full-time students of the Corvinus University of Budapest (CUB) (N=339). As a second part of this research phase, in March 2009 the same questionnaire was used in English on a sample of CUB's foreign students (N=106). The goal of this second study was to compare the results of the two culturally different samples in order to extract and test the most important relationships.

The first quantitative stage was followed by a qualitative phase. The aim of this was to elaborate on the understanding of the results gathered in the first phase and to further refine the preliminary hypotheses and supposed system of relationships. In this phase we proceeded to a focus group study (3 focus groups of respectively 5, 5 and 6 Hungarian, full-time students of CUB) in September-October 2009.

A first test of the questionnaire and proposed model followed. Beforehand, the questionnaire had been translated, back-translated adapted (if relevant) and the results of the previous qualitative phase were equally taken into account. The questionnaire was filled out by a sample of Hungarian, full-time students of CUB between October 2010 and January 2011 (second quantitative phase).

After this phase and following a validation of its results we proceeded to a series of expert interviews in the aim of refining the hypotheses and expert validating the used and to-be-used methodology (third qualitative phase).

The following experts were interviewed:
- László ACZÉL (CEO, Young&Rubicam) – member of The Board of Country Image (Országmárka Tanács), research on Hungary's country image
- Péter BÍRÓ (BP International Business Promotion) – consultant, instructor, several publications in measuring brand equity
- Róbert BRAUN (CEO, Braun&Partners) – Brand Israel Project, consultant
- Emőke HALASSY (Director of Research, Magyar Turizmus Zrt.) – research projects in the field of touristic image
- Ákos KOZÁK (GfK Hungária, CEO) – researcher, several publications on measuring country image
- Erzsébet MALOTA (Corvinus University of Budapest) – instructor, researcher, several publications on country image and country-of-origin image
- Árpád PAPP-VÁRY (director, Institute of Marketing, Budapest College of Communication) – instructor, researcher, several publications on country branding, member of The Board of Country Image
- György SZONDI (Leeds University) – instructor, researcher, consultant, several publications on Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding

The *final test of the research model* was carried out in December 2011 on a representative sample of the Hungarian population aged 18-69 (N=600).

The *questionnaire of final research included an identical pool of questions for two countries*: beyond Germany, that had been proved to be adequately measurable, the control group responses were about Croatia.

The following table presents each research phase, their goals and the used samples.

Table 1: Phases of the empirical research

(Source: own table, 2012)

PHASE	MODE	GOAL OF STUDY	METHODOLOGY	DATE	SAMPLE
1.	Qualitative	Preparing the model, unveiling dimensions of country image	Content analysis	Feb. 2008.	Analysis of 35 studies
1.	Quantitative	Testing dimensional model of country image	Self-administered questionnaire (in Hungarian)	March 2008.	n=399 (CUB, Hungarian students)
1.	Quantitative	Testing dimensional model of country image	Self-administered questionnaire (in English)	March 2009.	n=106 (CUB, foreign students)
2.	Qualitative	Study of country brand and interaction effects	3 focus group interviews	Sep.– Oct. 2009.	n=5, 5, and 6 (CUB students)
2.	Quantitative	Test of scale	Online query	Oct. 2010. – Jan. 2011.	n=390 (CUB students)
3.	Qualitative	Expert validation of results and assumptions	Semi-structured expert in-depth interviews	Sep.-Dec. 2011.	n=8 (researchers in fields of country image and country brand)
3.	Quantitative	Test of hypotheses and of model (country equity, destination evaluation)	Online query (representative for pop. aged 18-69)	Dec. 2011.	n=600

4. Results of the dissertation

The aim of the dissertation was to analyze within one empirical framework the theory and influencing factors of country equity and the theory of destination evaluation. Based on the literature review, the objective was to build and undertake a first test of a model that can be widely used to describe the dimensions, influencing factors and interaction effects of country equity (Country Equity Model, CEM).

4.1. Theses and results of the empirical research

Hypotheses related to the research model were tested during the third quantitative research phase. The hypotheses of the dissertation and the results of the tests of hypothesis are summarized in Table 2. The structural models on both sample are presented in Figures 2-3. Statistical analyses were undertaken using SPSS 18.0 and AMOS 18.0 software.

Table 2: Hypotheses of the dissertation and results of the tests of hypothesis.

(Source: own table, 2012)

	HYPOTHESIS	ACCEPTED?
H1	The role and weight of each dimension of country image varies according to the given country.	YES
H1a	There exists a formative casual relationship between country image and its dimensions.	YES
H2	The evaluation of the inhabitants of a given country has a positive influence on the evaluation of the country.	YES
H2a	Country associations have a positive effect on the evaluation (image) of people.	YES
H3	Country image is influenced, beyond the uncovered dimensions, by additional factors, peculiar to the given country.	YES
H3a	Country size has a positive effect on country image.	YES
H3b	The relative distance of the destination country from the home country has a negative effect of the country image of the former.	NO
H4	Country image is influenced, beyond the uncovered dimensions, by additional individual factors.	NO
H4a	Gender influences the evaluation of a country: female have more positive views on country image.	NO
H4b	Declared income positively influences the evaluation of a country (country image).	NO
H4c	Declared self-esteem positively influences the evaluation of a country (country image)	NO
H4d	Individuals' having lived abroad positively influences the evaluation of a country. (country image)	NO
H5	Measurable factors of country equity are: country associations, country image, country awareness, country loyalty.	YES
H5a	Country awareness positively influences country associations.	YES
H5b	Country image positively influences country associations.	YES
H5c	Country awareness positively influences country loyalty.	YES
H5d	Country associations positively influence country loyalty.	YES
H6	Elements of country equity have a positive influence on destination evaluation.	YES
H6a	Country image has a positive influence on destination evaluation.	YES
H6b	Country loyalty has a positive influence on destination evaluation	YES
H6c	Country associations positively affect destination evaluation.	YES

Figure 2: Structural research model (German sample)
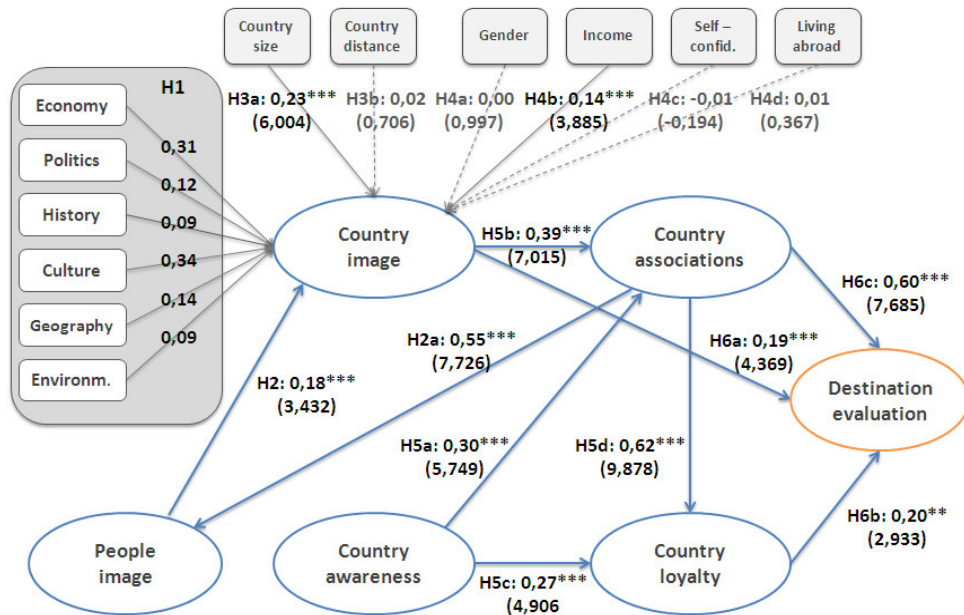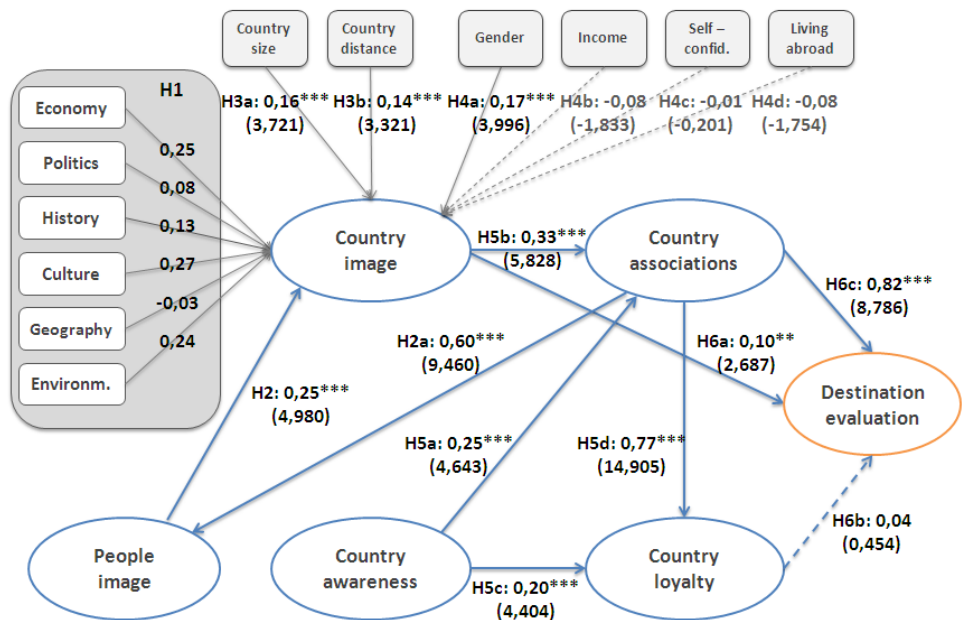(Source: own elaboration, 2012)

Figure 3: Structural research model (Croatian sample)
(Source: own elaboration, 2012)

Bold lines are indicating significant pathes (p<0.05), the dashed line is indicating the insignificant path *** p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05, t values in parantheses

The evaluation of country as a brand was measured and tested based on the model designed by Pappu and Quester (2010). Structural modeling was preceded by a confirmatory factor analysis during which the goodness of fit and significance of the measured variables and of their indicators was tested. The original model is a five-dimensional construct composed of country awareness, macro country image, micro country image, perceived quality and country loyalty (Pappu-Quester, 2010, p. 276.). To build their model the authors used and adapted well known scales that had already been tested and validated in previous studies. In our research the items of the scale has been developed according to the focus and specialities of the research model.

According to the above, the variables used in the model are as follows:

Country image within country equity models is described as "the total of all descriptive, inferential, and informational beliefs about a particular country".(Martin – Eroglu, 1993, p. 193.) Pappu and Quester (2010) in their model use the same approach.

"Publications generally embrace [country image's] multidimensional nature [...]. The cognitive, affective/evaluative, and conative phases of attitude formation are represented through the beliefs about a country and its products (cognitive), the feelings towards it and its products (affective), and behavioral intentions to purchase its products […] (conative)" (Nadeau et.al., 2008, p. 87.). Studies on country image found a direct relationship between country evaluation and the evaluation of its inhabitants several times. Therefore Nadeau et.al. (2008) in their study examine country character and people character as two separate entities.

"[P]eople-beliefs may be best represented using two groups: character and competency beliefs" (Nadeau et.al., 2008, p. 88.)

According to Pappu and Quester (2010, p. 278.), "country awareness, country associations, perceived quality and country loyalty are the four dimensions of country equity". In our research the perceived quality item has been eliminated according to its product-level focus as the research model was developed on general level of attributes.

Country awareness not only means that consumers are merely aware of a country, but their "ability to recognize or recall that the country is a producer of certain product category" (Pappu – Quester, 2010, p. 280.)

In connection with *country loyalty*, Paswan et al. (2003) state that similarly to brand loyalty, one can formulate a loyalty towards countries. In their study, Pappu and Quester (2010, p. 280.) based on the definition by Yoo and Donthu (2001, p. 3.) define country loyalty as "the tendency to be loyal to a focal country as demonstrated by the intention to buy products from the country as a primary choice". In our research we transformed the item to a general meaning of country brand loyalty, instead of loyalty in connection with products. developed item in the scale, based on the original one by Pappu – Quester, 2010)

According to Keller (1993), a relevant approach to *country associations* is the general view that consumers' brand associations contribute to a brand's equity. In their adaptation of this

view, Pappu and Quester (2010, p. 280.) state that "country equity benefits from consumers' country-of-origin related associations" and define "country-of-origin associations' as descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs one holds in memory about a particular country" In our understanding the country associations are in connection with countries instead of products or brand (developed item in the scale, based on the original one by Pappu – Quester, 2010)

In connection with *destination evaluation*, Nadeau et.al. (2008, p. 86.) state that "the image of a place influences touristic decisions" (see also: Hunt, 1975; Baloglu – McCleary, 1999; Tapachai – Waryszak, 2000). In their view, destination evaluation comprises destination attributes as well as evaluations of personal experience or satisfaction. (Nadeau et.al., 2008)

Moderating effects include individual and country-specific elements.

Individual elements include the attributes tested in the previous chapters, like income situation, gender or self-confidence.

The country-related elements include country size and its perceived distance

The indicators of fit of the model are shown in Table 3. According to Table 3, the model adequately fits the data and therefore has been accepted.

Table 3: Indicators of fit of the model

(Source: own table, 2012)

INDICATOR	GERMANY	CROATIA
CMIN/df (≤ 3)	2,466	2,497
NFI ($\geq 0,90$)	0,910	0,905
CFI ($\geq 0,90$)	0,919	0,913
RMSEA ($\leq 0,06$)	0,059	0,060

Results showed that all items did not fit the model adequately and thus were excluded. However according to the results, the *scale is valid and reliable and it is suitable to be used to measure country image and its dimensions.* The scale was further adapted in order for the model to be fully suitable to measure country equity and to be a valid measurement tool to assess each dimension thereof. In summary, in can be stated that *the goodness of fit of the model is adequate and therefore the model is accepted.* All hypotheses related to the assumed relationships within the model were accepted and all but some hypotheses related to the influencing factors were accepted.

4.2. Main conclusions of the dissertation

The results of the doctoral research **confirm the complex model of country image, country equity and destination evaluation as well as the combination of the three constructs**. **Country image can indeed be defined as an explanatory variable for determining country equity** and equally for destination rating, in accordance with the results of previous studies (Nadeau et.al., 2008; Pappu – Quester, 2010). At the same time, these studies all rated the models of the different sub-fields separately and used own or adapted scales. Some major result of the present study are the use of scales specifically adapted to the subject, the study of all sub-fields within one comprehensive model and the use (and confirmed importance of the use) of theoretical variables.

The model includes six main variables into the research model and all six were revealed to be of significant effect. The doctoral research was led to **a joint study of the aforementioned three fields** by the recognition of the lack of the related theoretical background and an aim to explore this unstudied area. The ultimate goal of the present doctoral dissertation was to design a model suitable to be used in a wide context that is able to empirically test the theoretically validated elements from the literature. **The doctoral research therefore acts as a first elaboration and test of a Country Equity Model (CEM) in the context of destinations.**

To answer our main research question (What factors influence the rating and measuring of country image and country brand, with special regard to the field of destination evaluation?), our research did confirm that the dimensions of country equity do have a determining effect on destination evaluation. **Results confirm that the country equity model (CEM) provides a useful theoretical framework for the study and interpretation of country image and destination evaluation.**

The approach according to which *country image is an element and not an antecedent of country equity* was further tested before being accepted. **The validated dimensions of the country equity construct are as follows: country image, country awareness, country associations, country loyalty.** Given that previous studies of country image and country equity have not studied in a complex manner the relationships between these dimensions, our results account for an important indication as to the future potential use of these.

The development and foundation of **an extended approach to the concept of brand equity** marks another significant theoretical contribution. Previous analyses on country equity mostly considered the concept in a country-of-origin context by expressing the value of a country brand through products' brand equity. The present dissertation gets ahead of this approach and argues that country brands have a raison d'être beyond being a part of product brand equity, on their own, and that the value of a country as a brand can be expressed the same way a consumer brand's value can be.

According to the results of the doctoral research it can be said that there is no evidence in the literature of the study of the effect of country image's influencing factors even though they might have an effect on the evaluation of countries, independently of the behavioral output. Therefore our results account for an important achievement in the field as they confirm the important role of the influencing factors (individual and country attributes) within the analysis of a complex situation of evaluation.

Following a systematic analysis of these influencing factors, one can state that *country size has a significant positive effect and the distance from the destination country a significant negative effect on country image*. These results add to the practical utility of the research.

Among the individual factors taken into consideration, *gender turned out to have a significant effect on the evaluation of countries,* with women being more prone to give a more positive evaluation of a country than men. *Respondents' income situation equally showed a significant positive effect on the evaluation of country image*: Results show *that respondents' declared level of self-confidence and a previous, prolonged stay abroad do not significantly influence countries' evaluation*. These results equally add to the practical utility of our research.

The *theoretical significance* of the dissertation is **the development of the concept of country image by unveiling, aggregating and analyzing the dimensions and influencing factors thereof.** This can represent an added value, both in the international and the Hungarian literature, in the sense that no work is known to have been published that goes beyond a literature review and provides and empirical test and structural modeling of the area.

The development and foundation of **an extended approach to the concept of brand equity** marks another significant theoretical contribution. **The inclusion of destination evaluation into the approaches of country image and country branding is also a relevant and novel approach** thus further contributing to theory development and to tracing the directions to follow in the area.

The hybrid methodological approach followed during the doctoral research allowed a more complex and multi-faceted analysis of the subject, which makes it one of its methodological strengths. This procedure is equally in line with the recommendations from the literature (see e.g. Zenker, 2011) **Another methodological added value provided by the present dissertation is the methodological and substantive adaptation to the field of country equity of the consumer-focused brand equity items. On the other hand the structural analysis equally accounts for a methodological significance in the field of country image and country branding**.

The practical significance of the dissertation is that **the multi-method research design, the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches largely contributed to unveil the mechanisms of action of the evaluation of countries as well as the effect thereof on destination evaluation.**

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6. Publications related to the topic of the dissertation

Book chapter	
	Malota Erzsébet - Kelemen Kata (szerk.)(2011): Nemzetközi marketing a hazai gyakorlatban. Pearson Publishing, Harlow, Essex. pp. 53-57.
Article	
Barbara Jenes	Az országimázs alakításának lehetőségei. Marketing és Menedzsment, 2005/2. szám, pp. 18-29.
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Barbara Jenes	A 'pusztaromantika' helye a magyar országimázsban Kilátások az Országmárka Tanács megalakulása kapcsán Marketing és Menedzsment, 2009/2. szám, pp. 64-72.
International conference (presentation/proceedings)	
Barbara Jenes Erzsébet Malota Judit Simon	Reconsidering the Measurement of Country Image and Country Branding – Theory and Practice „Marketing Theory Challenges in Transitional Societies" Conference, Zagreb (HR), 2008. szeptember 26-27. pp. 99-107.
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Hungarian conference (presentation/proceedings)	
Barbara Jenes	Az országimázs mérésének elméleti és gyakorlati kérdései Tavaszi Szél Konferencia, Budapest, 2008. május 23-25. pp. 560-570.
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