

# **Destination Imagery of Kosovo as a Tourism Destination**

A study to the destination imagery of international potential tourists



Prizren, Kosovo. August 19, 2017.  
Photo by Kim Janssen

## **Master Thesis**

by

**Kim Janssen**

Master's degree in Human Geography: Cultural Geography & Tourism

Radboud University, Nijmegen

The Netherlands

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S4361989

## **Abstract**

The present study aimed to investigate the destination imagery that international potential tourists have of Kosovo as a tourism destination, that is, cognitive, affective, and distinctive attributes that they associate with Kosovo. A qualitative stage first captured relevant attributes associated with Kosovo by potential tourists, as well as by tourists because of the added value of tourists in the promotion of Kosovo to potential tourists. A quantitative stage subsequently measured for potential tourists the association strength and association valence of these attributes. It also aimed to identify their intention to visit Kosovo, how positive or negative their overall image is, and what information sources formed their imagery. Methods included online questionnaires with qualitative and quantitative items and content analysis of travel blogs. The results showed that safety and a weak imagery are the main issues that should be addressed by tourism managers. Positive associations included that Kosovo is not a standard destination and that it is not touristy, while negative associations were related to the war and conflicts or political instability. The results were finally discussed from their practical point of view in promoting Kosovo to potential tourists.

**Keywords:** destination imagery, destination image, Kosovo, international potential tourists, behavioural intentions.

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# 1. Introduction

Kosovo is a country situated in South-Eastern Europe, bordering Albania to the southwest, Montenegro to northwest, Serbia to northeast, and North Macedonia to the south. It is the smallest country in the Balkan. In 2018, it had an overall population of 1,907,592 people of which a large amount lived in the capital, Pristina. Kosovo is more densely populated than neighbour countries and in 2011, more than half of the population (61.7%) lived in rural areas. Ethnic groups that live in Kosovo, based on numbers from 2011, are Albanian (91%), Serbian (3.4%), and Others (5.6%) and the main language that is spoken in Kosovo is Albanian (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2018). The majority of the population is Muslim (95.6%), followed by Roman Catholic (2.2%) (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). Kosovo has a continental climate, meaning hot summers and cold winters which range between 30+ degrees in summer and -10 degrees in winter, and a mountainous scenery, especially around its borders, including the Sharr Mountains (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2018). Kosovo's citizens are the second poorest in Europe, after Moldova, and the country has an unemployment rate of 33%, and a youth unemployment rate near 60% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019).

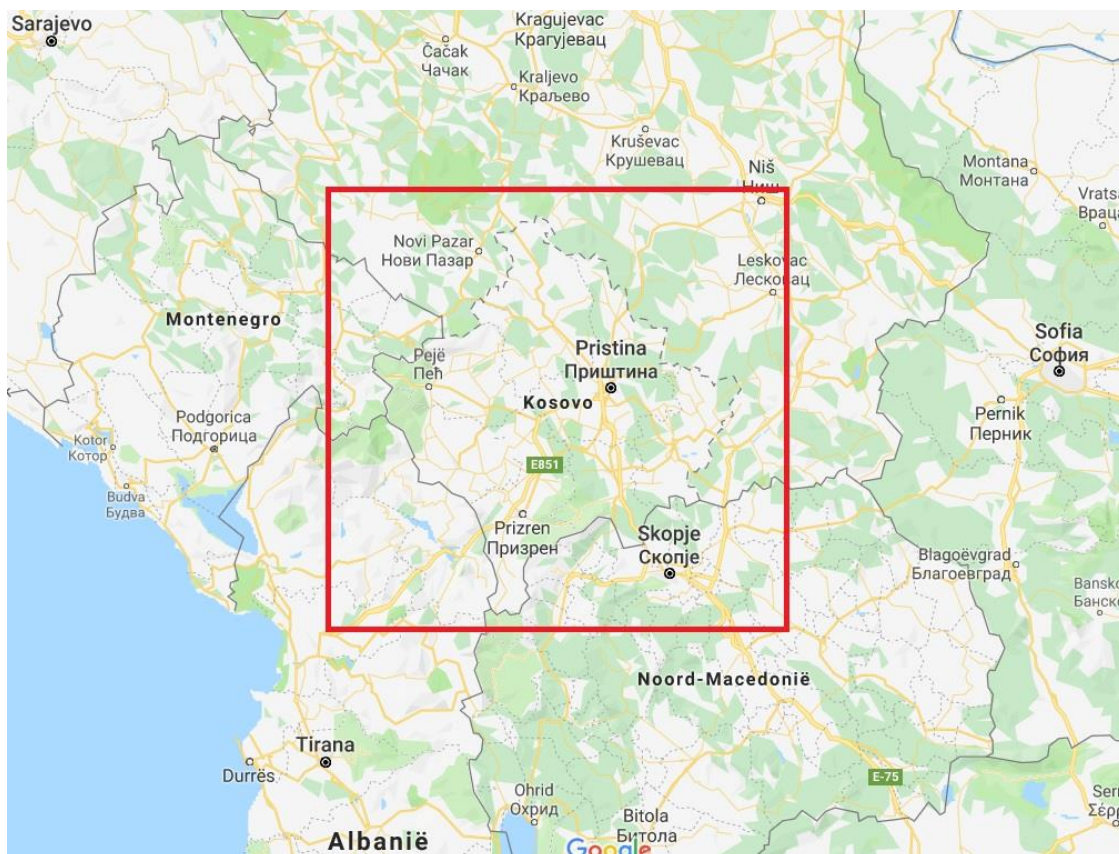


Figure 1: Kosovo's geographical location in Southeastern Europe (Google Maps, 2019).



Kosovo has many historical and cultural sites. Several of the most significant ones are the medieval Serbian Orthodox monasteries including the Dečani Monastery (Gračanica, near Pristina), the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery (Pejë), and the Church of the Virgin of Ljeviša (near Prizren). All three of them are part of the UNESCO World Heritage ("Medieval Monuments in Kosovo," n.d.). Furthermore, it has several old mosques (e.g. the Sinan Pasha Mosque in Prizren), traditional bazaars (e.g. The Old Bazaar in Gjakova), and picturesque small towns (e.g. Prizren). Some natural attractions include the Rugova Canyon (near Pejë), the Marble Cave (a limestone cave near Pristina). Additionally it has several museums (e.g. the Kosovo Museum and the Ethnological Museum, both in Pristina), war memorial sites (e.g. Memorial Complex Adem Jashari near Skënderaj), Prizren Fortress (Prizren), and several statues (e.g. a statue of Bill Clinton and a statue of Mother Theresa who was Albanian, both in Pristina). Lastly, the Newborn Monument in Pristina is one of the main tourist attractions of Kosovo which was unveiled on the day that Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia and every year on the day of the anniversary of Kosovo's independence it is repainted in a new theme.

### **1.1 Kosovo's history**

To contribute to a better understanding of the overall study, Kosovo's history will be briefly discussed in this section. Kosovo knows a history of war and armed conflicts. In late February 1998, the Kosovo War breaks out in Kosovo. Ethnic Albanians in the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) opposed the ethnic Serbs and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (i.e. Serbia and Montenegro) which controlled Kosovo until then. On March 24, 1999, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) began air strikes against Serbian military targets. In response, Yugoslav and Serbian forces drove out all of Kosovo's ethnic Albanians, displacing hundreds of thousands of people into Albania, North Macedonia, and Montenegro ("Kosovo conflict," 2019) which is known as the greatest displacement of a European population since World War II (Dhima, 2019). March 24, 1999 is an important day for Kosovo as it paved the way to its liberation from Serbia (Dhima, 2019). In June 1999, the war ends with a peace accord between NATO and Yugoslavia. Consequently, nearly one million ethnic Albanians and another 500 thousand displaced within the province return while most Serbs leave the region. Despite the war being over, UN peacekeeping forces are deployed in Kosovo to supervise. On February 17, 2008, Kosovo unilaterally



declares its independence from Serbia and a new country is born (“Kosovo conflict,” 2019). As of 2018, 108 member states of the United Nations recognised the sovereignty of Kosovo including 23 members of the European Union. Among the countries that do not recognize is Serbia (“Which Countries Recognize Kosovo?,” n.d.). Serbia still considers it as part of their country. Kosovo, officially Republic of Kosovo, is therefore the youngest country of Europe and with 53% of the population under the age of 25, it also has the youngest population of Europe (*EU Assistance to Kosovo*, n.d.). While the war is over, it is still under UN supervision nowadays and tensions between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo still continue to this day with sporadic violence every now and then (“Kosovo conflict,” 2019).

## **1.2 Personal experience with Kosovo**

Kosovo’s history of war and conflict and the sporadic violent outbreaks still negatively impact the perceptions about the country, which I know from personal experience. The first time I visited Kosovo was in 2015 and I have been going back every year ever since and I even had the opportunity to live in Kosovo for several months in 2018. The first thing that people always ask me when they hear I was in Kosovo is: “Is it safe?” or “Is it not dangerous there?”. And the second thing they always ask is: “Why would you go there? What can you even do there?”. The first two associations that come to people’s minds about Kosovo is that it is not very safe and that there is not much to do for tourists. This is such a shame, because it has so much potential as a successful tourism destination. It has plenty of things to offer for everyone. From nature and stunning natural attractions to outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, or swimming in one of its beautiful lakes. And from visiting historical and cultural sites to just relaxing with a cup of tea or coffee in one of its many cafes and bars. But maybe the best thing about Kosovo is its atmosphere. Kosovo has such a vibrant and cosy atmosphere, full of friendly, curious, and very hospitable people, and vibrant cities with plenty of bars, cafes, and restaurants that are filled with people at all times of the day and in the evening, especially during summer months. The people there really made me feel at home. It is really a misconception that Kosovo has not much to offer and that it is not safe. I personally never felt unsafe once. I was curious to the perceptions that people outside my personal environment have of Kosovo which sparked my interest to write this thesis about the

destination imagery that individuals who have never visited Kosovo have of Kosovo as a tourism destination.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

Unfortunately, war and political unrest leave a country with the negative imagery of a war-torn and ravaged country crime and negatively impact the tourism industry in a country (Reka, 2014; Sönmez, 1998). According to Hall (1994), war and political instability tend to dominate the minds of potential tourists as peace, safety, and calmness are not guaranteed, regardless of a country's tourism attractions (in Reka, 2014; Sönmez, 1998). As a result, potential tourists tend to choose other destinations that are safer and with which they have more favourable associations. Nevertheless, tourism is considered to be essential in helping to overcome the negative imagery and build up the economy (Reka, 2014; Vitic & Ringer, 2008). Begolli Dauti (2013) adds that one of the priorities for economic development in Kosovo is tourism. Kosovo's international tourism product is, however, of little significance (Hall & Brown, 2017) with only a total of 86,032 foreign visitors in 2017 (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2017). This means that Kosovo should attract more tourists, while also retaining current tourists, emphasising the need for Kosovo to establish a strong position in the competitive global tourism market. According to Hunt (1975), a critical component for a successful tourism destination is destination image (imagery). To become a successful tourism destination, understanding the destination imagery that potential tourists have of the destination is crucial (Shapoval, Wang, Hara, & Shioya, 2017), because it helps in understanding their behavioural intentions, i.e. intention to visit the destination (Kock et al., 2016). To my knowledge, there is only one study to date that aimed to investigate the imagery that potential tourists have of Kosovo as a tourism destination, namely the study by Reka (2011). This study measured potential tourists' perceptions of several "common" destination attributes rather than capturing Kosovo's specific destination imagery, i.e. the imagery that is specific to Kosovo and varies for different destinations. In addition, this study dates from 2011 so perceptions might have changed in the meantime. As such, more research is needed on the specific destination imagery that potential tourists have of Kosovo as a tourism destination. Finally, it is important to clarify a few terms that are used in the present study. Two common terms that are used in the extant literature to refer to individuals who never visited

a particular destination are *non-visitors* and *potential tourists*. The present study uses *potential tourists*, and *tourists* is used to refer to those who did visit Kosovo. The term *destination imagery* is used to refer to all associations that individuals have with Kosovo (Kock et al., 2016).

#### **1.4 Significance of the study**

The findings of the present study have practical implications for tourism managers or destination marketers and others concerned with the promotion of Kosovo as a tourism destination. An understanding of the destination imagery that potential tourists have of Kosovo as a tourism destination will help them identify the nature and sources of this (unfavourable) imagery as well as strengths and weaknesses in this imagery, or even lacking imagery. This knowledge can subsequently be utilised in the development or improvement of marketing strategies to improve the imagery projected in the promotion of Kosovo as a tourism destination to potential tourists and consequently trigger positive behavioural intentions (Kock et al., 2016; Lee, 2009; Selby & Morgan, 1996). Since tourists have a direct experience of the destination, they have a more differentiated and truer comprehension of the destination than potential tourists (Prayag, 2009). It might therefore be valuable to identify (favourable) attributes in their destination imagery of Kosovo and utilise these to project a favourable, yet realistic and true representation of the destination to potential tourists. Selby and Morgan (1996) similarly state that understanding the differences between the imageries of potential tourists and tourists is invaluable for tourism marketing planning. The present study furthermore adds to the literature by investigating the specific destination imagery of a country that has not received much attention in tourism studies thus far.

#### **1.5 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is twofold: The first purpose is to identify the destination imagery that potential tourists have of Kosovo as a tourism destination and to understand why they have that imagery (e.g. where it comes from or what it is based on). It also aims to identify (favourable) attributes in tourists' destination imagery of Kosovo because of the value they have in promoting Kosovo to potential tourists. The second purpose is to identify and understand the behavioural intention of potential tourists to visit

Kosovo. Finally, the practical implications of the findings is discussed in terms of their utilisation in marketing strategies to attract potential tourists to the destination.

### **1.6 Research questions and objectives**

This study was based on the following two main questions:

1. What is the destination imagery that tourists and in particular potential tourists have of Kosovo as a tourism destination and why do potential tourists have this imagery?
2. What are the behavioural intentions of potential tourists, i.e. their intention to visit Kosovo?

The following objectives were formulated to be able to answer these questions:

- To identify the cognitive associations that tourists and potential tourists mentally link to Kosovo as a tourism destination;
- To identify the affective associations that tourists and potential tourists mentally link to Kosovo as a tourism destination;
- To identify distinctive attributes that tourists and potential tourists associate with Kosovo as a tourism destination;
- To understand and describe why potential tourists have that imagery of Kosovo;
- To identify and understand the behavioural intention of potential tourists to visit Kosovo;
- To identify which information sources formed the imagery of potential tourists;
- To identify how positive or negative the potential tourists' overall image of Kosovo is;
- To discuss the findings from their practical point of view in attracting potential tourists;

### **1.7 Outline of the study**

This study consists of six chapters. The first chapter is the introduction chapter which provides some background information about Kosovo and the subject, and states the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions and objectives, and the significance of the study. The second chapter is a review of previous literature on destination image and presents relevant definitions, concepts, and outlines for the present study. The third chapter explains the methodology, methods for data collection, respondents,

data sources, the strategy to data collection, and methods for data analysis. The fourth chapter presents the findings of the research and the fifth chapter provides a discussion of these findings and discusses the practical implications of these findings. Lastly, the sixth chapter is the conclusion that summarises the study and findings, and discusses the limitations and recommendations for future research.

## **2. Conceptual framework and literature review**

This chapter will present and discuss definitions and concepts that are relevant to the present study. It will also identify the gaps in the extant literature which the present study aims to fill and present the outline to measure the destination imagery of Kosovo which is based on prior studies.

### **2.1 Destination imagery versus destination image**

Destination image has been defined in many ways in the literature, but there is no consensus on the exact definition of ‘destination image’ because it is such a fuzzy concept (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Kock et al., 2016; Lai & Li, 2016; Prayag, 2009). A general agreement in the literature is that a destination image is a mental representation of the destination in the individual’s mind (Kock et al., 2016). According to Josiassen, Assaf, Woo, and Kock (2016), the issue of defining destination image is that the term is often used in the extant literature to refer to two conceptually different concepts. Some studies focus on the range of associations and thus conceptualise destination image as a host of attributes that individuals mentally link to a destination. Cai (2002), for example, defined it as “perceptions about the place as reflected by the associations held in tourist memory” (p. 723). Others, on the other hand, focus on the summary nature of such associations and are interested in the overall image which represents a mental shortcut for the range of associations used to make decisions (Kock et al., 2016). Definitions that belong to this latter group include one of the most commonly cited definitions, that by Crompton (1979) who defined destination image as “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination” (as cited in Gallarza, Saura, & Garcíá, 2002, p. 60). Gartner (1986) argued that an individual’s perceptions of destination attributes will interact to form an overall image (in Josiassen et al., 2016) and likewise, Kotler, Haider and Rein (1993) defined it as a “simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with the place” (as cited in Pike & Ryan, 2004, p. 4). These definitions suggest that an individual has a range of beliefs, feelings, perceptions, and impressions about a destination, i.e. associations, and that the sum of these associations represents the overall image of the destination. Josiassen et al. (2016) argue that these two perspectives are concerned with ‘destination imagery’ and ‘destination image’ respectively. Therefore, they suggest to use the term

destination imagery to refer to “an individual’s diverse cognitive and affective associations relating to a destination” (as cited in Kock et al., 2016, p. 32) and destination image to refer to “an individual’s overall evaluative representation of a destination” (p. 31).

There are three things to point out regarding destination imagery: (1) associations may differ per individual and per destination, thus destination imagery reflects destination-specific associations; (2) as the definition explicitly states, associations can include both cognitive and affective associations; (3) associations (e.g. ‘relaxing’, ‘beautiful scenery’) do not necessarily imply whether the individual’s overall image of the destination is positive or negative. While destination imagery is descriptive in nature –associations are simply a way to describe a destination– the overall image is evaluative in nature, hence ‘overall evaluative image’. They are conceptually different but interrelated by a mental evaluative process translates the descriptive imagery into an overall positive or negative evaluation of the destination (Kock et al., 2016). Likewise, Qu, Kim, and Im (2011) state that the overall image is derived from cognitive and affective associations linked to the destination. Thus, knowledge of the imagery that potential tourists have of a destination is crucial for understanding their overall image of the destination. The present study follows Josiassen et al. (2016) in their distinction and adopts the term destination imagery to refer to the range of (cognitive and affective) associations that individuals mentally link to Kosovo as a tourism destination, while image is used to refer to their overall image of the destination which is either positive or negative. Since associations are essentially destination attributes associated with the destination, ‘associations’ and ‘attributes’ will be used interchangeably in the present study. It is worth noting that many studies in the extant literature and studies that will be discussed in the present study thus essentially investigate the imagery of a destination rather than its image, or both.



## 2.2 Destination image components

### 2.2.1 Cognitive-affective-conative

Adding to the complexity of defining it, destination image has also been conceptualised and operationalised in a variety of ways (Kock et al., 2016; Prayag, 2009).

Researchers generally agree that destination images are composed of at least two closely interrelated

components, a cognitive component and an affective component, which form an overall image of the destination

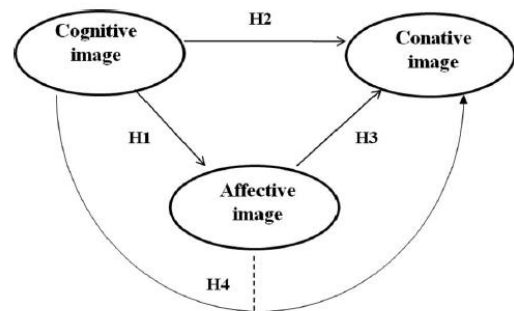


Figure 2: The cognitive-affective-conative model (Agapito, Oom do Valle, & da Costa Mendes, 2013).

that encompasses either an overall positive or a negative evaluation of the destination, the overall image component (see figure 2) (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Wang & Hsu, 2010). This overall image component thus resembles destination image by Kock et al. (2016). The cognitive component refers to the beliefs or knowledge about a destination and the affective component refers to feelings towards the destination. They are part of a hierarchically model proposed by Gartner (1993) which also includes a conative component that will not be discussed here due to the scope of the present study. It has been empirically confirmed that each of the two components directly affects this overall evaluative image and that the cognitive component also indirectly affects it via the affective component, because the affective component is largely dependent on the cognitive component (Agapito et al., 2013; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Wang & Hsu, 2010). Thus, an individual's overall (evaluative) image of a destination is based on the individual's cognitions and feelings about that destination, and those feelings are based on the cognitions.

### 2.2.2 Attribute-holistic

Echtner and Ritchie (1993) conceptualised it as consisting of six components along three continuums: (1) attribute-holistic; (2) functional-psychological; and (3) common-unique (see figure 3). The overall image of a destination is formed based on an attribute-based component and a holistic component. More specifically, a destination is perceived both in perceptions of individual destination attributes and in more holistic impressions (imagery) of the destination and both components range from functional

(tangible) to psychological (more abstract) characteristics. On the attribute-based side, the perceptions range from functional characteristics such as accommodations to psychological characteristics such as friendliness of locals. On the holistic side, the functional holistic image refers to the imagery of physical characteristics and the psychological holistic image refers to the imagery of the atmosphere or mood of

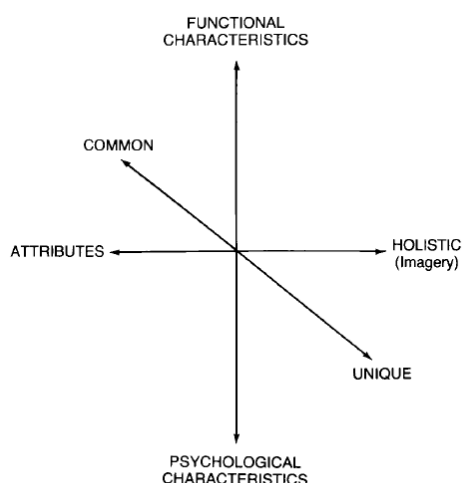


Figure 3: The components of destination image (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993).

the destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). As the term imagery here already denotes, the holistic component seems to resemble destination imagery by Kock et al. (2016). The third continuum ranges from attributes or attractions that are ‘common’ to all destinations to attributes or attractions that are distinctive or even ‘unique’ for a destination (e.g. events, features, auras). The unique component determines what differentiates a destination from other destinations (Echtner & Ritchie,

1993; Michaelidou, Siamagka, Moraes, & Micevski, 2013; Qu et al., 2011; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008) and is important for a destination to consider if it wants to know what makes it a unique or distinctive destination. The present study therefore integrated this distinctiveness dimension into the destination imagery. Thus, destination imagery refers in the present study to the cognitive and affective associations as well as distinctive attributes or attractions that individuals link to Kosovo as a tourism destination.

### 2.2.3 Destination Content Model

As a response to the various definitions, conceptualisations, and operationalisations of mental destination representations in the extant literature which hinders further development of the area, Kock et al. (2016) introduced their Destination Content Model (DCM) as an attempt to facilitate towards a more consistent and comprehensive theoretical base. This theoretical framework draws upon attitude research which provides a fruitful theoretical substrate for research on mental destination representations because it “conceptually distinguishes between cognitive and affective as well as descriptive and evaluative mental states [...]” (Kock et al., 2016, p. 30). More specifically, it draws upon the expectancy-

value model of attitude by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and feelings-as-information theory by Schwarz (1990) (in Kock et al., 2016). The model is composed of destination imagery, destination affect, and destination image which represent the cognitive component, the affective component, and the overall component respectively and which drive tourist behaviour (see figure 4). As such, this model lies within the widely accepted cognitive-affective-overall image conceptualisation. Kock et al. (2016) also present outlines for the measurement of each component. The Destination Content Model provides the theoretical base for the present study in terms of its conceptualisations for each of the components and the outline for the measurement of imagery.

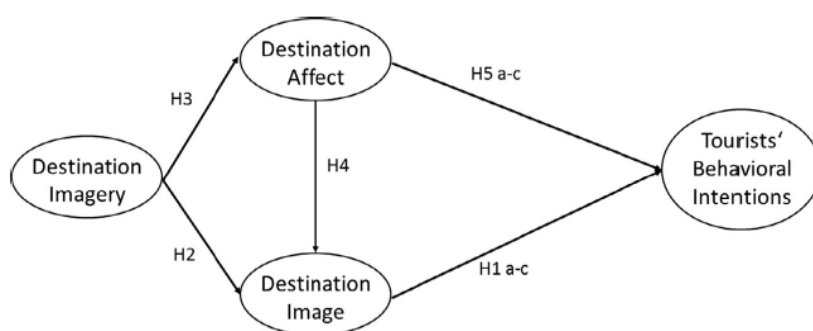


Figure 4: Destination Content Model (Kock et al., 2016).

### 2.2.3.1 Affective associations versus affective component

Kock et al. (2016) propose that destination affect (affective component) should be defined as “an individual’s overall affect attributed to a destination” (p. 33), or more specifically, it is an overall affective state of like or dislike towards a destination. Likewise, Fishbein (1967) states that affect represents an individual’s feelings toward an object, which will be favourable, unfavourable, or neutral (in Pike & Ryan, 2004). Affect is thus evaluative in nature and is to be understood as a positive or negative core affect (Kock et al., 2016; Pike & Ryan, 2004). It is not to be understood as a range of feelings and emotions associated with a destination, to which Kock et al. (2016) refer to with ‘affective associations’ and which are part of the destination imagery. Unlike affect, affective associations do not reflect the individual’s affective state of like or dislike towards the destination. In other words, an individual may describe a destination as ‘relaxing’ but still does not like the destination. Rather, an individual’s affect attributed towards a destination (affective component) is formed based on the

individual's cognitive and affective associations (cognitive component) (Kock et al., 2016), in line with the empirical evidence discussed earlier (e.g. Agapito et al., 2013).

Kock et al. (2016) argue that studies often fail to correctly operationalise the distinction between affective associations and affect. They either integrate the cognitive and affective components by conflating affective associations with affect or they use the label 'affective image' to express affective associations. As such, they even go so far as to argue that affect has never been measured in the destination image literature before (see for a detailed discussion of affect and how to measure it Kock et al., 2016). Stepchenkova and Morrison (2008) (and supported by e.g. Michaelidou et al., 2013; Prayag & Ryan, 2011), for example, incorrectly use the label affective image to express affective associations. They state that Echtner and Ritchie's (1993) psychological holistic component captures affective evaluations (e.g. 'exciting', 'relaxing', 'boring') and therefore, resembles the affective component. Based on DCM by Kock et al. (2016), however, such 'affective evaluations' are simply adjectives to describe a destination –thus descriptive in nature– and as such, they are affective associations.

On the basis of this, it could be argued that the holistic component in Echtner and Ritchie's (1993) framework captures cognitive and affective associations and does not incorporate the affective component. Their holistic component resembles therefore destination imagery which means that their approach to capturing the holistic component can be adopted in the present study to capture Kosovo's destination imagery. Highlighting this important difference between affective associations and the affective component is important not only for the sake of future research but also for a better understanding of the present study, because while the present study includes affective associations, it should be stressed that it does not incorporate the affective component.

### **2.3 Types of images and formation agents**

Gunn (1972) identified three types of images: organic image, induced image, and modified-induced image. The organic image is formed through non-touristic and non-commercial information sources (e.g. newspapers, magazines, TV, and word-of-mouth), induced images are formed through promotional

touristic material (e.g. advertisements, travel posters, and brochures), and modified-induced images are the result of personal experience with the destination through an actual visit (in Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Prebensen, 2007). The destination imagery of potential tourists can thus be organic or induced, or a combination of them.

Gartner (1993) elaborated on this and identified various information sources (agents): (1) overt induced, traditional advertising in the mass media, and information received from tour operators and wholesalers; (2) covert induced, second-party endorsement through traditional forms of advertising and unbiased reports or articles (e.g. newspaper, travel articles); (3) autonomous, news and popular culture (e.g. documentaries, films, television programmes about the place); (4) unsolicited or solicited organic, requested or unrequested word-of-mouth from others people (e.g. friend and relatives); and (5) organic, own experience through visit to the destination (in Beerli & Martín, 2004; Gartner, 1993). He suggested that tourism managers should use a combination of several agents for an effective destination image promotion because they each affect the formation of images differently.

### **2.3.1 Influence of word-of-mouth recommendation on destination imagery**

According to Bigné, Sánchez, and Sánchez (2001), in particular word-of-mouth recommendation (e.g. from friends, acquaintances, or other people) is an important information source for potential tourists in the formation of their imagery and overall image of a destination, because word-of-mouth recommendation is considered to be the most reliable source of information for potential tourists due to lack of commercial self-interest (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). The importance of recommendation as an information source has been empirically confirmed by several studies. Govers, Go, and Kumar (2007) in their study to the role of tourism promotion upon travellers' perceptions of seven different tourism destinations, for example, found that while tourism promotion does not have a major impact, television plays the most influential role, followed by travel (elsewhere/in region), friends, magazines, and internet. Similar results were found by Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco, and Izquierdo-Yusta (2015). The findings of their study showed that internet was the primary information source, followed by friends and acquaintances, travel guides, media specializing in

tourism, suppliers (transport, accommodation, complementary offers). This means that tourism managers should also acknowledge the role that tourists play in attracting potential tourists. The findings of both of these studies additionally showed that internet is another major information source, which is to be expected nowadays.

## **2.4 Influence of destination imagery and image on behavioural intentions**

### **2.4.1 Destination selection**

It has been widely acknowledged that destination image plays a significant role in the destination selection of potential tourists (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Hunt, 1975; Jenkins, 1999). In other words, potential tourists who have a positive image of a destination are more likely to select that destination. On the other hand, if they have a less favourable image of the destination they will be less likely to visit it, suggesting that creating a positive image in the minds of potential tourists is crucial for attracting new tourists to the destination. Moreover, it should be highlighted that potential tourists, in contrast to tourists, do not have a personal experience with the destination, meaning that they rely heavily on their image (Hunt, 1975; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Bigné et al. (2001) therefore stress that tourism destinations should focus on improving their imagery and overall image to have a higher probability of being included and chosen in the process of decision making by these potential tourists and compete successfully in the global tourism market. More specifically, Qu et al. (2011) argue that destinations should establish a positive, strong, and unique destination imagery and image that differentiates itself from competitors to get in the minds of potential tourists.

### **2.4.2 Satisfaction**

The destination imagery that individuals have before visiting a destination (pre-visit imagery) is considered to be related to the on-site experience (i.e. perceived trip quality) during an actual visitation in the destination and overall tourist satisfaction (Bigné et al., 2001; Jani & Hwang, 2011; Jenkins, 1999). Chen and Tsai (2007), for example, empirically showed that pre-visit destination imagery positively affects on-site experience which in turn positively affects satisfaction. More specifically, the

pre-visit destination imagery shapes certain expectations of the destination and if the performance of the destination (reality) meets or exceeds these expectations, satisfaction occurs (Bigné et al., 2001; Um & Crompton, 1990; Wang, Lo, & Yang, 2004). While one of the major objectives of tourism managers should be to project a positive, strong, and differentiated imagery of the destination to potential tourists, it should not be excessively higher than what the destination can actually offer (Jani & Hwang, 2011). This will increase the chances that the expectations will be met and satisfaction occurs in case of an actual visitation. On the other hand, when the on-site experience does not meet the expectations, for example when the projected imagery by the destination is unrealistic in terms of what the destination has to offer, dissatisfaction will occur. It should also be noted that when the pre-visit imagery is very low compared to what the destination has to offer, the chances that the destination is chosen by potential tourists are lower as well (Jani & Hwang, 2011).

#### **2.4.3 Intention to recommend and intention to revisit**

While the pre-visit destination imagery in relation to the on-site experience affects overall satisfaction, satisfaction in turn positively influences post-visit (future) behavioural intentions such as intention to recommend and intention to revisit. In other words, satisfaction plays a mediating role between pre-visit destination imagery and post-visit behavioural intentions (Bigné et al., 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Prayag, 2009; Qu et al., 2011; Wang & Hsu, 2010). Satisfaction by tourists positively influences their intention to recommend and intention to revisit the destination (Bigné et al., 2001; Um & Crompton, 1990; Wang et al., 2004). The relationship between pre-visit imagery and post-visit behavioural intentions can also be directly, meaning that the more positive the pre-visit imagery, the more positive the behaviours of tourists in general (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Prayag, 2009). This suggests that a positive imagery and overall image is not only crucial for attracting new tourists but also for retaining current tourists. As such, destination imagery is a critical component for a successful development of a destination (Hunt, 1975). Given the significant role of word-of-mouth recommendation in the formation of potential tourists' destination imagery and a favourable image, tourism managers should thus aim to project and promote a realistic and true imagery of the destination to potential tourists to create realistic expectations. This



will in turn increase their satisfaction and intention to recommend the destination to other potential tourists, as well as revisiting the destination themselves.

## **2.5 Previous studies**

There are numerous studies that have investigated destination image, it is the most frequently studied topic in tourism research (Kock et al., 2016). Pike (2002, 2011) conducted an overview of 142 articles on destination image from 1973 to 2000 and 120 articles from 2001 to 2007. One of the findings was a shift from the focus on North America, followed by UK/Europe and Asia (1973-2000) to European destinations, followed by Asia, and North America (2001-2007). More recently, a study by Josiassen et al. (2016) confirmed that North America/Canada, (Western) Europe, and (Northern) Asia received the most focus in the destination image literature (based on a selection of articles between 1990-2013). The findings of this study also showed that Eastern Europe/former USSR of which Kosovo is part has received relatively few attention. Moreover, an extensive search to articles on destination image/imagery revealed that, to my knowledge, the majority of them focus on relatively well-known tourism destinations and/or developed countries. There seems to be a paucity of studies focusing on destinations in developing countries and/or destinations that are generally less known as tourism destinations, or destinations with even a rather unfavourable or negative image, for example countries that are affected by conflicts or war.

### **2.5.1 Previous studies pertinent to the present study**

Çakmak and Isaac (2012) also noted the gap in the literature in terms of limited research on the tourism destination images of conflict areas and examined the image of Bethlehem, a destination in a conflict area that experienced a decline in tourism due to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The study aimed to highlight the perceptions of Bethlehem as held by visitors using content analysis of travel blogs, followed by quantitative data analysis techniques including word frequency. One of the findings highlights that associations related to safety were less frequently mentioned compared to stereotyped expectations, suggesting that despite the stereotype of Bethlehem as a dangerous country, safety was not an issue of concern for the tourists. Similar findings were obtained by Isaac and Eid (2019) in their study

to the perceptions of Palestine as held by tourists, a destination also affected by the conflict. They adopted an entirely qualitative approach using email interviews largely based on the three questions by Echtner and Ritchie (1993) aimed at capturing the unique and holistic components. They discovered that Palestine was perceived as a safe place, in contrast to how negatively it is projected in the media and argue that the discrepancy between the projected and perceived image is because the media focuses on the conflicts and ignores the positive sides of Palestine. While the tourists generally had positive images of Palestine, the unfavourable images were mostly related to the political atmosphere and scene in Palestine.

Where these two studies focused on the perceptions of actual tourists, the study by Alvarez and Campo (2014) investigated the perceptions of Israel as a country by Turkish students who had not visited the country yet and their intention to visit the place. They adopted an exclusively quantitative approach in the form of scale questions. Such an approach forces respondents to react to a standardised framework that may not be an accurate representation of their image (Jenkins, 1999), that is, it does not capture a destination's specific imagery. The findings showed that a political conflict in the same year significantly damaged the overall image through the affective component and consequently, negatively impacted the intention to visit Israel. They concluded that in the case of destinations with cultural and tourist attractions but with a negative image, travel experience in the destination might improve tourists' initial negative image. The findings of all three studies demonstrate that an actual visit to a destination might turn negative projected images into more positive perceived images.

### **2.5.2 Previous study on the destination imagery of Kosovo**

The war that Kosovo suffered from two decades ago still impacts the perceptions of the country by individuals who have never visited it and additionally, it is relatively unknown as a tourism destination. While it has received relatively much attention in previous studies concerning issues such as post-conflict development and peace-building, or economic development (e.g. Begolli Dauti, 2013; Kida, 2016; Reka, 2014), it has received little attention in the field of tourism thus far. There are a few studies

related to (a form of) tourism in Kosovo (e.g. Kida, 2016; Pavličić, 2016; Reka, 2014), but there is only one study that looked specifically at the destination imagery of Kosovo.

Reka (2011) aimed to investigate the image of Kosovo as a tourism destination held by UK citizens and Kosovo citizens and employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques. For the perceptions by UK citizens, the study adopted a self-administered questionnaire with quantitative items which measured their levels of agreement with statements relating to, among others, whether they associate Kosovo with war and turmoil, whether they would feel safe to go, and their knowledge about natural and cultural attractions. As mentioned before, this approach neglects their specific imagery. It is also subjective to the researcher's bias and assumption, in this case that individuals very likely associate Kosovo with war and unsafety. For the perceptions of Kosovo citizens, a qualitative method in the form of structured email interviews was adopted. It included a question about their image of Kosovo as a tourism destination which invited the respondents to talk freely about their image perceptions. It can be considered a limitation of this study that image perceptions of UK citizens were not investigated in the same manner because it could have perhaps uncovered some interesting and unexpected (positive) themes in their specific imagery of Kosovo. Findings of the study showed that the majority of the respondents (71%) associate Kosovo with war and violence, and a substantial amount (49%) indicated that they associate Kosovo with unsafety. Respondents generally believed that Kosovo is still under the same conditions as it used to be during the war. However, this study is from 2011 and therefore already quite dated and images might have changed in the meantime. New research is needed to give a recent update on these issues and furthermore, to capture the specific destination imagery that individuals have of Kosovo rather than their perceptions of pre-defined attributes by the researcher which may not even all be part of their imagery.

## **2.6 How to measure destination imagery**

Pike (2002, 2011) as well Gallarza et al. (2002) who examined 65 articles on destination image from 1971 and 1999 showed that the majority of studies used structured (quantitative) techniques to examine destination image. However, quantitative approaches do not address the unique and holistic components

(Jenkins, 1999). For this reason, several researchers, including Crompton (1979) and Echtner and Ritchie (1993), advocated the use of qualitative (unstructured) techniques to capture the unique and holistic components, the destination imagery (in Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Jenkins, 1999; Kock et al., 2016; Prebensen, 2007). Moreover, qualitative techniques are also able to capture weak or even lacking destination imageries, for example when respondents are not able to provide responses to the open-ended questions (Jenkins, 1999). This makes qualitative techniques particularly appropriate for the present study, because it is anticipated that there will be a significant amount of respondents with a weak or lacking imagery of Kosovo as a tourism destination because it is a relatively unknown destination.

Although an overview of articles from more recent years has, to my knowledge, not been conducted so far, it seems that quantitative techniques are still widely included in studies to examine destination images. At the same time, the body of studies that uses both quantitative and qualitative methods has been increasing (e.g. Alrawadie, Zeki Dincer, Istanbul Dincer, & Mammadova, 2018; Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001; Chi & Qu, 2008; Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Jeng, Snyder, & Chen, 2017; Kock et al., 2016; Matlovičová & Kolesárová, 2011; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Reka, 2011; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008; Valek & Williams, 2018). Only several studies adopted exclusively a quantitative (e.g. Alvarez & Campo, 2014) or qualitative (e.g. Isaac & Eid, 2019) approach. The studies that include qualitative techniques either analyse destination image or elicit a set of relevant destination attributes which are subsequently used to further measure the destination image in a quantitative way.

### **2.6.1 Two stage approach**

Jenkins (1999) proposed that the best way to measure destination image is an approach consisting of two phases. First a qualitative phase using unstructured methods to elicit relevant destination attributes and secondly, a quantitative phase that draws upon the results of the previous phase and measures the image quantitatively. Often employed qualitative techniques include free elicitation/open-ended questions, focus groups, in-depth interviews or discussion with experts, and content analysis (Gallarza et al., 2002), and quantitative techniques that draw upon qualitative results include, for example, word frequency (e.g. Çakmak & Isaac, 2012; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Önder & Marchiori, 2017; Son, 2011;

Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008), Importance-Performance Analysis (e.g. O’Leary & Deegan, 2005), or factor analysis (e.g. Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008).

In line with Jenkins (1999), Kock et al. (2016) proposed to also use a two stage approach for examining destination imagery in itself. They argue that a shortcoming of many previous studies is that they simultaneously try to capture associations linked to a destination as well as the evaluations of these associations while they rely on different mental capacities and should be measured separately. It should be noted that this evaluation process does not refer to the overall evaluation of the destination that is contained in destination image. An individual may describe a destination as ‘relaxing’, but it does not imply whether it has a positive or negative connotation for that individual, nor does it reflect whether that individual’s overall image of the destination is positive or negative. While ‘relaxing’ is positive for some individuals, it might be negative for others (i.e. ‘boring’) (Kock et al., 2016). As such, they propose to first capture a pool of cognitive and affective associations at the individual level using unstructured (qualitative) methods, followed by structured (quantitative) techniques that measure both how positively or negatively individuals evaluate each association (association valence) as well as how strongly they link each association to the destination (association strength) (Kock et al., 2016). This extra dimension within the measurement of imagery is relevant for tourism managers because it provides more in-depth results so marketing strategies can be developed or improved more effectively. In testing their model, Kock et al. (2016) applied this approach to examine the imagery of Spain and Germany, and focused on tourists who had visited the destinations. After the qualitative stage using face-to-face interviews in line with Echtner and Ritchie’s (1993) approach and the quantitative stage, it became evident that in the case of Spain, respondents quite strongly associated the attribute ‘touristy’ with Spain and evaluated that attribute very negatively, suggesting that tourism managers should either weaken this link between the attribute and destination or increase the attribute’s favourability. Moreover, the standard deviation for valence showed that some respondents evaluated that attribute negatively while others evaluated it positively, demonstrating the need to measure association strength and association valence separately.

Overall, this study addresses the two theoretical gaps outlined above, namely lack of studies on destinations in developing countries and destinations that are generally lesser known as a tourism destination, and lack of (recent) studies about the destination image/imagery of Kosovo. It will also add to the extant literature by including qualitative techniques to examine Kosovo's imagery.

### **3. Methodology**

The main objectives of the study were to examine the destination imagery of Kosovo as a tourism destination –cognitive, affective, and distinctive attributes that potential tourists associate with it– and why potential tourists have this imagery, i.e. what it is based on. Kock et al. (2016) provided an outline for the measurement of destination imagery consisting of a qualitative stage that captures the destination imagery at the individual level, followed by a quantitative stage which measures these identified attributes further for association strength and association valence. The present study followed this outline, but measured the association strength and association valence as perceived by potential tourists for attributes not only associated with Kosovo by potential tourists but also by tourists, because of the added value tourists' perceptions provide in promoting a realistic imagery of the destination to potential tourists. The present study therefore also identified attributes that tourists associate with Kosovo. The other objectives were to identify their behavioural intentions, how positive or negative their overall image is, and the information sources that formed their imagery. A mixed methods methodology seemed therefore most suitable because it allowed to integrate qualitative and quantitative data to generate a rich and comprehensive set of data to be able to answer the research questions in the best possible way, because when qualitative and quantitative data are combined they can provide validation for each other and also create a comprehensive and solid foundation for drawing conclusions (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013). Qualitative methods were included to elicit associated attributes and quantitative methods were included to measure these attributes further and to measure the other objectives relating to overall image, behavioural intention, and information sources. These quantified results allowed for easier comparison of the respondents and for demonstrating the need for this research, which guided the discussion of the results.

#### **3.1 Methods**

The initial method for collecting the cognitive, affective, and distinctive attributes during the qualitative stage was a self-administered online (qualitative) questionnaire. However, it was anticipated that finding enough potential respondents for the group of tourists and who would be willing to fill in a questionnaire



would be challenging due to that it is such a specific target group. To ensure sufficient attributes for the group of tourists, content analysis of travel blogs about Kosovo was adopted as an extra method to collect more attributes. For the quantitative stage that measures the association strength and association valence of potential tourists for the identified attributes, a self-administered (quantitative) online questionnaire was used as well.

### **3.1.1 Questionnaire (qualitative stage)**

The advantage of using an online questionnaire is its cost and time efficiency. It can be send out to a large number of potential respondents at the same time, thus maximising the pool of respondents. There were two versions of the questionnaire, one for the tourists and one for the potential tourists. Both versions were in Dutch and English and contained the same questions but slightly differently formulated in each version to best fit each target group, and the questionnaire for tourists had an extra question that was not applicable to the potential tourists. The open-ended questions to elicit the cognitive, affective, and distinctive attributes were adapted from Echtner & Ritchie (1993). The findings of their study and the study by Stepchenkova and Morrison (2008) showed that these three questions are effective for capturing these associations. A fourth open-ended question was added which invited respondents to talk freely about their imagery of Kosovo as an attempt to elicit additional attributes. The questions are presented in table 1. The term ‘attribute’ was explained to make sure all respondents understood what that term means.

The degree of positivity or negativity of their overall image was measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from very negative (-3) to very positive (3). For behavioural intentions, the respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with statements about intention to visit Kosovo (potential tourists) and intention to recommend Kosovo to others and/or intention to visit Kosovo again in the future (tourists), measured with 7-point Likert scales, ranging from strongly disagree (-3) to strongly agree (3), adapted from Kock et al. (2016). For the closed-ended question about information sources, respondents could select one or more options from the list. These questions and statements are presented in table 2.

Table 1

Open-ended questions to capture Kosovo's destination imagery

Question	Aspect	Source
What images or characteristics come to your mind when you think about Kosovo as a tourism destination?	Holistic functional / cognitive associations	Echtner and Ritchie (1993)
How would you describe the atmosphere in Kosovo and the mood/feelings that you experienced (for potential tourists: would expect to experience) while visiting Kosovo?	Holistic psychological / affective associations	Echtner and Ritchie (1993)
Please (for potential tourists: try to) list any tourist attractions/attributes (that you can think of) that you find are unique or distinctive for Kosovo?	Unique holistic component / distinctive attributes	Echtner and Ritchie (1993)
Describe your overall image of Kosovo in general and as a tourism destination?	Overall image	Researcher's own

Table 2

Closed-ended questions to identify (future) behavioural intentions, overall image, and information sources

Question	Aspect	Source
Overall, how negative/positive is your image of Kosovo as a tourism destination?	Overall evaluative image	Based on Kock et al. (2016)
Which information sources mainly formed your image?	Information sources	Researcher's own
(1) I strongly intend to visit Kosovo (again) in the future; (2) It is very likely that I would choose Kosovo (again) as my tourist destination; (3) I would like to take a holiday in Kosovo (again); (4) I plan to visit Kosovo as a tourist (again) at some point in the future.	Intention to (re)visit destination	Kock et al. (2016)
(1) I talk up Kosovo as a holiday destination; (2) I bring up Kosovo in a positive way in conversations about holiday destinations; (3) In social situations, I often speak favourably about Kosovo as a tourist destination; (4) I recommend Kosovo as a vacation destination to other people when asked.	Intention to recommend destination (only for tourists)	Kock et al. (2016)

### 3.1.2 Content analysis of online travel blogs

Blogs are webpages on which travellers share their travel experiences with others (Tse & Zhang, 2013).

Content analysis of travel blogs as a qualitative method for examining destination image (imagery) has become increasingly more popular in recent years (Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Çakmak & Isaac, 2012).

According to Law and Cheung (2010), content analysis of (travel) blogs is believed to provide more reliable results than conventional questionnaires and interviews. However, the findings of several studies (e.g. Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Çakmak & Isaac, 2012; Choi et al., 2007) demonstrate that the focus is mostly on cognitive associations and distinctive attributes, the amount of affective associations

is limited. This suggests that content analysis of blogs should be combined with other methods such as open-ended questions in questionnaires or interviews to maximise the amount of affective associations.

### 3.1.3 Questionnaire (quantitative stage)

The two questions to measure the association strength and association valence (see table 3) were adapted from Kock et al. (2016) and measured using 7-point Likert scales ranging from not at all (1) to very much (7), and from very negative (-3) to very positive (3). This questionnaire was also in Dutch and English.

Table 3

Closed-ended questions to measure association strength and association valence

Question	Aspect	Source
How much do you relate/associate each of the following attributes to Kosovo as a tourist destination?	Association strength	Adapted from Kock et al. (2016)
For you as a tourist, is each attribute negative or positive?	Association valence	Adapted from Kock et al. (2016)

### 3.2 Respondents

The requirements for both groups were that the respondents had to be eighteen years or older and that they do not have the Albanian/Kosovar nationality. An additional requirement for the group of tourists was that they had visited Kosovo at least once during the years 2013-2019, as a tourist/for pleasure or leisure (or at least part of their trip, for example when business or study was their main reason to visit Kosovo). It was chosen to limit the study to visits in 2013 and later to have relatively recent and thus more relevant data, as Kosovo has been changing and developing constantly and Kosovo is different now than it was years ago. Business people and students were not excluded from the study, because that would limit the pool of potential respondents, especially since the target audience of the group of tourists was already quite small.

### **3.3 Data sources**

#### *Background information and conceptual framework*

Data for the background information and conceptual framework of the present study were obtained from reviewing existing studies to provide an overview of the current knowledge in the field of destination image in tourism and present relevant concepts and theories for the present study as well as relevant studies. Official documents from the government of Kosovo were reviewed to provide information about the current state of tourism development in Kosovo.

#### *Respondents for the questionnaires*

Potential respondents for the questionnaires were found on various online and offline platforms. A combination of platforms was used to maximise the pool of respondents. The qualitative and quantitative questionnaires were posted in relevant Facebook groups and on a subsection of Reddit called ‘takemysurvey’ where users can post their questionnaires and surveys. Respondents for these questionnaires were also approached via a private message on TripAdvisor and Facebook after seeing their reviews about places in Kosovo. The other method to gather respondents for the questionnaires was through the snowballing method (Meho, 2006). This involved asking the respondents and people in my direct environment if they knew anyone who meets the eligibility criteria and would be willing to fill in a questionnaire.

#### *Travel blogs*

Potential travel blogs were found by searching for terms such as ‘travel blogs Kosovo’ on Google. In selecting blogs, two criteria were that they had to contain the own experiences of the blogger rather than only factual information and they also had to date from 2013 or later. There was a rather limited amount of blogs on Kosovo and some did not meet the requirements so they were not considered eligible. In total, there were seven blogs that could be used in the present study (see appendix A).

### **3.4 Data collection strategy**

(1) The first stage of the research involved designing the self-administered online qualitative questionnaire using the online survey software tool Qualtrics. These questionnaires were then distributed to potential respondents using the mentioned online and offline platforms. (2) Meanwhile, the contents of seven online travel blogs were transported to ATLAS.ti. The responses from the questionnaires and contents of the blogs were constantly monitored during this stage to ensure that there were sufficient cognitive, affective, as well as distinctive associations. (3) These data were subsequently analysed and resulted in a total set of associations mentioned by 10% or more for potential tourists and a set of associations mentioned by 20% or more of the tourists. (4) The second stage involved designing the quantitative questionnaire based on the combination of attributes mentioned by the tourists and potential tourists which was then distributed to potential respondents using the same online and offline platforms. (5) These results were analysed as well and combined with the other data. The whole data collection ran from February to July.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

All data from the open-ended questions from the qualitative questionnaire and the contents from the online travel blogs were collected in ATLAS.ti, a research software for qualitative data analysis. Qualitative thematic analysis was used to analyse these data. This method involves describing, classifying, and interpreting the textual data into codes and themes (Creswell, 2013). Within thematic analysis there are two approaches: an inductive approach or a (theoretical) deductive approach. Coding in the deductive approach is driven by the researcher's theoretical interest in the topic or research question(s), in contrast to the inductive approach in which coding is driven by the data itself (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A combination of these two approaches was used in the analysis for the present study. While the research objectives and theoretical framework guided the coding process in terms of what to search for, codes and themes emerged from the data itself. Mainly in-vivo coding was used to stay close to the respondents' own words. Similar codes were merged together using two criteria: (1) best representative of the underlying meaning and (2) most frequently mentioned (Kock et al., 2016). For example, 'danger' and 'dangerous' were merged under 'dangerous', 'tasty', 'amazing' and 'good' local

food were merged under 'good local food' as this was the best underlying meaning, and 'hospitable' and 'welcoming' was merged under 'hospitable'. Following this coding process, codes that were related to each other in terms of meaning were grouped in a category that best described this group. For example, 'war' and 'conflict' were combined into the category 'war/conflict'. Several related categories were then also combined in umbrella themes because this way, similar and contrasting associations could be easier identified which would enrich the discussion of the results. For example, codes/categories about unsafety were grouped together with codes/categories about safety in 'safe versus unsafe', or 'unstable country', 'separatist tendencies', and 'political instability' were grouped together in 'political instability'. The associations mentioned by 10% or more of the potential tourists and by 20% or more of the tourists were merged together to be used in the quantitative questionnaire to measure their association strength and association valence.

The data from the closed-ended questions from the questionnaire of the qualitative stage were analysed using descriptive statistics to present them in a manageable form. The data from the quantitative questionnaire were measured for association strength and association valence using an approach adapted from Kock et al. (2016). For each association, the mean of its strength was calculated to show how strongly respondents link each attribute on average to Kosovo as well as the mean of its valence to show how positively or negatively each attribute is evaluated on average. For association valence, also the standard deviation was calculated to identify the amount of variation between respondents in terms of whether an attribute is negative or positive for them (Kock et al., 2016).

### **3.6 Ethical issues**

All respondents were asked to sign a consent form prior to taking part in the qualitative questionnaire (see appendix B). This consent form ensured the respondents that their identity will remain anonymous at all times through disguising any information that may reveal their identity. It also included a statement to make them aware that their responses may be used in anonymous statements/quotations by the researcher to support the contents of the study. Furthermore, the respondents were made aware of their right to refuse participating as well as of their right to withdraw from participating at any time without

having to give a reason and without any consequences, and that there are no risks and/or discomforts associated with participating. Finally, they were informed that they could contact me any time if they had any questions.



## 4. Findings

In this chapter, the results of the qualitative and quantitative stages will be presented in tables and figures and briefly described. The qualitative questionnaire for potential tourists received 112 responses, but only 70 responses were useful to be analysed (N=70), as some respondents did not fill it in seriously. The qualitative questionnaire for tourists received seven useful responses and in combination with the seven travel blogs, this yielded a total of fourteen responses (N=14). It should be pointed out that some respondents of both groups did not fill in every closed-ended question, so for each figure or table it is indicated on how many respondents the results are based. The quantitative questionnaire for potential tourists received 80 useful responses (N=80).

### 4.1 Qualitative stage

#### 4.1.1 Demographics

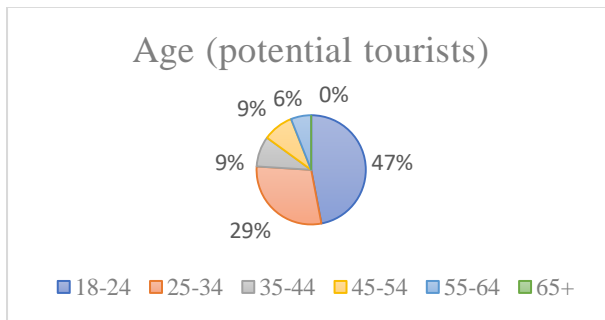


Figure 5: Age potential tourists qualitative stage (N=68).

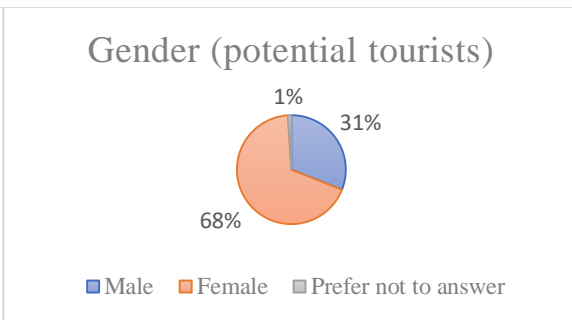


Figure 6: Gender potential tourists qualitative stage (N=68).

Figure 5 shows that the majority of respondents is 18 to 34 years old (76%) of which 47% between 18 and 24 years old. While this means they do not represent the whole population, it also has an advantage that the majority is young, because destination image is very resistant to change and as such, it is advisable to target students or young individuals in destination image studies and strengthen or modify their imageries before their overall image becomes entrenched negative images at a later age (Tasci, Uygur Meydan, & Cavusgil, 2006). Unfortunately, there is not an even distribution between male and female (figure 6), as females accounted for 68% of the respondents and males for only 31%.

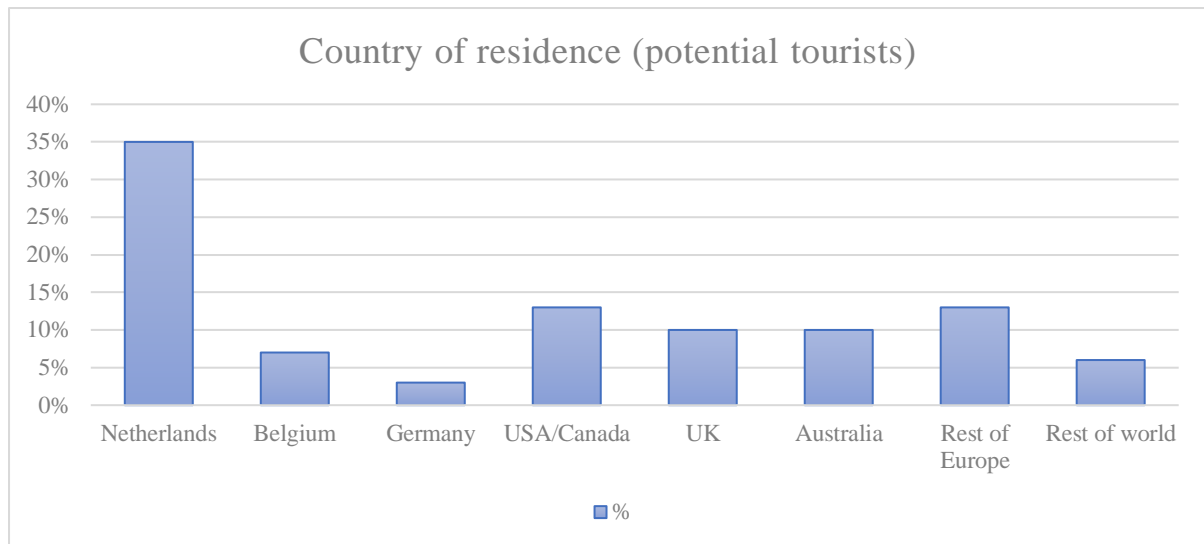


Figure 7: Country of residence potential tourists qualitative stage (N=68).

Figure 7 shows that the majority of the respondents is from Europe (69%) of which the majority lives in The Netherlands, United Kingdom, Belgium, and Germany (56%). The category rest of Europe (13%) included respondents from Poland, France, and Sweden. The other group of respondents are from outside Europe (29%).

Since the number of respondents in the group of tourists who filled in the questionnaire is so small (N=7), they are not presented in figures. The respondents from this group are from The United Kingdom, Canada, Switzerland, Germany, Iraq, and two from The Netherlands. Their ages are 55, 22, 24, 50, 53, 24, and 44, and three of them are female and four of them are male. Despite it being such a small group, there is a good spread in age and gender. The demographics of the bloggers are not included.

#### 4.1.2 Information sources

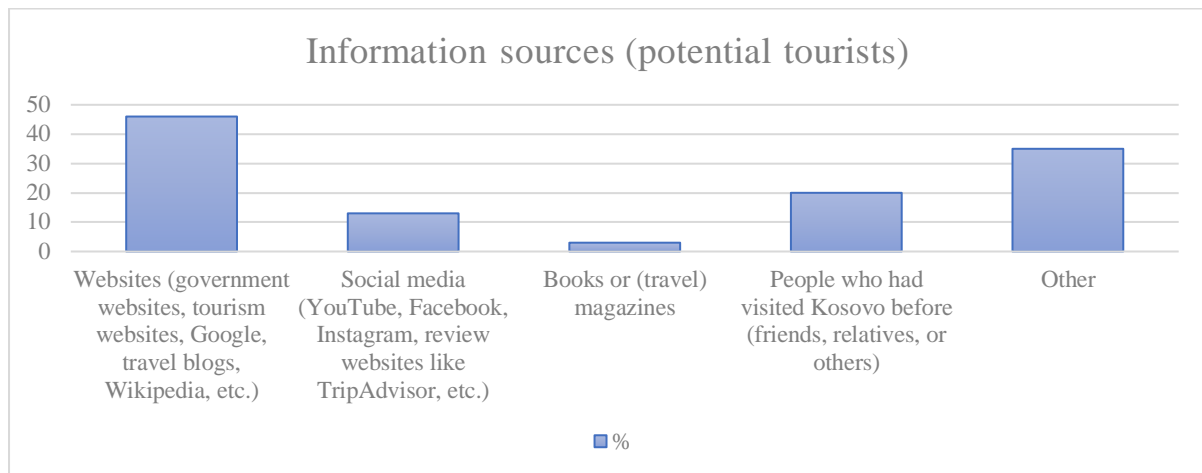


Figure 8: Information sources that formed the imagery of potential tourists (N=69).

Figure 8 shows that websites including government websites, Google, and travel blogs is the most influential information source that formed the respondents' imagery of Kosovo as a tourism destination (46%). Surprisingly, while social media has become increasingly popular and plays a big role in our lives nowadays, it is not a major source that formed the imageries in the present study. On the contrary, word-of-mouth from people who had visited Kosovo before (20%) is a more influential source than prior expectations. This finding corresponds with the findings of the study by Govers et al. (2007) that friends (19.1%) and other people (7.4%) were two of the most important information sources that formed individuals' pre-visit image of seven different sample destinations. Similar findings were obtained by Llodrà-Riera et al. (2015). And also Bigné et al. (2001) argue that for potential tourists, word-of-mouth recommendation is an important information source in forming an image toward the particular destination. For the option 'other', respondents were asked to specify this. Common answers included that their imagery was based on experiences in countries in the area, or based on people they know who are from Kosovo, and the news. However, the majority who selected this option stated that it is purely the perceptions or images of the country in their minds, as some had only seen or heard little about Kosovo.

#### 4.1.3 Identified associations

The focus was on the destination imagery of potential tourists. The results from the three open-ended questions about their images and characteristics, their expected mood/feelings and atmosphere, and unique or distinctive attributes are presented in the tables below. Table 4 contains the associations mentioned by 10% or more of the respondents and table 5 was added to present the associations mentioned by 5% to 10% of the respondents to give a more extensive overview of all the associations linked to Kosovo. The responses from all three the questions were combined, because respondents sometimes listed affective attributes under the first question aimed at cognitive attributes, for example, while they listed attributes that are not distinctive under the third question about distinctive attributes. The researcher eventually determined which are cognitive attributes, which are affective attributes, and which could be considered distinctive.

Table 4

Associations mentioned by 10%> of the potential tourists (N=70)

Code	Frequency	%		Frequency	%
Not touristy	24	34%	Beautiful natural attractions/nature	9	13%
Cheap	19	27%	Mountains/mountainous	9	13%
Historical/history	18	26%	Old areas	8	11%
Friendly locals	17	24%	Old (ruined) buildings	8	11%
War/conflict	14	20%	Good local food	8	11%
Not very safe/unsafe	13	19%	Hiking	7	10%
Poor	11	16%	Beautiful country	7	10%
Warm weather/climate	11	16%			

Table 5

Associations mentioned by 5%>10% of the potential tourists (N=70)

Code	Frequency	%		Frequency	%
Safe	6	9%	New country	4	6%
Tensed	5	7%	Unique/not a standard destination	4	6%
Hospitable/welcoming	5	7%	Relaxing	4	6%
Closed people	5	7%	Untouched nature	4	6%
Beautiful scenery	5	7%	Interested	4	6%
Happy	5	7%	Cultural	4	6%
Lack of tourism attractions (sights and activities)	5	7%	Eastern European/Soviet/Communitic	4	6%
Forests	4	6%	Poor tourism facilities	4	6%
Pristina	4	6%			

The identified cognitive, affective, and distinctive attributes that tourists (from the questionnaire and the travel blogs) associate with Kosovo are presented in table 6. For this group, only the attributes mentioned by 20% or more of the respondents were included and they are presented in random order. These attributes will not be discussed in detail, they are only identified so they could be included in the quantitative questionnaire for potential tourists, because of their potential usefulness in marketing strategies to attract potential tourists. When they listed a specific attraction or place of interest (e.g. Our Lady of Ljeviš, an Orthodox church) these were listed under a generic category, in this case ‘Catholic and Orthodox churches’. If respondents mentioned the same attributes more than once, only one of them was coded. This latter also goes for the potential tourists.

The associations mentioned by 10% or more of the respondents from the group of potential tourists were divided into a few main themes and discussed in more detail below. Codes that were related to any of the themes were also included in that theme. For example, the association ‘not safe/unsafe’ was divided into the theme ‘safety’ and related codes or categories ( e.g. ‘dangerous’, ‘scared’, and ‘safe’) were also grouped under this theme, so that similar and contrasting associations could be discussed per theme. As such, several codes from the table 5 will be discussed as well in relation to associations from table 4.

Table 6

Associations mentioned by 20%&gt; of the tourists/travel blogs (N=14)

Code/category	Code/category
Bustling/vibrant cities full of people and bars/cafes/restaurants	Tourist infrastructure/facilities not that good
Interesting cultural and historic sites	Undiscovered/not touristy
Charming/cosy old towns	Hiking
Cheap	Hospitable/welcoming
Coffee culture	Good local food
Nature/natural attractions	Old monasteries
Friendly locals	Mountainous scenery
Getting to know the locals and experience the local culture/lifestyle (attraction)	No typical tourist hotspots/attractions
Relaxed	Safe
Traditional old bazaars	Unique/not standard destination
Catholic and Orthodox churches and old mosques	No language barrier/good level of English
Happy	Lot of meat based dishes
Not difficult to travel in Kosovo	Ottoman influences in architecture
Many young people	

#### 4.1.3.1 Tourism and tourism facilities/attractions

The most frequently mentioned association is ‘not touristy’ (34%). The responses were all quite similar, most people said something along the following lines:

*“I don’t think it’s very touristy there.”*

*“Less hectic and touristic than other destinations.”*

*“I don’t expect it to very touristy because it is not very well-known as a tourist destination (I think).”*

Yet, there was also one respondent who said: *“I imagine it is very touristy now”*. It is interesting that most respondents used it in combination with ‘think’ or ‘expect’, which was the first indication during the analysis that they have no idea about tourism in Kosovo at all. Consequently, due to lack of tourists, respondents think that Kosovo also has a lack of tourism facilities and/or not many tourism attractions such as sights and activities. Some of such responses included:

*“I would not expect the place to be very touristy or have attractions/facilities aimed at tourists.”*

*“In general, I don’t expect that there is a lot to do/see, except from a single attraction/sight.”*

*“I think the number of hotels and restaurants might be limited.”*

*“[...] tourist facilities are not existent or very basic.”*

*“Tourism facilities would be inadequate.”*

On the positive side, lack of tourism means that it is a undiscovered country. Several respondents called Kosovo a unique or not a standard well-known country (6%). One respondent, for example, called Kosovo *“off the beaten path”* and another mentioned the following as response to the question about Kosovo’s distinctive attributes: *“It is an alternative tourist destination for people who want to experience something else than the standard well-known destinations”*.

#### **4.1.3.2 History and culture**

On the contrary to the belief that there is not much to do or see in Kosovo, there was also a substantial amount of respondents highlighting that Kosovo does have plenty of interesting sights and activities, in particular historically and culturally related, and also Kosovo’s unique history was mentioned quite a few times as a response to the question about distinctive attributes or attractions:

*“I don't know it well, but I think there would be some good culture and history to take in.”*

*“I am not aware of any attractions I would think that there is some nice landscape and some interesting history to learn about.”*

*“I don't know what kind of activities I can find there but for sure there is a lot of history to learn there.”*

*“There are areas of Kosovo that look as if they have great historical value.”*

*“I expect the architecture and area around Kosovo to be very pretty and old, with an interesting history to it that I would like to know more about.”*

In terms of culture, respondents believe that Kosovo has a *“rich culture”* and that *“there would be the opportunity to experience a culture that is different to my own”*. Similarly, one respondent said that he/she expects a lot of *“interesting cultural experiences”*.

The historical aspect was also mentioned in terms of old (ruined) buildings that can be visited and the idea that cities and villages are old in general. As such, the codes ‘old areas’ and ‘old (ruined) buildings’ were not grouped under the same ‘historical’ category, because the context of them is slightly different.

One respondent said that cities look as if they have stood still for “20/30 years”, meaning “*many old buildings and not a lot rebuilt*”. Another respondent noted that one of the things to do in Kosovo is “*visiting old villages*”, as well as many “*old (ruined) buildings*” that can be found and visited all over Kosovo: “*Given the age of the city, there are likely to be a number of historical building to see*”.

Another interesting contrast to point out is that there was one respondent who thinks that “*The architecture may be more like you would see maybe in Prague, with a richer appearance*”, while other respondents think that the buildings are in typical Eastern European/Soviet style and therefore ugly and grey. Others agree that there are probably Soviet/Communistic and Eastern European influences in the architecture and buildings:

*“I expect it to look similar to Serbia, where I have been recently, meaning for instance architecture similar to soviet one, cities looking rather "sad", grey.”*

*“However, I am unsure if the villages are very beautiful because of previous communism (which often means grey, ugly buildings).”*

#### **4.1.3.3 Nature**

Another attribute that was (positively) and often associated with Kosovo is nature. Respondents associate, for example, forests and lakes and mountains with Kosovo. Several also highlighted that it has many beautiful natural attractions and a very beautiful nature and scenery in general which are worth seeing as well as still authentic nature and authentic villages:

*“I think there would be quite a lot of nature things to see [...].”*

*“I expect lots of little villages, beautiful nature-sights.”*

*“I do believe that Kosovo has beautiful nature, lots of forests and mountains.”*

*“I don’t think that there is many tourism in that country. In my head it seems a bit grey. With a land climate. But also much green nature, old buildings and mountains to hike.”*

*“I would think that there would be scenery and spots of natural beauty to visit.”*

*“Quite beautiful landscapes with lot of lakes and mountains.”*

*“[...] still has authentic villages and nature.”*



Although not as frequently, the authentic aspect of Kosovo was mentioned several times which is something that really differentiates it from the standard well-known destinations. Another positive attribute that was frequently mentioned is untouched nature: *“I sort of imagine it with a lot of mountains and untouched nature. Probably good for hiking, camping and staying close to nature in the countryside”*. Hiking was also often mentioned as an activity. Interestingly, one respondent even thinks Kosovo has a desert. Others think the countryside in general is very beautiful, with *“many small [but old] villages”* which can be visited and that it has a *“calm”* and *“peaceful”* atmosphere.

#### **4.1.3.4 Locals/society**

Generally, potential tourists think that the locals in Kosovo are very friendly (24%). One respondent said that from his/her experience in other Balkan countries, he/she thinks that the locals in Kosovo will be nice, too. One even said that they would be *“extremely friendly”*. Another respondent noted that locals can *“seem in the beginning not very friendly, but once you get to interact and understand why they are like that, you see they are nice”*. In contrast, there were also several respondents who associate *“closed”* and *“distant”* people with Kosovo: *“I imagine [the] people as a bit stand-offish but relatively friendly”* and *“People won't approach you by themselves, they will be rather closed, however once you need their advice or help they will be willing to provide it”*. One respondent states that the locals are cold and distant because Kosovo is a country of the Eastern bloc and people there are generally cold and distant. The same respondent said that because the people are so distant, it is not a hospitable country, which was shared by one other respondent. On the contrary, respondents who think that the locals are very hospitable and welcoming accounted for a larger amount (7%). They said they would feel welcome and that the locals are warm. Other respondents called the locals *“authentic”*, *“kind and polite”*, and *“open”*. Lastly, a couple of respondents imagine Kosovo to be very social, explained by one respondent as locals who all know each other and hang out together outside.

#### **4.1.3.5 War/conflict**

In line with prior expectations, war and conflict was often associated with Kosovo, however, not as frequently as expected (21%). If the associations relating to political instability (together 7%) were

grouped together under one category, it would become the second most frequently mentioned association. Nevertheless, this total number is still significantly lower than the 71% by Reka (2011), but this difference can be accounted for by the differences between a quantitative research design that was used in his study and a qualitative one like in the present study. Some responses included:

*“Unfortunately, war does come to mind in spite of that being 20 years ago.”*

*“Don't know a whole lot about it. I know it is a European country that was involved in a war or conflict in the 1990's.”*

*“I know only that Kosovo exists (and that there are problems with Serbia).”*

Others still associate Kosovo with a “war zone” which corresponds with the findings from the study by Reka (2011), who stated that “respondents still believed that the country is under similar conditions as it used to be during the war” (p. 333). One respondent even thinks, for example, that there “are many soldiers on the streets”. As such, “war-related atmosphere”, “military and scary”, “darkness”, “sadness”, a “slightly negative” atmosphere, or “war-torn” were associated with Kosovo, as well as a heavy and tensed atmosphere: *“I expect to find a heavy atmosphere because of political situations. Good people and good mood but can be suddenly turns bad if the wrong word is said”*. Similarly, another respondent said: *“I think it may be a little tense given the news that sometimes it can be volatile [...]”*. Others imagine the effects from war still visible in the sense that a lot has not been rebuilt yet.

On the other hand, several respondents associate positive feelings and a positive atmosphere with Kosovo: *“Given the Republic is most likely revitalized post-war, I would imagine the atmosphere is one of renewal, uplifting attitude, and a happy mood”* and *“I expect there to be a good atmosphere”*.

#### **4.1.3.6 Safety**

Given that many people associate Kosovo with war and conflicts and political instability, it was to be expected that many also associate feeling unsafe, or at least not very safe, with Kosovo (19%).

*“[I] do not consider it to be a very safe destination.”*

*“I don't think the country is very safe.”*

*“Unsafe, there has been a history of unsettlement and war there.”*

*“I know that there are geopolitical tensions around Kosovo, thus I would not say it's safe.”*

*“Feelings of unsafety, feeling like I need to pay a lot attention to my surroundings.”*

As a consequence, people state that they would feel worried, scared, or not at ease and some even call it a (slightly) dangerous place:

*“I have a slight worry to visit Kosovo and do not consider it to be a very safe destination.”*

*“A tense feeling. Everyone feeling scared.”*

*“Dangerous and atmosphere, I would be scared and wouldn't feel at ease.”*

In contrast, there was also a substantial amount of respondents (9%) who think it is safe: *“I am quite certain that it's a safe country now”* and *“I am generally good at taking precautions, so I think I would feel reasonably safe if I were to visit”*.

#### 4.1.4 Overall image

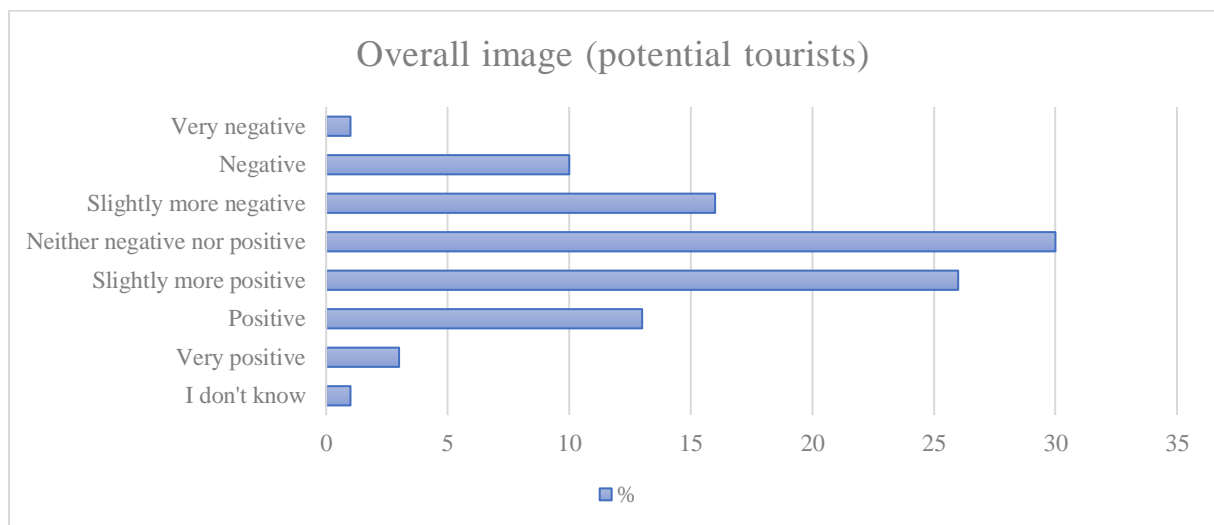


Figure 9: Overall image of potential tourists (N=69).

Respondents were asked to indicate how positive or negative their overall image of Kosovo as a tourism destination is. As figure 9 indicates, the majority has neither a negative nor a positive overall image (29%). Unlike prior expectations, the amount of images on the positive side of the continuum (total 42%) dominates the amount of images on the negative continuum (total 28%). Only 1% has a very

negative image, while 3% even has a very positive image. One respondent selected the ‘I don’t know’ option.

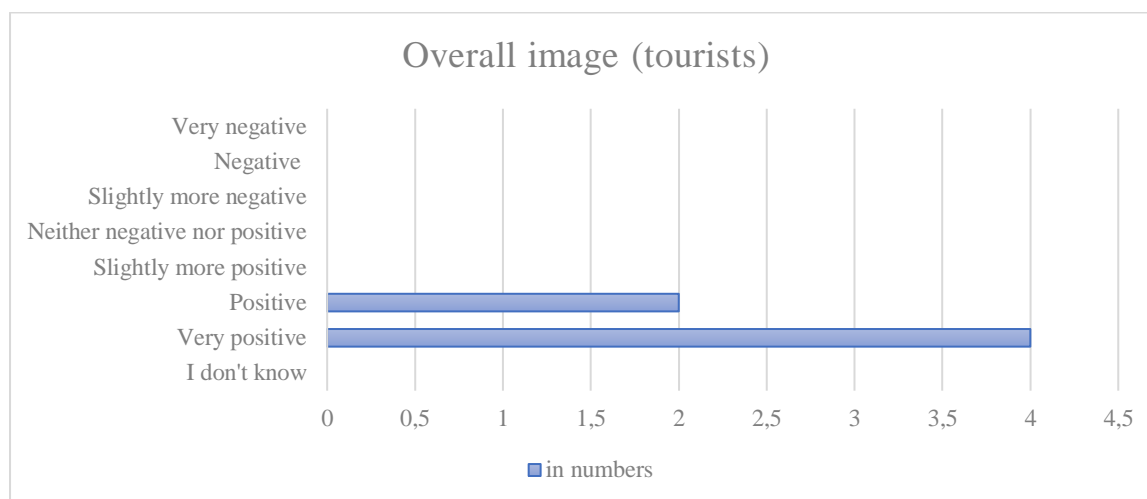


Figure 10: Overall image of tourists (N=6).

Of the six tourists that filled this in, all have a positive image, of which four even have a very positive image. While the sample is too small to make conclusions, it does give a bit of an indication that the overall image after visitation in Kosovo is more positive, which is in line with Tasci (2006) who states that visitation improves destination image.

#### 4.1.5 Behavioural intentions

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with four statements about their intention to visit Kosovo measured on a 7-point Likert scale. The results are presented in table 7 with the percentage per scale option for each statement. For a clearer overview, the three disagree scale options were grouped under ‘disagree’ and the three agree scale options were grouped under ‘agree’ and together with the ‘neither agree nor disagree’ these results are presented in figure 11. Figure 11 shows that the majority of respondents disagrees with all four statements, so it is safe to say that the majority will not select Kosovo as their potential destination at some point in the future (at this point). However, the difference between agree and disagree is only very minimum (1%) for the statement about whether they would like to take a holiday in Kosovo. Reka (2011) included a similar statement in his study, namely “I would like to visit Kosovo” (p. 333), to which 29% responded with agree. This number is significantly

lower than the 43% in the present study. It should be noted, however, that the amounts of respondents who neither agree nor disagree are relatively large for each of the other three statements, meaning that it is not fully ruled out either that they will visit Kosovo at some point in the future.

Table 7

Intention of potential tourists to visit Kosovo in percentages per scale option per statement (N=68)

<b>Intention to visit (potential tourists)</b>							
	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
I strongly intend to visit Kosovo in the future	13%	18%	16%	24%	21%	6%	3%
It is very likely that I would choose Kosovo as my tourist/holiday destination	12%	16%	28%	28%	10%	3%	3%
I would like to take a holiday in Kosovo	9%	18%	18%	13%	31%	9%	3%
I plan to visit Kosovo as a tourist at some point in the future	12%	13%	21%	24%	16%	12%	3%

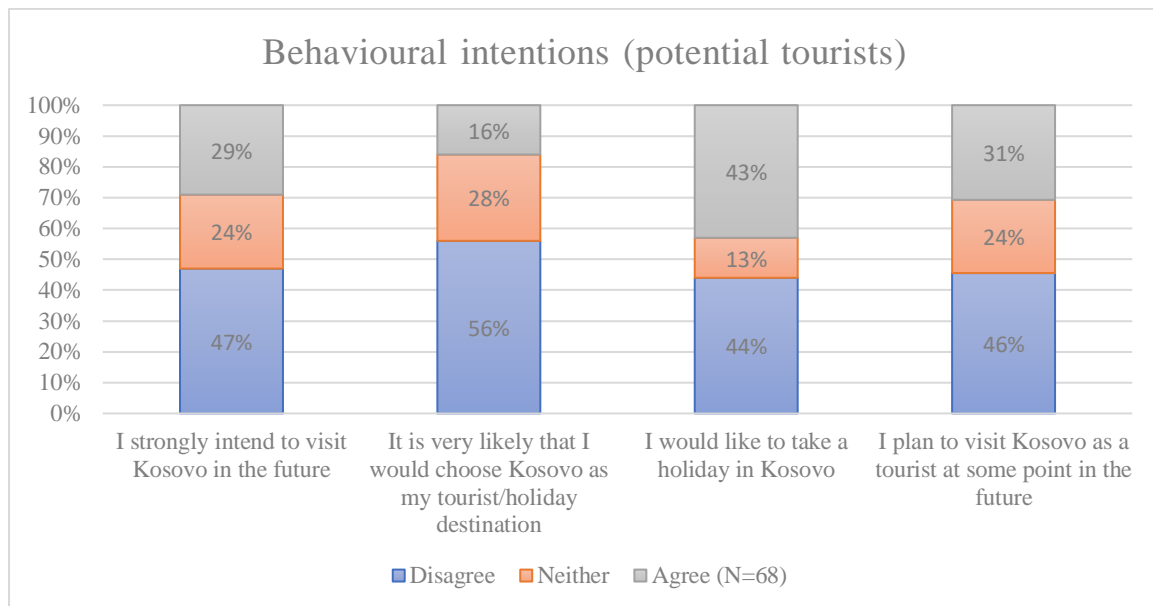


Figure 11: Intention of potential tourists to visit Kosovo for agree, disagree, and neither.

The respondents were also asked about their reasons for (not) visiting Kosovo in the future. Motivations for why they would visit Kosovo included that it is undiscovered and not touristy and therefore interesting and appealing which corresponds with the most frequently mentioned association ‘not touristy’ in table 4. Some responses included:

*"[I would] because it is not so touristy and busy yet."*

*"I would like to visit it because I'm pretty sure that there is something worth. However I don't know enough about it so I need to get more information about Kosovo."*

*"It believe that it is a nice country, but I would have to do some more research on it before deciding whether or not to visit it. I think that it may be an interesting place to visit."*

*"Never heard of it, therefore its interesting."*

*"Out of curiosity I would like to see if it is like they say it is."*

Interestingly, one responded mentioned that he/she knows about Dokufest, an International Documentary Short Film Festival in Prizren, and would like to visit it for that reason: *"I want to attend Dukofest in August in Kosovo, it sounds like fun"*.

On the other hand, motivations for not visiting Kosovo included:

*"There are numerous other destinations I find more attractive in Europe. Moreover, having visited countries like Serbia I feel I have already experience a bit of Balkan's culture and being honest it does not interest me to the extent some other European cultures do."*

*"I have the idea that it is not very safe there."*

*"I would have to do more research on Kosovo to decide whether I would like to visit or not. I need to know if there are nice things to see, good food, and how welcoming the country is to tourists."*

*"I don't know anything about Kosovo other than the war and soviet occupation."*

*"Just doesn't sound familiar and I don't know what to expect."*

Table 8

Intention of tourists to visit Kosovo again in numbers per scale option per statement (N=6)

<b>Intention to visit Kosovo again (tourists)</b>							
	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
I strongly intend to visit Kosovo again in the future	1	0	0	0	2	0	3
It is very likely that I would choose Kosovo again as my tourist/holiday destination	0	0	0	1	2	1	2
I would like to take a holiday in Kosovo again	0	0	0	0	2	2	2
I plan to visit Kosovo again as a tourist at some point in the future	0	0	0	0	2	2	2

Table 9

Intention of tourists to recommend Kosovo in numbers per scale option per statement (N=6)

<b>Intention to recommend Kosovo (tourists)</b>							
	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
I talk up Kosovo as a holiday destination	0	0	0	1	2	1	2
I bring up Kosovo in a positive way in conversations about holiday destinations	0	0	0	0	0	4	2
In social situations, I often speak favourably about Kosovo as a tourist destination	0	0	0	0	2	2	2
I recommend Kosovo as a vacation destination to other people when asked	0	0	0	1	2	1	2

While this sample is also too small to make conclusions and generalise the results, the results show that the majority of respondents in the group of tourists intent to visit Kosovo again and recommend it to others, suggesting that they must have had favourable experiences in the destination. This creates the expectation that other tourists are likely to have favourable experiences as well.

## 4.2 Quantitative stage

The associations of both groups were combined together for the quantitative questionnaire that was distributed to a new group of potential tourists. See for their demographics figures 12 and 13 below. Unfortunately, also for this quantitative questionnaire there is not an even spread between male and female. The majority is between 18 and 24 years old (79%) which is almost the same as in the qualitative questionnaire (76%).

### 4.2.1 Demographics

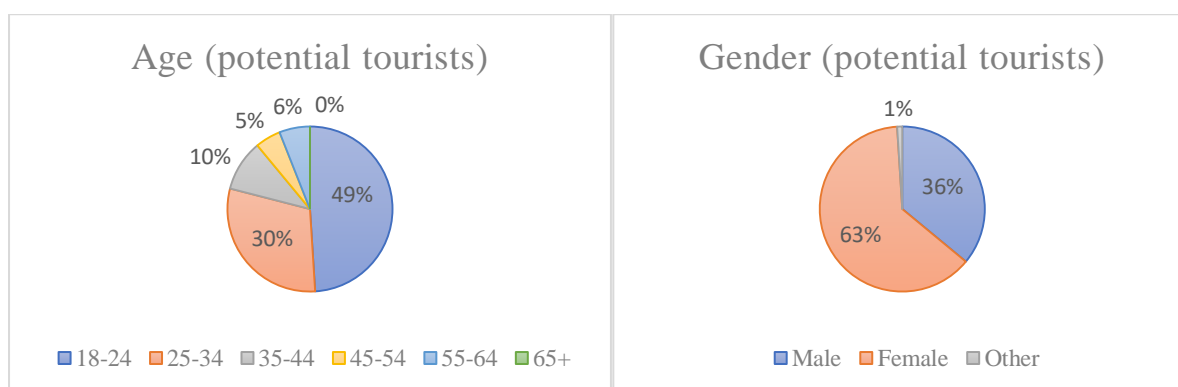


Figure 12: Age potential respondents quantitative stage (N=80).

Figure 13: Gender potential respondents quantitative stage (N=80).

### 4.2.2 Association strength and association valence

The associations that were (mostly) mentioned by tourists are indicated with \*\* and the associations that were (mostly) mentioned by potential tourists are indicated with \*. Some associations of both groups overlapped with each other, for example the association 'cheap' was mentioned by both groups. These are the remaining associations without an indication. The final list consisting of 37 attributes is presented in random order in table 10. Some of the associations were elaborated a little to make sure that each respondent knew exactly what was meant. These associations were then calculated for the mean association strength and mean association valence. The standard deviation of valence was also calculated to indicate per attribute whether the respondents generally agreed in terms of positive or negative evaluation of that attribute or that the valence varies among respondents, indicating a spread covering negative and positive valence (Kock et al., 2016).



The table shows that all attributes received relatively high strength values. It is interesting to point out that potential tourists also linked attributes mentioned only by tourists quite strongly with Kosovo while they did not mention them as part of their destination imagery of Kosovo. The expectation was that potential tourists would associate the attributes mentioned by tourists relatively less strongly with Kosovo than the attributes mentioned by potential tourists. However, if the average strength for all the attributes mentioned by tourists together ( $=4,01$ ) and the average strength for all the attributes mentioned by potential tourists together ( $=4,57$ ) is calculated, it becomes evident that they do associate the attributes mentioned by tourists slightly less strongly with Kosovo. This relatively high strength value of 4,57 means that the qualitative stage satisfactorily identified potential tourists' most associated attributes with Kosovo (Kock et al., 2016). The average strength of attributes mentioned by both groups ( $=4,54$ ) lies between those two numbers.

Table 10

Association strength and association valence of attributes by potential tourists (N=80) (\*=potential tourists, \*\*=tourists, no indication=both)

Attributes	Strength (mean)	Valence (mean)	Valence (std)
*Eastern European/Balkan country and influences	4,75	0,25	1,65
Cheap	5,09	1,38	1,43
Cultural (cultural sights and interesting culture)	4,61	1,76	1,29
Historical (historical buildings/sights and Kosovo's unique history)	4,69	1,61	1,28
Good local food	3,86	1,64	1,27
Not touristy/undiscovered	4,94	1,21	1,61
*Old buildings/cities/villages	5	1,31	1,29
*Similar to other countries in the area (Eastern Europe and Balkan)	4,6	0,15	1,36
*War/conflict	4,81	-1,11	2,07
Nature/natural attractions	4,14	1,52	1,28
*Warm weather/climate	4,36	1,27	1,37
*Authentic	4,78	1,57	1,24
Mountainous scenery	4,41	0,95	1,58
*Poor infrastructure/transport	4,81	-1,27	1,77
**Feeling happy	3,63	1,75	1,45
**Vibrant cities with many bars/cafes/restaurants full of people from early in the morning to late in the evening	3,51	1,35	1,45
**Safe	3,45	1,7	1,54
**Charming/cosy old towns (with sometimes cobbled streets)	4,06	1,51	1,33
**Coffee culture	3,51	0,53	1,72
*Poor/poverty	4,59	-1,09	1,7
Friendly locals	4,39	1,66	1,17
**Experience the local culture/lifestyle and interact with locals	4,36	1,26	1,31
**Ottoman influences in architecture	4,45	0,38	1,42
Hiking	4,22	0,62	1,58
**Hospitable/welcoming	4,39	1,51	1,29
**Old monasteries	4,24	0,59	1,42
**Feeling relaxed	3,95	1,64	1,4
*Unsafety/not safe	4,14	-1,49	1,81
**Traditional old bazaars	4,44	0,6	1,42
Unique/not standard destination	5,31	1,07	1,27
**(Old) Catholic and Orthodox churches and (old) mosques	4,6	0,63	1,44
**No language barrier/locals have good level of English	2,91	0,57	1,83
*Feeling scared/fear/worried	3,81	-1,63	1,61
**Lot of meat based dishes	4,76	0,81	1,62
**Not difficult to travel around in the country	3,49	1,39	1,41
Poor/not that good tourism infrastructure/facilities	4,25	-0,93	1,63
**Many young people	4,36	0,61	1,39
TOTAL	4,32	0,78	1,48

The two attributes that received the highest strength values are ‘cheap’ (5,09) and ‘unique/not a standard destination’ (5,31) while the two least strongly associated attributes are ‘no language barrier/locals have good level of English’ (2,91) and ‘safe’ (3,45). This means that their perception of Kosovo is that it is cheap and not a standard destination, but also that it is not safe and that locals do not have a good level of English. It was expected that they would not strongly associate safety with Kosovo, as ‘unsafe/not safe’ was one of the most frequently mentioned associations in the qualitative stage. Looking at the mean association valence, the two attributes that are most negatively evaluated are ‘feeling scared/fear/worried’ (-1,63) and ‘unsafety/not safe’ (-1,49) which is logical. Other negatively evaluated attributes include ‘war/conflict’ (-1,11), ‘poor infrastructure/transport’ (-1,27), ‘poor/poverty’ (-1,09), and ‘poor/not that good tourism infrastructure/facilities’ (-0,93). On the other hand, the two most positively evaluated attributes are ‘cultural (cultural sights and interesting culture)’ (1,76) and ‘feeling happy’ (1,75), and other positively evaluated attributes include ‘safe’ (1,7), ‘friendly locals’ (1,66), ‘good local food’ (1,64), ‘feeling relaxed’ (1,64), ‘historical (historical buildings/sights and Kosovo’s unique history)’ (1,61), ‘authentic’ (1,57), and ‘charming/cosy old towns (with sometimes cobbled streets)’ (1,51). In terms of the standard deviation for valence, the two attributes that have the highest standard deviation are ‘unsafety/not safe’ (1,81) and ‘no language barrier/locals have good level of English’ (1,83), meaning that the evaluations of these attributes cover a spread of positive and negative evaluations. In other words, there were relatively large differences between respondents in terms of evaluation of these attributes. In the case of ‘unsafety/not safe’, which was evaluated very negatively on average (-1,49), this could mean, for example, that some people might have evaluated it as very negative (-3) because safety is very important for them while others might have evaluated it more as neutral (0) because it is not so much an issue for them. Nevertheless, the expectation was that (almost) all respondents would evaluate that attribute as negative, but this is contradicted here. The three attributes with a low standard deviation are ‘friendly locals’ (1,17), ‘good local food’ (1,27), and ‘unique/not a standard destination’ (1,27). This indicates that respondents generally agreed in the evaluation of these attributes.

## **5. Discussion and practical implications**

In this section, the findings of the research will be discussed more extensively with a focus on their practical point of view in marketing strategies to promote Kosovo as a tourism destination.

### **5.1 Behavioural intentions of potential tourists**

A positive overall image positively influences the behavioural intentions of potential tourists, meaning that a positive image leads to intention to visit. In the present study, however, a positive image is not necessarily reflected in the intention to visit Kosovo. While the overall image of the majority of the respondents (42%) falls on the positive side of the continuum, the percentages of respondents who agreed with the four statements about intention to visit Kosovo fall between only 16% and 43%. On the other hand, while the overall image of 28% of the respondents falls on the negative side of the continuum, the percentages of respondents who disagreed with the four statements fall between 44% and even 56%, showing a discrepancy between overall image and behavioural intentions. Speaking for the group of tourists, the majority had a positive overall image of Kosovo and the majority also intends to visit Kosovo again and recommend it to others, which is in line with previous studies that a positive image also leads to positive future behaviours of tourists. However, the sample of tourists is too small to make such a conclusion. The high numbers of potential tourists who indicated that they do not intend to visit Kosovo together with the statistical data about the limited number of foreign visitors that visited Kosovo in 2017 suggest that the position of Kosovo in the tourism market is not strong, positive, and differentiating enough to attract potential tourists while these are important elements that a destination needs in order to compete in the competitive global tourism market (Qu et al., 2011). Understanding the destination imagery that potential tourists have of a destination is important to understand their behavioural intentions (Kock et al., 2016), demonstrating the purpose of the present study. Accordingly, tourism managers should seek to reinforce positive imageries held by the target audience, correct negative imageries, or create a new imagery (Pike & Ryan, 2004). Likewise, Kock et al. (2016) state that if managers identify a negative attribute that tourists strongly associate with a destination, they should either try to weaken the link (association strength) between the attribute and the destination or

increasing its favorability (association valence). On the other hand, if they identify a positive attribute that is strongly associated with Kosovo, they should reinforce this association.

## **5.2 Issues that negatively influence the behavioural intentions**

For the behavioural intentions of potential tourists, there are three main issues that could be identified in the motivations for why they do not intend to visit Kosovo. First of all, many respondents seem to have concerns about the safety in the country. These safety issues seem to be largely based on the associations that they have with the war, conflicts, and political tensions. Second, some of them stated that there are other destinations that attract them more or that they feel they do not have to visit Kosovo anymore when they have already visited other Balkan countries, suggesting that Kosovo is not distinctive enough to be chosen over other more well-known destinations or similar countries in the area. Third, and perhaps most importantly, respondents seem to generally have a weak or even lacking imagery of Kosovo, as many of the respondents stated that they do not know enough about Kosovo and what to expect there, confirming prior expectations. The observation that respondents generally have a weak or lacking imagery of Kosovo was not only evident in the motivations for why they do not intend to visit Kosovo, but also in the motivations for why would. Respondents said, for example, that they would visit it because it might be an interesting country but that they first need to look up more information, or that they would visit it to see if it is really like others describe it is, or that they have never really heard about it which is what makes it an interesting destination to visit. It could thus be argued that a weak or lacking imagery seems to be Kosovo's biggest obstacle in attracting potential tourists.

## **5.3 Unsafety**

The second biggest obstacle that hinders potential tourists from visiting Kosovo is their perception that it is not safe which is to be expected because perceptions of security, risk, safety, and political instability, whether perceived or real, significantly impact destination image and tourist behaviour (Alvarez & Campo, 2014; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Sönmez & Sirakaya, 2002). More specifically, peace, calm, and safety are requisite to attract tourists to any destination (Sönmez, 1998). Surprisingly, table 10 shows

that ‘unsafety/not safe’ received a relatively low strength value (4,14) which is below the total association strength average (4,32), so it is relatively weakly associated with Kosovo. If we compare this with the attribute ‘safe’ which is the second least strongly associated attribute (3,45), it could be argued that potential tourists perceive Kosovo not necessarily as unsafe, but also not as safe. As is to be expected, ‘unsafety/not safe’ is the second most negatively evaluated (-1,49) while ‘safe’ is one of the most positively evaluated attributes in a destination (1,7). Tourism managers should seek to weaken the association that Kosovo is unsafe. Several respondents indicated in the qualitative stage that they still think Kosovo is under the same conditions as it was during the war, that it is a war-torn country with a war-related atmosphere and with soldiers in the streets. Similarly, Ireland is still seen as the place of the IRA’s bloody attacks and Central America as a place rife with civil wars and revolutionary groups while they are very different nowadays (Gertner & Kotler, 2004). Turning a negative imagery and overall image into a more positive one is not an easy task, because change only occurs slowly over many years (Pike, 2017). This is particularly true for developing countries which tend to suffer from negative stereotypes, generalisations, and perceptions (Avraham & Ketter, 2013). While it takes a lot of time and effort, it is not impossible, as Gartner and Hunt (1987) found evidence of a positive destination image change in the image of Utah over a 13-year period (in Pike, 2017). According to Avraham and Ketter (2013), combating a prolonged negative image and negative stereotypes and prejudices associated with a destination is difficult, because they were constructed over many years, and reinforced in the public mind by the media. Isaac and Eid (2019) similarly argued that the negative perceptions of Palestine are the result of the media focusing only on the conflicts and ignoring the positive sides of Palestine. That it will not be easy to change negative perceptions into a more positive imagery was also emphasised of the respondents in the present study who said:

*“I do not consider Kosovo, nor have I ever considered, as a tourist destination [...] so it doesn't appeal to me as a tourist destination. It's late turbulent history with Serbia and its separatist tendencies is something that dominates my mind when I hear “Kosovo” and it would require putting some highly visible knowledge out there about Kosovo to get me to start thinking in different terms.”*

#### 5.4 Weak destination imagery

To address Kosovo's main issue that many potential tourists simply have a weak or lacking imagery of Kosovo it is important to understand why this is, i.e. what this is based on. Respondents reiterated several times phrases such as *"I don't know"*, *"I'm not sure"*, or *"It's difficult to say because I don't have enough information about Kosovo"*. In total, 47% of the respondents said they do not know for at least one of the questions. This was especially the case when they were asked to try and list attributes or attractions that are distinctive for Kosovo. There were even two respondents who think Kosovo is a city, not a country. This lack of imagery might explain the discrepancy between the high numbers of respondents with neither a negative nor a positive overall image and the high numbers of respondents who disagreed with the four statements about intention to visit even, because potential tourists only choose destinations they are aware of (Hahm & Severt, 2018; Um & Crompton, 1990). This means that due to their weak imagery of Kosovo, respondents from the group with neither a negative nor a positive image were probably more inclined to disagree because they cannot make the decision to visit Kosovo on the basis of such limited knowledge, apart from those who are purposefully looking for the unknown. Milman and Pizam (1995) add that for a tourism destination to be successful, it must first create awareness in the minds of potential tourist and second create a positive imagery and image.

Once the importance of awareness and the role of a positive overall image in intention to visit a destination is recognised, awareness can be developed through product publicity and other communications processes (Milman & Pizam, 1995). In other words, tourism managers should focus more on communicating Kosovo to potential tourists to create awareness about the destination. Lack of information and enough advertisements and other promotional materials about Kosovo indeed explains the weak or lacking imagery of Kosovo, as indicated by several respondents:

*"No images or characteristics come to mind as I have never heard of Kosovo before."*

*"I do not have any information about Kosovo yet. I am not sure if I have ever seen any advertisement on Kosovo as a tourism destination."*

*“I do not consider Kosovo, nor have I ever considered, as a tourist destination. I am quite certain that it's a safe country now, but on the forum of travels and vacations, it doesn't come up at all. It's not a country that I see advertised or that I see among tourist destinations. Its landscape is not very known to me and I am not aware of any tourist attractions in Kosovo, so it doesn't appeal to me as a tourist destination.”*

*“I don't know anything special about the country, that makes me want to go there. I wouldn't hold back to go there, if I thought it would be interesting, beautiful etc.”*

It becomes evident that in the case of Kosovo, potential tourists seem to generally have only an organic imagery of Kosovo which is formed through non-touristic and non-commercial information sources such as newspapers, magazines, TV, and word-of-mouth, in contrast to an induced imagery which is formed through promotional touristic material such as advertisements, travel posters, and brochures. Tourism managers can do little to change an organic imagery but they can influence the formation of an induced imagery through promotion (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Prebensen, 2007). The most effective tourism promotion at the organic stage is informative promotion, meaning to provide potential tourists with knowledge of a destination, so they are aware of it when making a selection of potential destinations (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Gartner (1993) suggests to use a combination of several agents, i.e. information sources, for an effective promotion. Prior studies emphasised social media as one of the most influential information sources nowadays and Xiang and Gretzel (2010) even postulate that “tourism marketers can no longer ignore the role of social media in distributing travel-related information without risking to become irrelevant” (p. 186). The present study, however, showed that social media played only a minor role in the formation of the imageries of respondents in the present study (13%), meaning that there is room for improvement in this aspect. Thus, tourism managers should acknowledge the influential role of social media and accordingly, adopt them in their strategies. Additionally, social media is not only a great channel for information distribution by tourism managers, it is also a great platform for tourists to share their travel experiences and provide word-of-mouth to potential tourists, which, as argued is one of the most important information sources the formation of imageries of potential respondents (Bigné et al., 2001). Tourism managers should therefore not only



acknowledge the key role for social media in their promotion of Kosovo, but also the importance of ensuring that tourists provide positive word-of-mouth on social media platforms. As argued, this can be achieved by projecting a true representation of the destination to potential tourists in the first place, and not one that is more positive than what the destination can offer as that will create unrealistic expectations on the side of potential tourists and result in dissatisfaction and decreased intention to recommend. A final remark is that it is positive that the group with a negative overall image is relatively small (28%) and that the group with neither a negative nor a positive overall image is relatively large (29%), because the images of the latter group will be easier to modify into a more positive one than the ones of the group with a negative image.

### **5.5 Strategies to establish a positive destination imagery of Kosovo**

There are several strategies that destinations can adopt to attempt to establish a more positive imagery and overall image. These can be divided into two main approaches: a cosmetic approach which is focused on changing how the destination is portrayed, and the second is a strategic approach which is focused on both the portrayal and changing reality that give cause to the negative perceptions (Avraham & Ketter, 2013).

#### **5.5.1 Cosmetic approach**

The seven strategies within the cosmetic approach include: (1) ignoring the image crisis problem; (2) disassociation from the problematic location; (3) association with prestige locations; (4) acknowledging a negative destination image; (5) delivering a counter message to the negative stereotype; (6) spinning the negative characteristic to positive, and (7) ridiculing the stereotype (Avraham & Ketter, 2013). It is not in the scope of the present study to extensively discuss how Kosovo could change its imagery, but some of these strategies will be briefly discussed and how they can be applied to the case of Kosovo. The perceptions that potential tourists have that Kosovo is not safe are mainly based on their associations with war, conflict, and political instability. According to Avraham and Ketter (2013), often the most effective strategy to deal with these perceptions is by acknowledging this negative imagery in campaigns and promotion and emphasise that the war is over and that it is no longer unsafe or dangerous anymore,

for example through the use of a ‘new era’ slogan. This approach was adopted by Croatia which created the slogan: “After the war, safety has become our biggest marketing tool.” (as cited in Rivera, 2008). Similarly, some researchers emphasise that potential tourists need to be reassured of their safety and security (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Sirakaya, Sheppard, and McLellan (1997) in their study to the effect of perceived safety at a potential vacation destination on the reported likelihood to travel to that destination for potential travellers, however, found that an individual’s likelihood of travelling to a destination does not increase when high safety levels are stressed. In fact, they argue that stressing high safety levels only reinforce the prior assumption rather than that it alters their perception of the destination. A better strategy to deal with these safety concerns and war related associations such as the perceptions that the atmosphere is still war-related and very tensed would perhaps be the fifth strategy. In this strategy, such negative associations are counter messaged in campaigns by emphasising how peaceful and relaxing it is (Avraham & Ketter, 2013). Table 10 shows that ‘feeling relaxed’ is indeed not strongly associated with Kosovo (3,95) while it is very positively evaluated (1,64) and received a relatively low variance value, meaning that respondents generally agree that it is a favourable attribute. Tourism managers should thus really focus on ensuring that Kosovo is a relaxing and peaceful destination.

The same strategy could be applied to the perception that Kosovo lacks interesting tourist attractions (sights and activities). Campaigns should counter message this by highlighting that it does have plenty of interesting things to see or do, mainly historically and culturally related. It is important for a destination to show these sights and activities because attractions have been viewed by many researchers as central to the tourism process, meaning that they are often the reason for visiting a particular destination (Richards, 2002). This is supported by table 10 which shows that, for instance, ‘cultural (cultural sights and interesting culture)’ and ‘historical (historical buildings/sights and Kosovo’s unique history)’ received relatively high valence values (respectively 1,76 and 1,61). Moreover, tourism managers should weaken the associations that it has grey and sad cities by highlighting the charming and cosy old towns (e.g. Prizren) which was very positively evaluated (1,51). Finally, attributes that are strongly associated with Kosovo are ‘poor infrastructure/transport’ (4,81) and ‘poor/not that good

tourism infrastructure/facilities' (4,25) and which are negatively evaluated with respectively -1,27 and -0,93. This perception that Kosovo is underdeveloped in terms of these attributes could be approached with the sixth strategy in which the focus is on turning Kosovo's negative attributes into its assets, for example by emphasising its authenticity (Avraham & Ketter, 2013), an attribute that was also positively evaluated (1,57).

### **5.5.2 Strategic approach**

The strategic approach, on the other hand, is more effective because it deals with the fundamental underlying problems by changing reality, but also requires more effort on many levels. Strategies within this approach include: (1) hosting spotlight events; (2) hosting events that spin liabilities into assets; (3) tackling the problematic reality; (4) and branding contrary to stereotypes (Avraham & Ketter, 2013). Hosting events that are unique to the destination is a great way to put the destination in a positive spotlight and shift the media attention from a negative projection of the destination to a positive projection. Moreover, destinations can use this media attention to promote other positive aspects of the destination during the event, hoping to change potential tourists' imageries. Such events attract individuals to a destination which they normally never considered visiting (Avraham & Ketter, 2013). Even if the rest of their imagery and overall image of the destination is not be that favourable, the time they spend in the destination might improve this, as visitation improves the destination imagery (Tasci, 2006). According to Alvarez and Campo (2014), this is especially true for destinations with a negative imagery but with many tourist attractions. In the case of Kosovo, such a spotlight event could, for example, be the Dokufest in Prizren in August, especially because it was also mentioned by one respondent who said he/she would love to visit that festival. This festival has the potential to attract many (young) international people to the destination which in turn hopefully results in positive future behaviours, i.e. intention to recommend and intention to revisit.

Finally, a prior expectation was that potential tourists would strongly associate war and conflict with Kosovo. This belief is confirmed by the high strength value that the association 'war/conflict' received (4,81). While this attribute is negatively evaluated (-1,11), it could also be turned into a positive asset

of the destination (Avraham & Ketter, 2013). It is interesting that this attribute received the highest standard deviation for valence (2,07), meaning that the evaluations of this attribute differ greatly among the respondents. This suggests that there have been respondents who evaluated it as a positive asset of the destination, as can be demonstrated with the response of one of the respondents to the question about the expected atmosphere: *“Slightly negative due to its recent history, but at the same time this could be a positive thing”*. Tourism managers could use the war and its outcomes (e.g. the artefacts of war, such as battlefields, cemeteries, monuments, museums and living history demonstrations) to stimulate tourism (Bigley, Lee, Chon, & Yoon, 2010). On the other hand, they may also choose to cover this part of the history. For example Croatia omitted the war from its history by reframing Croatia’s history and culture (Rivera, 2008). The question is whether tourism managers want to focus on Kosovo’s past or that they seek to diminish the link between the destination and the war as much as possible and focus on its positive attributes and the future. All in all, it should be emphasised that whatever campaigns are used, if they do not match with the reality, tourists may be more disappointed which creates more harm than good to their image (Avraham & Ketter, 2013). Similarly, in chapter two it was discussed that destinations should project a reliable and true representation of the destination and not one that is excessively higher than what the destination can actually offer as that will create unrealistic expectations which will likely result in dissatisfaction and negative future behaviours.

## **5.6 Reinforcing positive associations**

Changing a negative imagery and image into a positive takes time and effort. According to Pike (2017), “marketing communications should be underpinned by the notion that the easiest route to consumers’ minds is to reinforce positively held perceptions” (p 128), meaning that tourism managers should focus on the positive associations and reinforce those. The motivations given for why the respondents do intend to visit Kosovo were mainly that it is not touristy. Table 10 shows that this attribute is strongly associated with Kosovo (4,94) and also quite positively evaluated (1,21), suggesting that tourism managers should emphasise this attribute in their promotion of Kosovo. However, it should also be highlighted that the standard deviation of valence for this attribute is relatively high (1,61), meaning that for some potential tourists this is a positive attribute while for others it is a negative attribute in a

destination, which is also demonstrated by the following two contrasting responses: “[I would] because it is not so touristy and busy yet” and “Honestly I want to go other more touristic countries”. Depending on how tourism managers want to project the destination to potential tourists, they could therefore also try to make this attribute more favourable so that it is not something that negatively influences the intention to visit of those who evaluate this attribute as negative for a destination. The two responses support the argument by Kock et al. (2016) that the evaluation of attributes should be measured separately from collecting them and per respondent-destination under investigation, as it should not be assumed that a certain attribute is positive or negative for all individuals.

The consequence of not being a touristy destination is that Kosovo is a unique destination, or at least not a standard destination. Table 10 shows that this attribute is the most strongly associated with Kosovo with a 5,3 (on a scale from 1 to 7) and additionally it is also quite positively evaluated (1,07), and the standard deviation is the second lowest. Also strongly associated but evaluated even more positively is ‘authentic’ (4,78 and 1,57). Therefore, tourism managers should especially highlight these attributes in marketing strategies. It should be pointed out that once international tourism starts to grow, these attributes will no longer apply to Kosovo. As such, tourism managers should also focus on attributes that will still be there in the long term. Based on table 10, such long term attributes that are relatively strongly associated with Kosovo as well as positively evaluated include ‘cultural (cultural sights and interesting culture)’ (respectively 4,61 and 1,76), ‘historical (historical buildings/sights and Kosovo’s unique history)’ (4,69 and 1,61), ‘warm weather/climate’ (4,36 and 1,27), and ‘charming/cosy old towns (with sometimes cobbled streets)’ (4,06 and 1,51). Tourism managers should furthermore not only focus on promoting cognitive attributes of Kosovo but also on affective attributes such as atmosphere, because some potential tourists simply look for atmosphere and hospitality: “[...] I look for hospitality and atmosphere in a destination. I have the idea that I will not find that in that country”. Including affective attributes in the promotion will also attract those who are not necessarily looking for nature or historical and cultural sights and activities. Lastly, another attribute that is the second most strongly associated with Kosovo and also relatively positively evaluated is ‘cheap’ (5,09), but the question is whether that is what tourism managers should want to highlight.

Tourists frequently mentioned that Kosovo has good local food, an attribute which is also evaluated by potential tourists as positive in a destination. It is a shame that they associate this attribute relatively weakly with Kosovo (3,86), meaning that this is an aspect which tourism managers can use to their advantage. If tourists perceive this as a strength of the destination, it should definitely be used in the promotion of Kosovo to potential tourists, especially because they evaluate it so positively. This example clearly supports the argument that the experience that tourists have with a destination and the attributes they perceive as strengths of the destination is valuable knowledge for tourism managers and should be utilised in attracting potential tourists.

## **6. Conclusion**

### **6.1 Conclusion of the study**

In the extant literature there is a paucity of studies that examined the destination imagery of post-conflict countries and countries that are less known as a tourism destination. Moreover, destination imagery has often been examined using quantitative methods while only qualitative methods are able to capture destination-specific imagery. The present study has added to the literature by investigating potential tourists' destination imagery of Kosovo as a tourism destination using a mixed methods approach. It also aimed to understand what the destination imagery of potential tourists is based on, their behavioural intentions, how positive or negative their overall image is, and what information sources influenced the formation of their destination imagery. Self-administered online questionnaires with qualitative and quantitative items as well as qualitative content analysis of travel blogs were used as methods for this.

The results about behavioural intentions demonstrated the need for the present study, as the majority of potential tourists indicated that they do not intend to visit Kosovo. It is widely believed that a positive overall image of a destination positively correlates with intention to visit the destination, but the present study could not confirm this for potential tourists. Their motivations for their choice revealed that safety concerns as a result of associations with war, conflict, and political instability and a weak or even a lacking imagery of Kosovo as a result of lack of information and advertisements and other promotional materials about Kosovo are the main obstacles that hinder potential tourists from visiting Kosovo. On the other hand, motivations for visiting Kosovo included that it is undiscovered and not touristy. The study argued that the discrepancy between overall image and intention to visit is likely due to this weak imagery, because respondents who do not necessarily have a negative overall image are more likely to not visit Kosovo because they have limited knowledge about Kosovo. The safety related associations and the weak destination imagery should therefore be two of the major objectives that tourism managers should address in marketing strategies in order to trigger positive behavioural intentions of potential tourists. Furthermore, the results showed that social media only played a minor role in the formation of

their imageries, meaning that tourism managers should use this channel more for the distribution of information and promotional materials about Kosovo.

The destination imagery was examined in two stages. First a qualitative stage which captured the cognitive, affective, and distinctive attributes that potential tourists as well as tourists associate with Kosovo in a qualitative way, followed by a quantitative stage which measured for potential tourists their association strength and association valence for 37 of the most frequently mentioned destination attributes identified in the imageries of both tourists and potential tourists. The fifteen most frequently mentioned associations identified in the imageries of potential tourists during the qualitative stage included *not touristy*, *cheap*, *historical/history*, *friendly locals*, *war/conflict*, and *not very safe*. The results from the quantitative stage showed that associations that received high strength and high valence values include that it is a unique or not a standard destination, that it is authentic, and that it is not touristy. Tourism managers should reinforce and highlight these. On the other hand, they should weaken the link between associations that received also high strength but low valence values or increase their favourability, such as war/conflict, and poor infrastructure and transport and poor tourism infrastructure and facilities. Attributes that are not strongly associated with Kosovo and with low valence values include that there are no language barriers, so tourism managers could either ensure that language barriers will not be a problem or try to make it more favourable by highlighting its authenticity aspect. Finally, associations with also low strength values but with high valence values include feeling happy, safe, and good local food. Tourism managers could try to strengthen the links between these attributes and Kosovo and emphasise that Kosovo is a place to feel happy and eat good local food, although stressing that Kosovo is safe could also be counterproductive. In short, tourism managers should aim to reinforce the positive associations while weaken the link between negative associations or make them more favourable.

Overall, the methods used in the present study provided satisfactory results and a good foundation for the discussion to be able to answer the main research questions. Moreover, the quantitative stage satisfactorily confirmed prior expectations that many respondents would have a weak or lacking imagery



of Kosovo as a tourism destination as well as the belief that many would strongly associate it with war and conflict and unsafety, although surprisingly, the strength value for war/conflict was lower than prior expectations, meaning that it is not as much part of Kosovo's destination imagery as expected.

## **6.2 Limitations**

While the present study was able to achieve its objectives and provide satisfactory results to answer the research questions, one of the main limitations of the present study was that the samples of respondents were relatively small. Therefore, the results cannot be generalised to the whole population. Future studies should examine the aspects measured in the present study further for larger samples to see if larger samples will give the same conclusions. Especially the sample of tourists was too small to make any concrete conclusions and generalise the results. They were nevertheless presented to give an indication. The present study was, however, focused on potential tourists rather than on tourists and the identified attributes in the destination imagery of tourists still represent a true representation of Kosovo and as such, were nevertheless valuable to be used in the measurement of association strength and association valence by potential tourists. While content analysis of travel blogs allowed to elicit attributes in addition to the seven respondents, the future behaviours and overall level of positivity or negativity could not be measured for the bloggers, but only for the seven of the total fourteen tourists. Although bigger samples are more favourable it was still possible to fulfil the aim of the study. Respondents in both the groups of tourists and potential tourists did not always fill in every question of the questionnaires and additionally, there were many respondents for the group of potential tourists who did not fill in the questionnaires seriously. This meant that around forty responses for the qualitative questionnaire and around ten responses for the quantitative questionnaire could not be used. This could be considered as a big limitation of the present study. Another limitation related to the use of online questionnaires is that they sometimes provided too generic words and phrases (e.g. 'beautiful'). In-depth interviews would allow the researcher to ask what they mean with certain generic phrases, what it refers to, or what gives cause to them to obtain more detailed results. It would also allow the researcher to observe the respondents and see how serious they are about answering the questions. Using online questionnaires is also limited to individuals who know how to use the internet and might exclude the

older generation. This was also visible in the present study where the majority of all respondents were between 18 and 34 years old which is another reason why the results cannot be generalised to the whole population. If the age group had been more diverse in terms of age, the attributes might have been evaluated differently. It would be interesting to do the same study but with an older sample. On the other hand, however, it would be very time consuming to do in-depth interviews with very large samples of respondents. So in this respect, using online questionnaires was both an advantage as a limitation. Not necessarily a limitation, but worth to point out is that qualitative analysis is highly subjective to a researcher's interpretation of the data. Another researcher might have interpreted and coded the data slightly differently.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

Although the present study gives a good indication of Kosovo's destination imagery held by potential tourists, more research on this subject is desirable and future studies should use bigger samples to be able to generalise the results to the whole population. Since there is a limited amount of tourism studies on Kosovo and in particular the imagery of Kosovo, there are endless possibilities for future studies. The focus of the present study was on potential tourists, but doing a similar more in-depth study to the destination imagery of tourists would be interesting to identify strengths and weaknesses of Kosovo's performance as a tourism destination based on actual experience in the destination. These results could subsequently be compared with the results from the present study to discover the main differences between the imageries of tourists and potential tourists. Furthermore, it would be interesting to do a similar research to the projected imagery of Kosovo on various travel and tourism related websites that promote Kosovo using content analysis and compare these results with the results from the present study to identify if there are any discrepancies between the perceived imagery and the imagery that these websites wish to project of Kosovo. Finally, the present study made a first attempt at discussing how Kosovo could improve its position in the tourism market, but it was not in the scope of the present study to discuss this extensively and in-depth, so this might be a good subject for future studies.

**To the reader of this thesis who has never visited Kosovo:**

Visit Kosovo and discover for yourself all the great things it has to offer.

I am certain you will love this place just as much as I do.

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## Appendix A

### Travel blogs tourists

<a href="https://www.travelsofabookpacker.com/blog/kosovo-things-to-do">https://www.travelsofabookpacker.com/blog/kosovo-things-to-do</a>
<a href="https://www.swedishnomad.com/14-reasons-to-visit-kosovo/">https://www.swedishnomad.com/14-reasons-to-visit-kosovo/</a>
<a href="https://eternalarrival.com/travel-blog/europe/kosovo/things-to-do-in-kosovo/">https://eternalarrival.com/travel-blog/europe/kosovo/things-to-do-in-kosovo/</a>
<a href="https://www.ikreis.net/p-457/reizen-door-kosovo">https://www.ikreis.net/p-457/reizen-door-kosovo</a>
<a href="https://www.backpackadventures.org/2017/08/30/backpacking-kosovo/">https://www.backpackadventures.org/2017/08/30/backpacking-kosovo/</a>
<a href="https://www.adventurousskate.com/kosovo-a-warm-welcome-from-a-newborn-country/">https://www.adventurousskate.com/kosovo-a-warm-welcome-from-a-newborn-country/</a>
<a href="http://floatingmyboat.com/kosovo-travel-guide-6-places-you-should-visit/">http://floatingmyboat.com/kosovo-travel-guide-6-places-you-should-visit/</a>

Note: Full insight in the primary data used in this study is available through the Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

## **Appendix B**

### **More information about the research**

- **What is the research about?**

Explore the images that tourists and potential tourists (people who have never visited Kosovo) have of Kosovo as a tourism destination.

- **Confidentiality and anonymity**

If you decide to participate, all the information you provide will be processed anonymously and your identity will remain anonymous at all times. This will be done by disguising any information that may reveal your identity. Data from this questionnaire will only be used for this research.

- **What benefits will I have from participating in this research?**

You will not have any direct benefits from participating in this research. However, your responses in the questionnaire may play a role in the future development of tourism in Kosovo. It will help organizations/companies/individuals concerned with tourism (development) in Kosovo learn more about how Kosovo is perceived. This is useful knowledge because they can use this information to adjust or improve marketing strategies to attract new tourists to Kosovo while also retaining current tourists.

If you are interested in the findings of the research or in reading the final thesis, I would be more than happy to send it to you. At the end of the questionnaire you will have the opportunity to indicate if you are interested in this or not. Of course you can also always email me for it.

- **Right to refuse and withdraw from the research and right to ask questions**

You have the right to refuse or withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences and without having to give a reason. You are also free to contact me any time if you have any questions or when you need clarification and/or more information.

- **Possible risks or discomforts**

There are no risks and/or discomforts associated with participating in this study. Your participation in this research does not involve any physical or emotional risk to you.

For questions or complaints you can contact me at [kim-janssen94@outlook.com](mailto:kim-janssen94@outlook.com)

**If you want to participate, continue to the next page to start the questionnaire.**