

Operational Plan

INTRODUCTION

Countries, cities and tourism destinations are partially overlapping concepts, of which the city-state Monaco is a good example.

Conceptually places can be located into a continuum on the basis of number of actors or stakeholders. In the other extreme are larger entities, such as countries or cities, in which number of stakeholders and actors may be enormous. At the other extreme are smaller entities, e.g., smaller towns or tourism resorts, where both the number of actors, as well as relevant thematic issues are considerably fewer. Place marketing related to countries and cities often has far more audiences and strategic objectives than those related to tourism industry.

Despite the similarities, overlap and difficulties in drawing the line between, a tourism destination (e.g., ski destination or a paradise island) may often be considered to be closer to a mono-purpose area than a city or a country. This feature reduces the number of variables that need to be considered, thus making the planning and implementation (arguably) easier. As an example, it may be far easier to consider positioning and differentiation from the tourism purpose alone, than taking into account the needs of car manufacturing industry and public diplomacy. Another significantly different feature is that within the limits of a tourism destination (e.g., ski destination or a paradise island), the opportunities of the stakeholder to change reality are far greater than in the context of larger geographical area. As an example, if necessary, a ski destination might end up realizing the need to paint every house red, and be successful in doing so.

This fourth chapter of the book presents a description of the action plan for building a place brand for a country and for a tourism destination. Either one or the other of these action plans may be utilized in the context of cities,

depending on their size and type. The action plan goes through different steps of building a place-brand and its programming.

COUNTRY BRAND: OPERATIONAL PLAN IN STAGES

A general operational plan for creating and sustaining a country-brand consists of five consecutive stages. This working plan deals with the first four: start-up and organization, research, forming brand identity (strategic work stage), and making an execution and enforcement plan. The operational plan's main stages and preliminary timetable are presented in Figure 4.1. The length and timing of the operations is marked with the numbers of the months, so that number 1 represents the starting month of the project. The following pages introduce the steps in stages.

The program's research, strategic and planning stages take 18 months. Three points of view are emphasized: image clarifications, evaluation of competitiveness and creative strategic conception. Activities, different operations and brand platform are established from the developed competition strategies. The operational plan's estimated cost is specified at the beginning of the project.

The actual implementation stage has to be long term, systematic and consistent. Abroad, the program should increase the country's positive image, level of knowledge of the country, as well as the strengths and values of the country. Approximately 5 years should be reserved for the launching stage.

The results of the operational plan will be revealed at the end of the program and subsequently. It has been discovered that the process of developing a country-brand often takes 10 to 20 years.

Stage I: Start-up and Organization

The start-up phase of the process is vital for the project's success. Thus, a great deal of attention has been paid to widening participation and communication and increasing the commitment of various stakeholders.

The aim of this stage is to start organizing the country-branding project. The stage includes three main parts: generating commitment within the top political and business managers, getting organized and creating visibility for the process which is about to begin.

A team called the 'Promotion Board' is in charge of the implementation stages. The steps of this stage are presented in Table 4.1. The steps are described in more detail later.

A team is needed which organizes, coordinates and manages the country-branding process. We name this team the 'Action Group,' but the team can

FIGURE 4.1 Country brand: the operational plan's main stages and preliminary timetable

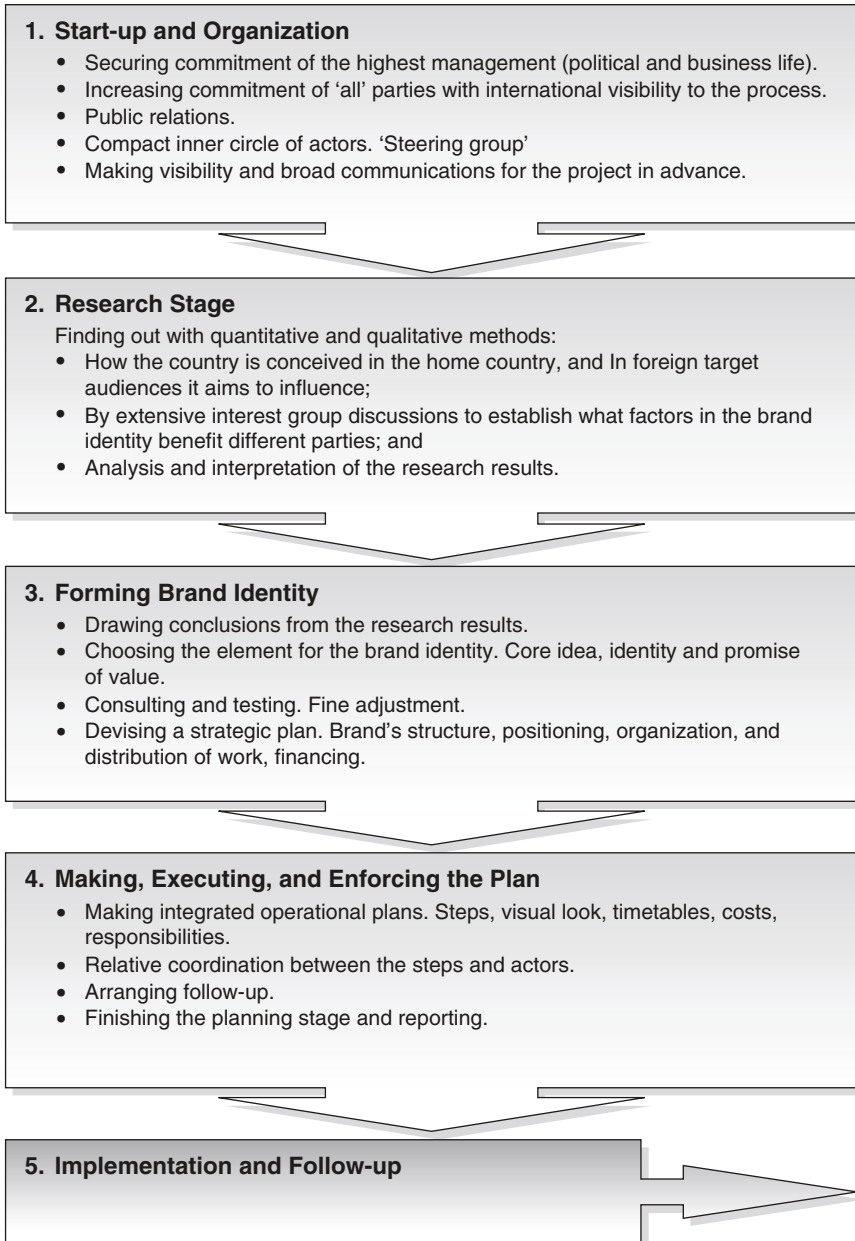


TABLE 4.1 Stage 1 – start-up and organization (country brand)

Step	Responsibility bearer	Actor	Timetable (month)
1. Generating commitment	Promotion Board	Promotion Board	1–2
2. Creating the organization	Promotion Board	Promotion Board	1–2
3. Project visibility	Promotion Board	Communications agency + Promotion Board	3–4

also have other names such as the ‘Branding Group.’ The task of the Action Group is to initiate, or ‘kick start’ and organize the process of developing a brand for a country. The Action Group should also build good relationships with the media and ensure that all the positive results of the project will get public attention. Smooth-functioning Action Groups typically have members from the fields of public diplomacy, tourism, exports and foreign direct investment. The group should be appointed by the government to guarantee the requisite high status and credibility.

In some examples, the Action Group has been led by a top representative from the Foreign Ministry, the head of the National Tourism Bureau or the head of the national FDI office. Importantly, what is needed is broad cooperation and involvement of representatives of all the major stakeholders, such as public diplomacy, government, business, the media, the arts and education.

Step 1. Making highest management of parties with international visibility committed (business life, science, arts, sports and political)

Top political and financial leaders (business life) as well as representatives of science, arts and sports’ interest groups should be committed to the project and its objectives. To secure sufficient emphasis on this subject, a special *Commitment Generation Plan* should be created. The plan should specify the target stakeholders, i.e., organizations with international visibility and activities needed to secure their interest and commitment in country-brand development process.

Making top-level private and public sector decision-makers committed to the project is critically important for its success.

When making political leaders committed it is important to emphasize the long-term character of the project. A brand develops slowly and the benefit

will not be realized during a government's four-year term. This step needs to engage:

- the government, president, party leaders;
- most central export companies;
- the tourism industry; and
- the highest management of 'all' the other parties with international visibility.

Making the parties committed is arranged consensually. Those who are willing benefit from an opportunity to give their opinions about the planning process, and their commitment takes effect immediately, right at the beginning of the planning process. Material related to the planning process is produced and communicated in many ways. The solutions of the planning stage are examined with all the participants and feedback material from these discussions is analyzed and used to further inform the planning process.

Step 2. Creating the organization

The objective of this step is to create a functional and credible organization which can lead the country-brand building's planning process.

During the start-up stage, a steering group (SG) is convened by the Promotion Board and named preferably by the country's government. Representatives of the steering group are chosen from parties with international visibility, including: representatives of business life (export industry, tourism); public diplomacy; science and sports; and political leaders. The brand's whole development project should be personified in the leader of the steering group, who should be an internationally-known, appreciated and influential person (on a level with the president, Prime Minister, Speaker of Parliament, managing director of a big company, etc.) The size of the steering group may be around 20 people.

When the steering group is formed, efforts should be made to ensure that the project will not be imprinted only in the public sector, a certain government, or in a certain ministry's project.

Together with building the organization, there should be some clear agreements on the political objectives, desired methods and the boundaries of the authorities.

A *secretariat* is assigned to support the steering group and help in preparation procedures, planning and coordination of the project, and to arrange supports, meetings, and seminars for the steering group, as well as taking care of different coordination and communication operations of the brand activities.

The secretariat consists both of a *management team* that makes operative decisions, and of supportive personnel. The project's secretariat should be organized so there are enough full-time personnel working on the project. The *management team* coordinating the secretariat can comprise of five to eight people, and consist of members of the steering group and professionals of place marketing and branding. The management can create separate teams, if needed.

Step 3. The project's visibility and broad communications

The objective of this step is to increase the project's transparency and communication on participation opportunities and to ensure early commitment from the parties. With transparency and early communication, the aim is to decrease the amount of criticism of the operations and actors.

Communication of the project's objectives, progress, and timetable, and the participant's opportunities to influence, immediately follows the decision has been to start a project. A plan for media relationship and agreement of who is in charge of communications needs to be made as early as possible.

The objective of the project is to build and maintain good and confidential media relationships. One should prepare oneself to be ready to answer a large amount of questions, which the media will surely pose. A country-brand project invokes passions in many parts in the media.

The Promotion Board maintains the project's continuous visibility and presence in the media. Communication of successes builds a positive circle of success. The communications emphasize the project's up-front objectives and potential benefits, planned progress and timetable. Special attention is paid to highlight the means of participating and to emphasize the importance of cooperation. This crosses the boundaries between different branches. In summary the contents of the communications should be: This is what it is all about; this is what we are going to do with this timetable; this is how you can influence; and here is where you can receive more information.

As part of the step presentation material a website will be made at the beginning of the project. The cost of the start-up and organization stages is in the region of €100,000.

Stage 2. Research Stage

The research stage's objective is to collect extensive basic information for decision-making. The stage included five main parts:

- Vast interest group discussions. What kind of factors in brand identity would benefit different parties?

Table 4.2 Stage 2 – research (country brand)

Steps	Responsibility bearer	Actor	Timetable (month)
4. Vast interest group discussions	Steering Group	Independent consultant	5–8
5. Country image in the home country	Steering Group	Market Research Agency	5–7
6. Country image abroad and analysis of competitors	Steering Group	Market Research Agency	5–7
7. Completing the basic information	Steering Group	International Market Research Department (if necessary)	7–8
8. Analyzing and interpreting the results	Steering Group	Independent consultant	8–9

- Research on how is the country seen among foreign target audiences;
- Research on how is the country seen internally, among its own citizens;
- Completing the basic information if needed; and
- Analyzing and interpreting the results.

The steps of this stage are shown in Table 4.2.

Step 4. Vast interest group discussions

The objective of this step is to find out which elements in the brand identity would benefit different parties, and under what conditions they would be interested in participating in the planning, implementation and financing of the country-brand building process. Different parties here refer to ‘all’ parties with international visibility. The step will involve a vast interview study, and an independent actor will be chosen to carry it out (e.g., external consultant).

Often different parties (tourism industry, export companies, importers, work-related immigration, public diplomacy, etc.) have already researched the country image. These together with the interest group discussions and further research will be collected.

Step 5. Country image in the home country

The objective of this step is to clarify how the country is seen internally, by its own citizens. This is conducted with traditional market research targeting all citizens.

Step 6. Country image among foreign target audiences and an analysis of the competitors

This step's first objective is to clarify how the country is experienced among different main sectors of international markets. The country's present image and how well known it is will be measured on these markets.

The step's second objective is to define the central competitors' brand identities and images, strategies of brand development, and strategic strengths and weaknesses.

This step is directed towards completing and specifying the research results collected in Step 4. The council decides on the direction. The step is implemented with traditional market research emphasizing qualitative methods.

The research methods will include in-depth interviews, phone interviews and focus group interviews in chosen target countries; analyzing foreign and domestic newspaper articles, promotion material, documentations of the country's different parties, publications of the country's history and culture, conducting interviews with people who have visited the country, investors who have invested in it, foreign importers; and foreign consultants' trips in the country to collect material and experiences of the country's real life from the point of view of the foreign target markets.

Step 7. Completing the basic information

The objective of this step is to ensure that the basic information required for decision-making is sufficient. This step is formed based on Steps 5 and 6. If some fundamental information is missing, it will need to be found using suitable methods.

Step 8. Analyzing and interpreting the research results

The results of the procedures from steps 4 to 7 will be analyzed and a synthesis of the basic information will be prepared as a foundation for the following steps.

This step's objective is to analyze how the country is experienced in the home country, to define state and central competitors' brand images in different target markets, and to recognize strategic strengths and weaknesses.

The estimated cost of the research phase is €3 mn. The magnitude is significantly influenced by the amount, content and availability of existing researches which will decrease the costs.

Table 4.3 Stage 3 – forming a country brand identity

Step	Responsibility bearer	Actor(s)	Timetable (month)
9. Choosing elements of brand identity	Steering Group	C + Team + Marketing agency participating in creative design	10
10. Interest groups' discussions about the concept	Started by the Steering Group Steering Group and the financiers give their acceptance.	Consultant	11–12
11. Strategic decisions. Objectives, brand's structure, organization and distribution of work, financing	Steering Group + parties participating in financing	Prepared by a marketing agency with the most central financiers	13
12. Consulting and testing. Fine adjustment	Steering Group	Interest group discussions – consultant Market testing – global market research department	14

Stage 3. Forming a Brand Identity

The third stage's objective is to make conclusions concerning the second stage, define the country-brand's elements (core idea, identity, promise of value) and formulate a strategic plan for the brand. The stage is an interactive and circular process that is repeated until a satisfying end-result is achieved. Table 4.3 outlines the steps to be taken in this stage.

Strategic decisions concerning the brand identity are made using the results of the research stage.

Step 9. Choosing the elements of brand identity

Step 9 involves defining: the core idea; identity; positioning; promise of value; as well as forming an estimation of competitiveness.

A clear and credible brand platform is created based on the objectives, criteria for success, and recognized weaknesses and strengths defined in the previous steps. The platform defines the country brand's core idea and central promise of value, brand identity and positioning.

The following criteria are used when choosing the elements:

- brand identity has to be something truthful so the country's citizens generally accept it and want to talk about it;

- brand identity has to use different interest groups (export industries, tourism industry, work-related immigration, public diplomacy, investments in the country, etc.);
- it has to be motivating, credible, acceptable, and relevant for foreigners, suggestive for local citizens, inspiring, and target-oriented worldwide; and
- it has to have longevity and lasting interest.

In the estimation of competitiveness, the most central challenges facing the brand and the competitive advantages are evaluated.

Step 10. Interest group discussions about the concept

The objective of this step is to define a brand identity to which as many actors as possible will commit. The plan is presented and tested among interest groups of the home country and abroad with vast interest group discussions. The concept is specified based on the interest group discussion results. The consultation rounds of the interest groups are continued as long as the new rounds do not change the end result.

The final definition of the brand identity happens after the consultation rounds. The final decisions are made by the council, together with the project's financiers.

Step 11. Strategic decisions

The strategic decisions include: the creative concept; brand's structure; organization and distribution of work; and the financing.

When the country-brand's strategic competitiveness has been recognized and the brand identity has been defined (Steps 9 and 10) it will be altered to produce a competitive advantage by making the target group aware of it through suitable marketing means. The objective of this step is to define the strategic decisions for developing the country-brand. This step includes defining the objectives, the brand's structure, choosing the target group and organizing the actors and financing solutions in order to continue developing the country-brand.

To coordinate the brand's enforcement, an executive organization is chosen or created and may be known as the Brand Management and Coordination Organization (BMCO). The organization will see to the practical implementation of the brand work (e.g., common campaigns in the home country and abroad). In addition, the organization will be responsible for the mutual coordination of the operations of the different actors (e.g., companies) in relation to the country brand.

The leading principles for the country brand project's financing are the following.

- (a) Goal to collect both private and public financing.
- (b) The financing will be agreed for sufficiently long term (e.g., five years) at a time.
- (c) By participating in the financing of common operations, the financier can decide on the trends and emphasis of common operations.
- (d) A company that plans and implements its own operations and communications according to the country brand and promotes the objectives of the country brand will receive financing from the common resources.

The brand's strategic elements are tuned to the target groups (tourism, investments, exports, etc.) and include adjustment of the key messages and creation of sub-area strategies resulting in new strategies and project models being formed. The aim is to find concrete (tangible) brand elements, bearing in mind that different audiences need different presentations defined by their segmenting and positioning. A country brand needs a physical foundation to support it, so it needs concrete ideas that can be fully realized.

Step 12. Consultation and testing – fine adjustments

The objective of this step is to clarify the functionality of the defined brand and the strategic decisions relating to it. It is conducted with expert interviews and market researches. The concept is redeveloped based on analysis of the results.

A cost estimate for the third stage, 'Forming a brand identity and strategic work,' is €1 m.

Stage 4. Establishing an Implementation and Enforcement Plan

The objective of the fourth stage is to establish an implementation and enforcement plan based on the strategy's objectives. The steps involved are outline in Table 4.4 and described below.

Step 13. Establishing integrated implementation plans

This includes: operations, visual look, timetables, costs, responsibilities.

The objective of this step is to create an integrated implementation plan to enforce the brand and carry it through from the plans to practice.

Table 4.4 Stage 4 – establishing an implementation and enforcement plan (country brand)

Step	Responsibility bearer	Actor	Timetable (month)
13. Establishing integrated implementation plans. Operations, visual look, timetables, costs, responsibilities	BMCO	Global market communications agency	15–16
14. Coordination between the operations and actors	BMCO	BMCO	15–16
15. Arranging follow up	BMCO	Global market communications agency	17
16. Ending the planning stage and reporting	Steering Group		18

A suitable solution is formulated for objectives and resources (Steps 11 and 12) during this stage.

Putting the strategy process into action is a demanding organizational, communications, management and transition process. Efficient communications are a foundation for functionality; a good story must be made of the strategy. The implementation should be led with determination by using the following practices of project management.

During the planning stage the brand elements (core messages), target groups of the target countries (target markets) and instruments to reach these target groups will be chosen. The branding process will also be planned.

In the end it is the functionality and activities that count, not the promotion. A brand needs dimensions that appeal as broadly as possible but at the same time are unique and genuinely related to the country. These should be concrete ideas that are possible to implement and which bring out the brand's essence.

Step 14. Coordination between the operations and actors

The objective of this step is to build a structure and constant operations model for coordination between actors.

An integrated brand image must be created persistently and uniformly between different actors in a coordinated way so the message is parallel. The message will be supported by a good quality image. Coordination is

important so each of the actors can define its own strategies that are linked to the vision.

Step 15. Arranging follow-up

Follow-up is arranged so the program's implementation can be adjusted if needed. The follow-up is directed at actors that can be directly influenced by procedures aimed at developing a country brand. Indirect indicators are avoided when choosing the indicators for follow-up. For example, an indicator which is often used in the tourism industry is 'the arrivals,' which represents an indirect indicator. This indicator is influenced not only by the operations of the branding program but also by many factors independent of the branding program (capacities of air traffic, general economic situation, etc.).

Step 16. Ending the planning stage and reporting

The planning stage of the country-brand development has ended, the process is evaluated, and the responsibility of operations moves to BMCO. The estimated cost of the implementation and enforcement stage is €1 mn.

Stage 5. Implementation and Follow-up

After the planning process has ended, country brand development begins, according to the prepared strategy. A 5-year budget of the implementation stage is planned in detail.

COUNTRY BRAND: SUMMARY OF THE OPERATIONAL PLAN

A summary of the total process is shown in Table 4.5.

COUNTRY BRAND: FINANCING

The most critical part of the country brand process is guaranteeing sufficient and continuous financing. Sufficient public, long-term basic funding must be ensured for the brand's development. Funding from actors in the private sector can be increased later in the project when each of the actors can predict how they can benefit from it. Developing a country-brand is a continuous process that goes beyond the first six-and-a-half year lifespan planned for the start-up.

Table 4.5 Summary of the operational plan of country brand development

Step	Responsibility bearer	Actor (s)	Timetable (month)
1. Commitment	Promotion Board	Promotion Board	1–2
2. Organization	Promotion Board	Promotion Board	1–2
3. Visibility for the project	Promotion Board	Communications consultant + Promotion Board	3–4
4. Vast interest group discussions	Steering Group	Independent consultant	5–8
5. Country image in the home country	Steering Group	Marketing research agency	5–7
6. Country image abroad and analysis of competitors	Steering Group	Marketing research agency	5–7
7. Completing the basic information	Steering Group	If needed. Int. marketing research agency	7–8
8. Analyzing and interpreting the results	Steering Group	Consultant	8–9
9. Choosing elements of brand identity. Core idea, identity, positioning, and a promise of value. Creative concept	Steering Group	Steering + team + marketing agency participating in creative design	10
10. Interest groups' discussion about the concept	Started by Steering Group. Steering Group and financiers decide.	Independent consultant	11–12
11. Strategic decisions. Objectives, brand's structure, organization and distribution of work, financing	Steering Group + parties participating in financing	Prepared by a marketing agency with the most central financiers	13
12. Consulting and testing. Fine-tuning	Steering Group	Interest group discussions – consultant; market testing – global market research department	14
13. Laying integrating implementation plans. Operations, visual look, timetables, costs, responsibilities	BMCO	Global market communications agency	15–16
14. Co-ordination between the operations and actors	BMCO	BMCO	15–16
15. Arranging follow-up	BMCO	Global market communications agency	17
16. Ending the planning stage and reporting	Steering Group		18

Continuous and predictable funding is critical for efficient use of resources. Previous country brand development programs, as described earlier, have discovered that one of the most important cornerstones for success is ensuring sufficient, continued and predictable funding.

How Much Should be Invested in Developing a Country Brand?

One significant challenge in brand building and marketing in general is to define a relationship between the investments and benefits gained. In other words, the challenge is defining the optimal investments for a country brand and the profit gained from those investments.

The world's most famous company measuring brand value, Interbrand, uses a method in its annual analysis known as 'discounted future cash flow' that defines a value in dollars of a company's brand. Country brand's economic value may also be measured, but defining a value for a country brand is still not established and the presented results should be taken with a pinch of salt. One of the first and best-known indexes of a country brand's value is Anholt's Nation Brand Index, which was started in 2005.

The approaches of Interbrand, Nation Brand Index, and other research institutes (e.g., Young & Rubicam, Brand Asset Valuator or Milward Brown, Brand Dynamics) which measure the value of brands, do not suggest how much should be invested in developing a brand.

Investments in brands and the meaning of building a successful brand as a company's success factor have been revealed in businesses and in several researches, despite the difficulties in defining the profits gained from investments. The extensive, and well-known, Profit Impact of Marketing Strategy (PIMS) research, conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, shows that an organization's brand positively influences a company's market share, perceptions of quality and profit. Later, extensive researches (see, e.g., Gregory, 2001) have confirmed PIMS results and shown there is a strong correlation between investments in marketing communication, and the strength and attractiveness of the brand. The research thus show that investments made for brand building influence the organization's market share and perceptions of quality and profit, but they do not offer tools for optimizing the planned investments.

Possibly the most commonly used approach in defining investments related to marketing is the so-called 'share-of-voice' approach. The main idea of this approach is to define the investments companies use for marketing communications altogether in each of the market areas. Then the share which the target organization spends defines the proportion of visibility (share-of-voice). Using the share-of-voice approach is demanding from a country brand development point of view. It is difficult to specify a

category for which the share-of-voice should be measured. The category could, for example, be investments targeted to each of the main markets by the National Tourism Organization (NTO), export promotion organizations, or organizations aiming to attract foreign investments.

It is worth noticing that, like Ferrari in Italy and Sony in Japan, significant consumer brands strongly influence the country brand and their role has to be recognized when defining a budget and strategy for the development of the country brand. From a country brand development point of view, another significant challenge of the share-of-voice approach is that the share-of-voice of the public sector and other comparative procedures (e.g., promotion of exports and tourism) is very small, considering the communications. For example, in Germany the total amount used for marketing communication in 2005 was approximately €15.2 bn. Of that amount, the share of different countries' tourism promotion organizations was only around 0.4 per cent at €60 million (Brand Architecture International 2007). In 2005, the marketing communication budgets of companies used on European markets were much larger than the combined financing of the countries' domestic public sector's actors (e.g., L'Oreal, \$1,633 mn, Coca-Cola \$534 mn, Time Warner \$387 mn, Walt Disney \$337 mn).

Preparing a more detailed share-of-voice analysis, which combines different industries (export promotion, public diplomacy, investment promotion, culture exports, tourism, etc.), becomes necessary during the process. It is reasonable to provide a more detailed description of investments required after strategic planning and establishing the goals.

Another approach for defining a cost estimate is to examine other countries' investments directed towards developing a country brand. Denmark provides a recent investment project for building a country brand. It has allocated approximately €55 mn, providing €15 mn annually, for its plan of action between 2007 and 2010.

A total of €205 mn of public funding, approximately €51 mn per year, was targeted for what has probably been the most developed-country brand building program, Brand Australia, between 2003 and 2006. In addition, Australian companies invested around €120 mn in the project, which provides an annual income of €30 mn.

Norway invested almost €50 million in (unsuccessful) brand building between 1998 and 2003. Norway learned from its experiences in this regard and discovered that its goal was right but its approach was wrong. After analyzing its mistakes and establishing a new alignment, Norway is starting a new country brand development program based on a more far-reaching approach. In 2007, funding directed solely at tourism promotion doubled that of the previous year and totaled €24.7 mn.

So far, there have only been a few successful implementations of country brand development programs and consequently there is little information available on investment planning. More detailed information is available on funding used for countries' tourism development. Although these investments are targeted only at one sector of country-brand building, they can be useful in indicating the magnitude of the funds allocated. Oxford Economics, an esteemed economic research institute, estimated that a well implemented, properly targeted, and sufficiently financed tourism promotion campaign can bring a 75-fold increase in tourism consumption in proportion to every single euro spent. Their estimation was based on research conducted in different countries.

Financial Need for Developing a Country Brand

Developing a country brand can be seen as an investment that has a very high return on investment (ROI) if it succeeds. Investments directed at brand development and the expected benefits are related to each other, but it is difficult to define the optimal financial need before the strategic goals have been set. When the finances for developing a country-brand are defined, it is crucial that:

- the *magnitude* of finances is established so the level of attention can be reached; and
- that financing has been secured for a long period.

Financing of the implementation stage should be sufficient in relation to the project's size, the expected benefits of the successful country-brand and the economic significance. The presented approach for developing a country brand differs significantly in its extent from country brand development programs still used in some countries, which concentrate on a certain branch and are uncoordinated. Successful financial investments, directed to country brand development, can have a more significant meaning than just its numerical value and an economic significance. The significance is especially based on the influence that coordinates and directs the project's different actors. Often a large number of independent actors are unaware of each other's use of significant amounts of money to market sectors related to the country brand. In addition, each country's citizens participate every day by creating hundreds of thousands of brand contacts in different parts of the world.

Based on different countries' experiences and investments directed at country-brand development, as well as on the presented operational plan, it is

the authors' opinion that to execute the country-brand development's operational plan, funding should average €5 mn for the planning stage and at least €15 mn for the implementation stage annually. The presented annual €15 mn investment can be considered to be a reasonable minimum. A more detailed estimation of the financial needs will develop during the operational plan.

COUNTRY BRAND: TIMETABLE

For the planning stage's timetable, this operational plan starting from the financing decision has allowed approximately 1.5 years for the development process. The plan's 16 steps and four main stages have been planned to progress logically to form an entity. The steps can partly overlap.

After the start-up and organization stages, a research stage starts and lasts approximately 6 months. During that time the aim is to systematically collect, produce and analyze information on the country brand's image in different sectors and target markets. The process's most demanding strategy stage, forming a brand identity, cannot take place without reliable information and its analysis. The 5 months reserved for building a strategy are very demanding. The timetable also requires that the process goes as planned without any substantial negative surprises (e.g., financial problems). The implementation and enforcement stages (operative routines) require less time (3 months in the plan).

It is possible to shorten the timescale of the planning process but this will require close attention to the project management and it will also increase the risks. If this planning stage were accelerated, it would endanger the whole project's end result. It is all about a strategic multi-phased process, finding the core of the country's soul in a way that the most central interest groups can consistently commit themselves to. The implementation stage is planned to be a 5 year project, after which the development of a country brand will continue based on collected experiences, chosen strategies and created practices.

DESTINATION BRAND: OPERATION PLAN IN STAGES

The following operational plan is intended to give guidance to managers of tourism destinations with relatively limited geographical areas and limited number of stakeholders, such as ski destinations, paradise islands or equivalent.

To a large extent, the process of developing a brand for a tourism destination is similar to the process of developing a brand for larger entities, such as cities or nations. However, some significant differences exist, and were discussed in the beginning of Chapter 4.

A general operational plan for creating and sustaining a destination brand consists of five consecutive stages. The main stages and preliminary timetable are presented in Figure 4.2. The figure perhaps conveys the impression that, at the beginning of the process, the organizations are not involved in any kind of collaboration. This may be the case, although it is highly unlikely. The adoption of cooperative marketing strategies within destinations continue to be common in the increasingly global market place, while tourism organizations are more and more likely to be beginning the strategic marketing planning process, conducting both competitive and collaborative marketing strategies at the same time (Fyall and Garrod 2005). Thus, when beginning to redraft their strategic plans, some organizations will have previous experience in collaboration while others will be considering the adoption of collaborative marketing strategies for the first time. This issue will be present throughout this chapter, but it is worthwhile pointing out that the framework provided in Figure 4.2, does not show this feature, and nor does it identify this as a potential source of conflict.

The length and timing of the operations is marked with the numbers of the months, so that number 1 represents the starting month of the project. The following pages introduce the steps in stages.

The actual implementation stage has to be long-term, systematic and consistent. It is justifiable to reserve approximately five years for the launching stage. The results of the operational plan will show at the end of the program and after that. It has been discovered that the process of developing a destination brand takes often 5–10 years.

Stage I. Start-up and Organization

The start-up phase of the process is vital for the project's success. A great deal of attention is needed to increasing commitment of various stakeholders, widening participation, and in general, creating momentum for the brand development process.

The aim of this stage is to organize the Destination Branding project. The stage includes three main parts; generating commitment within the top management of the stakeholders, getting organized, and creating visibility for the process which is about to begin. This stage is outlined in Table 4.6.

A team is needed to organize, coordinate and manage the Destination Branding project. We call this team 'Board of Managers', but the team can also have other names like 'Action Group' or 'Branding Group'. The task of the Board of Managers is to initiate, to 'kick start' and organize the process of developing a brand for the destination. The Board of Managers should also build good relationships with the local media and make sure that all the

FIGURE 4.2 Destination brand: the operational plan's main stages and preliminary timetable

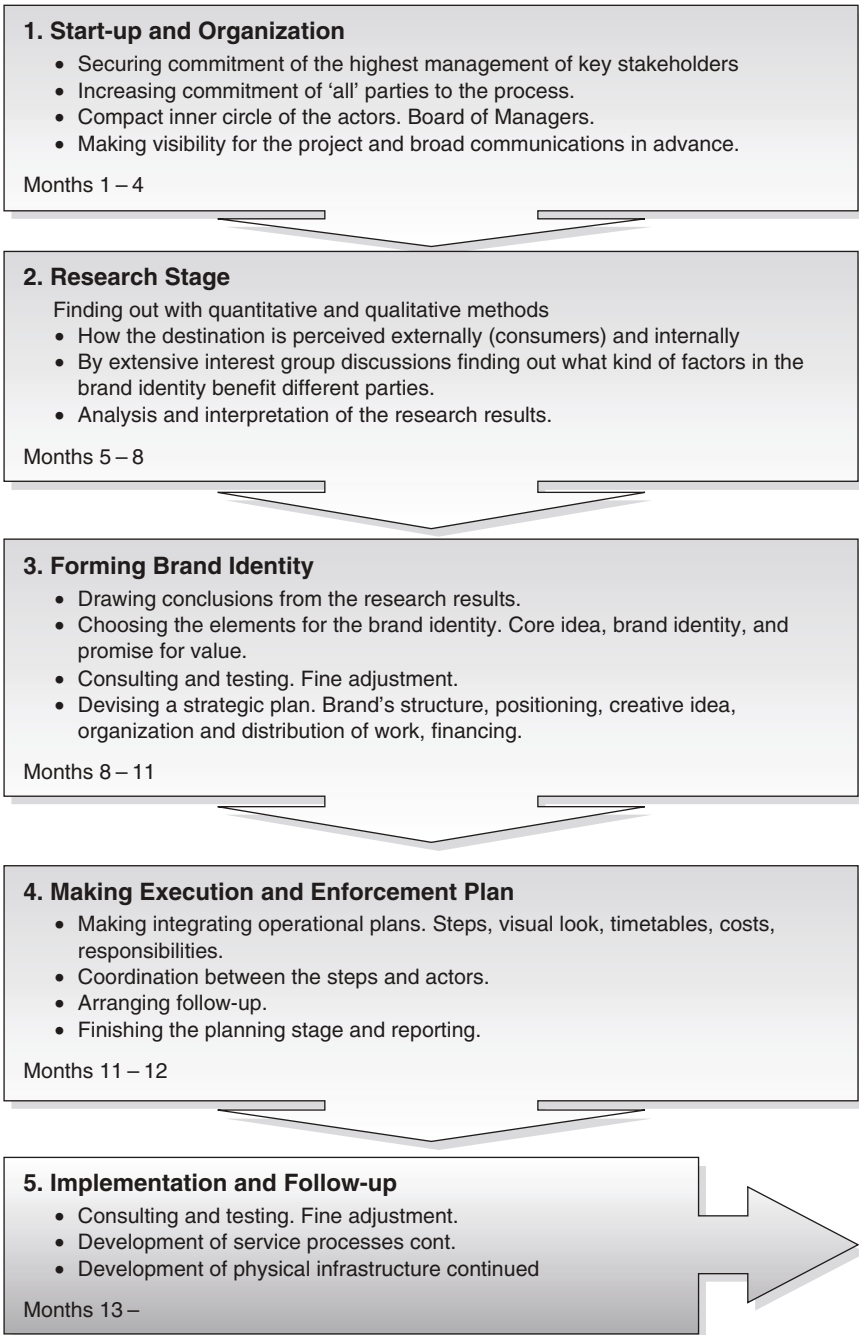


Table 4.6 Stage 1 – start-up and organization (destination brand)

Step	Responsibility bearer	Actor (s)	Timetable (months)
1. Generating commitment	Board of Managers	Board of Managers	1–2
2. Creating organization	Board of Managers	Board of Managers	1–2
3. The project's visibility and broad communications	Board of Managers	Communications agency + Board of Managers	3–4

positive results of the project will get public attention. Well-functioning boards typically have members from the top management of all of the largest companies operating within the destination, complemented by representatives of public sector actors that are responsible for land-use planning, infrastructural planning (e.g., roads, airports), environmental regulation and other issues governed by public sector actors, which have a direct influence on destination development.

Importantly, what is needed is wide cooperation and involvement of representatives of all the major stakeholders.

Step 1. Generating commitment

The very first step within the process should be mobilization, referring to the act of providing incentives for providers of key resources and capabilities to participate in the destination brand development process. There is no one single way to advance, but the mobilization may result from articulating clearly the potential benefits of a strong destination brand together with the argument presented in this book: The consumer considers the destination as one unit, and does not know nor care which of the individual companies provide particular elements of the entire vacation product. Hence, a network form of organization provides organizations with collective benefits exceeding those of a single company or market transaction. Other potential incentives include the fact that through participation, a firm has access to wider pool of resources and may influence decision making related to the destination brand.

Starting from this step, and continuing from now on, particular attention should be paid to organizational identity building. Organizational identity building competence refers to an organization's facility to generate solidarity among the members of the organization. Organizational identity can be thought of as a shared answer to the question 'who are we as an organization?' (Gioia 1998; Stimpert et al. 1998). In the context of destinations, the question

that should be posed is; ‘who are we as a destination?’. It represents the insiders’ perceptions and beliefs about what distinguishes their organization, or destination, from others and can provide the foundation for presenting images of the organization to the outsiders (Alvesson 1990; Gioia et al. 2000).

Because organizational identity is a socially-constructed, self-referential belief shared by organizational members, it is subject to influence and change, especially from competitive pressures perceived by top managers (Gioia and Thomas 1996). Organizational research scholars have conceptually and empirically cemented the significance of organizational identity to organizational behavior and strategy.

Competence in building organizational identity is a factor in developing successful destination brands. In the context of destination branding, the organizational identity building should pay particular attention to: 1) creating a community culture (spirit, trust, togetherness); 2) increasing commitment to the brand at all levels of the organization, particularly at managerial level; and 3) and finally creating a culture of open discussion.

The highest level managers of tourism companies operating within the Destination, as well as the selected public sector managers should be made committed to the Destination Brand development process and its objectives. Success in making the top level private and public sector’s decision-makers committed to the project is critically important for the project to succeed.

Making the parties committed should be arranged willfully. Everyone who is willing should have an opportunity to bring their opinions to the planning process, and this should support their commitment – right at the beginning of the process. Material, related to the planning process, needs to be produced and communicated in many ways in order to ensure wide-reach among organizations operating within the destination.

Step 2. Creating organization

The objective of the step is to create a functional and credible organization that can lead the destination-brand building’s planning process.

As discussed in the literature review, a large number of independent actors (e.g., independently owned and managed firms) participate in the process of tourism product creation, while the assembly of products and services used during the vacation is performed by the customer rather than the producers. In order to overcome the obstacle of lack of control, cooperation is necessary, thus making competence in developing coordination mechanisms significant.

The cooperation building should have three objectives:

- to create an effective organizational forum for sharing work and responsibilities;
- to establish coordination mechanisms between actors; and
- to create a decision-making system that distributes decision-making power in a just way.

The first step is to develop routines for discussion between representatives of stakeholder organizations. In addition to a forum (e.g., regular meetings) for negotiations and discussion, the building of a more formal and structured coordination mechanism among actors is an important factor in developing successful destination brands. By setting rules and regulations for cooperation, the network of companies reduce the need for negotiations, thus releasing resources for other duties. This step is close to the previous one; creating a forum. The key difference between the two is that the forum establishes means of communication and information exchange, whereas the coordination mechanisms regulate activities.

Finally, there is a need to create a decision-making system that distributes decision-making power in a just way. Most destinations have several companies of different sizes. As the number of customers, investments made and annual turnovers of some of the member companies in any destination may be only a small fragment of the larger companies operating in the area, decision-making power needs to be distributed according to business volume or strategic importance, rather than by the democratic one-vote/one-company principle.

Once the organization for destination brand management has been created, or even during the process, the need for decision making emerges. The network nature of the destination brand may create considerable managerial challenges, as individual firms may have common and diverse strategic objectives. The same firms may also be fierce competitors in other areas of action (other than brand management). From the perspective of a single firm the challenge is threefold. It should aim to simultaneously: (1) develop a brand capable of creating brand equity jointly with a network of other firms; (2) secure in the negotiation process that the destination brand supports the firms own strategic objectives (as opposed to other network members) as strongly as possible; and (3) modify its internal processes to fit the value promise offered by the Destination Brand to customers.

Competence in making decisions in a destination context is a significant issue in developing a successful destination brand. Within the decision

making, particular attention should be paid to the careful balance between the ability to make strategic decisions (ability to make decision without diluting decisions by excessive consensus building), while at the same time attempting to increase possibilities for reaching consensus. Finally, the ability to increase fairness in decision making, despite the uneven balance of power among network members companies, appears to be a significant factor in creating powerful destination brands.

Step 3. The project's visibility and broad communications

The objective of this step is to increase the project's transparency and communication in participation opportunities and to ensure the parties committed early on. With transparency and early communication, the aim is to decrease the amount of criticism by and of the operations and actors.

Communicating the project's objectives, progress, timetable and opportunities for the participants to influence the outcome and process, must be done as soon as the decision has been made to start a project. Development of effective internal communication processes, referring to exchange of information, ideas and/or feelings between actors of the destination, has significant importance for the project. Starting from the very beginning of the development of a destination brand continuing through to the daily management of a strong and powerful destination brand, great attention should be paid to internal communication.

The communications emphasize the project's up-front objectives and potential benefits, planned progress and timetable. Special attention is paid to highlight the possibility of participating and to emphasize the importance of cooperation. Basically the communications should contain: 'This is what it is all about; this is what we are going to do with this timetable; this is how you can influence, and this is where you can get more information'.

Stage 2. Research Stage

The research stage's objective is to collect extensive basic information for the decision-making. This second stage includes five main parts, shown in Table 4.7 and outlined briefly below:

- Stakeholder discussions, aiming to identify what kind of factors in brand identity would benefit different parties.
- Research on destination brand images held by consumers.
- Research on destination brand images held by staff members.

Table 4.7 Stage 2 – research (destination brand)

Step	Responsibility bearer	Actor (s)	Timetable (months)
4. Stakeholder discussions	Board of Managers	Independent consultant	5
5. Research on Destination Brand images held by consumers	Board of Managers	Market research agency	5–7
6. Research on Destination Brand images held by staff members	Board of Managers	Market research agency	5–7
7. Completing the informational base if needed	Board of Managers	If necessary. Market research agency	7–8
8. Analyzing and interpreting the results	Board of Managers	Independent consultant	8

- Completing the informational base if needed.
- Analyzing and interpreting the results.

Step 4. Stakeholder discussions

The objective of this step is to find out which kind of elements in the brand identity would benefit different parties and with which parts they would be interested to participate in; planning, implementation and financing of the destination brand development process. Different parties here refer to companies operating within the destination, complemented with relevant public sector organizations responsible for public sector activities of direct significance for the destination development (e.g., airport infrastructure).

Additionally, during this step an attempt should be made to identify non-financial resources held by independent companies that are relevant for brand building. Examples of these resources are individuals with specific branding knowledge, existing strategic partnerships (e.g., brand alliances) and particularly well functioning international distribution channels. The step ought to be carried out with personal interviews preferably performed by an independent actor (e.g., external consultant).

Step 5. Research on destination brand images held by consumers

The step's first objective is to clarify how the destination is perceived by the consumers. The step's second objective is to define the central competitors' brand identities and images, strategies of brand development, and strategic

strengths and weaknesses. Both objectives, i.e., assessing the awareness and associations attached to the destination and its competitors, can be reached through traditional consumer research (e.g., focus groups and quantitative surveys).

Step 6. Research on destination brand images held by staff members

The objective of the step is to clarify how the destination is seen by staff members (top, middle and front-line) of different companies. This step may be conducted with a traditional market research approach which is particularly targeted to middle-management and all front-line employees, with whom the visitor may interact in service encounters.

Step 7. Completing the basic information

The objective of this step is to ensure that the basic information needed for decision making is sufficient. The step depends on the outcomes of steps 5 and 6. If there is some relevant information missing, it should be acquired through suitable methods.

Step 8. Analyzing and interpreting the research results

The results of the procedures from step Stage 2 will be analyzed and a synthesis will be prepared to be a foundation for the following steps.

The objective, at this point, is to analyze how the destination is perceived externally (by consumers) and internally (by staff), to define the desired image of the destination and its main competitors on different target markets and finally to recognize strategic strengths and weaknesses.

Stage 3. Forming the Brand Identity (strategy work)

The third stage's objective is to draw conclusions from the second stage, define the destinations brand identity elements (core idea, promise of value, positioning, personality) and to formulate a strategic plan for the brand (see Table 4.8). The stage is an interactive and self-feeding process that is repeated until a satisfying end-result has been reached.

Step 9. Choosing the elements of the brand identity

The objective of this step is to choose and detail the elements of the brand identity: core idea; identity; positioning; and promise of value. A strong, clear,

Table 4.8 Stage 3 – forming the destination brand identity

Step	Responsibility bearer	Actor (s)	Timetable (month)
9. Choosing elements of brand identity. Core idea, identity, positioning, and a promise of value	Board of Managers	Board of Managers + Marketing agency participating to creative design	8
10. Interest groups discussion about the concept	Started by the Board of Managers. Board of Managers and the financiers approve the outcome	Consultant	9
11. Destination level strategic decisions. Creative concept. Brand's structure, organization and distribution of work. Financing	Board of Managers + actors participating to financing	Prepared by a marketing agency with the most central financiers	10
12. Consulting and testing. Fine adjustment	Board of Managers	Interest group discussions – consultant Market testing –market research agency	11

favorable and unique destination brand platform should be created based on the objectives, criteria for success and strengths and weaknesses defined in the previous steps. The platform should define the destination brands core idea and central promise for value, brand identity and positioning.

The following criteria need to be considered when choosing the elements (Berry 2000):

- Brand identity has to be positively distinctive, while at the same time something truthful so that the employees and local inhabitants generally accept it, and it can be delivered in the core services and ultimately in consumer vacation experience.
- Brand identity has to be valid for different interest groups.
- Brand identity should reach customers emotionally. It has to be motivating, believable, acceptable and relevant for target segments and the local population. It also should be inspiring, target-oriented and associated with trust.
- Brand identity should be time-resistant.

The brand identity should be a basis for a clear, unique and concise message that ‘touches’ the consumer and provides added value to consumers. An identity should be able to capture the ‘reality’ of the tourism product and at the same time be strongly focused and able to express experiential (as opposed to functional) features.

Brands are developed gradually in the minds of customers as a result of contacts received from a variety of sources. The more consistent and homogenic the brand contacts are, the more consistent the image in the customer’s mind. Metaphorically, the development of a brand in the customer’s mind is similar to piecing together a jigsaw puzzle. A single brand contact, whether an advert, an anecdote, or personal experience from service encounters, is one piece of the puzzle. Over time a customer collects more brand contacts, i.e., pieces to the jigsaw puzzle, and gradually, the picture, i.e., brand image, takes form. However, if the object of the picture changes during this process, the customer ends up with pieces of several jigsaw puzzles, thus making the picture distorted and difficult to comprehend.

Utilizing the metaphor, this ninth step refers to the brand management organization’s competence in identifying the ideal picture (brand identity) which can be formed by piecing together the individual pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. The intended picture of the jigsaw puzzle (brand identity) should be attractive and appealing, so that individuals piecing together the jigsaw puzzle find the effort worthwhile. The picture should be clear and easily comprehensible. The picture should be unique, so that other pictures (brands) would not be competing for the attention of the consumer. Also, the intended picture (brand identity) should reflect reality, so that the picture could be formed from concrete examples. Finally, the picture should focus on the value adding elements of the vacation experience, typically, emotional and experiential elements as opposed to the functional features of the product, such as the number of lifts.

A *unique* brand identity that provides added value to consumers has two basic requirements. First, the brand identity should enable differentiation and offer a unique promise. Second, the differentiated brand identity should be able to mediate added value to the consumer. The need to capture ‘reality’ in a brand identity is derived from the fact that all aspects of the destination product are not manageable, and reinforces the central feature of the importance of the delivery of the promises made by the brand communication on an actual vacation experience. A third important consideration is the ability to express experiential features in brand identity. Strong evidence exists suggesting that emotional factors may be a more useful basis for brand identity development than functional features of the product. This notion may sound obvious in the context of service branding, but is strikingly absent in the

marketing communication of ski destinations in all three markets. Taking into consideration the similarity of functional features of any particular types of destinations (e.g., ski destination or a paradise island), the functional features of the destinations are insufficient by themselves to enable the development of a sustainable competitive advantage.

Another issue requiring particular attention is *consistency*, i.e., the ability to create sustainable long-term strategic vision for the brand identity. A sustainable vision refers to a brand identity that requires only minor modifications despite turbulence in the operating environment and changing market conditions, and is able to convey a valuable promise to the consumer over a prolonged period.

Step 10. Interest group discussions about the concept

The objective of this step is to define a brand identity to which as many actors as possible are willing to commit, and which is able to generate competitive advantage for the destination. The draft plan developed in step 9 should be presented and discussed with managers of stakeholder organizations.

In order to ensure impartiality and to increase the perception of ‘fairness’, the use of external assistance (e.g., external consultants) to perform various elements should be considered. The consultation rounds of the interest groups should be continued until no additional information is identified.

The final definition of the brand identity happens after the consultation rounds. The Board of Managers, together with the project’s financiers, make the final decisions.

Step 11. Destination level strategic decisions

The strategic decisions include: the creative concept; brand’s structure; organization and distribution of work; and the financing.

When the destination brands’ strategic competitiveness has been analyzed and the brand identity has been defined (Steps 4 to 10), the competitive identity is transformed into competitive advantage. The objective of the step is to define the key strategic level decisions for developing the destination brand. The step includes defining the objectives, defining the brand’s structure, choosing the target groups, organization of actors and solutions of financing for developing the destination brand.

To coordinate the brands enforcement from paper to reality, an executing organization is chosen or created (later BMCO – Brand Management and Coordination Organization). If a Destination Marketing Organization

(DMO) exists, then destination brand management typically fits well within its remit. The organization should be responsible for coordinating the practical implementation of the brand development activities, with a particular focus on its role as the implementing arm of joint activities such as external joint marketing campaigns, orientation of seasonal workers, cooperation with the public sector actors, etc. In addition, the organization should be the central actor in coordinating the cooperation between the different actors (i.e., improving the systems for internal communication and decision making and negotiating financial issues with member companies). These issues are discussed in more detail in stage 4.

Long-term financing is necessary and the length (e.g. 5 years) should be agreed at the outset as opposed to annual round of financing negotiations. Appropriate incentives to participate in destination branding should be provided.

Step 12. Consultation and testing – fine adjustments

The objective of the step is to clarify the functionality of the defined brand and the strategic decisions. Testing should be conducted with market research that takes into account both visitors and non-visitors of the target segments. The destination brand platform should be refined based on the results of this testing.

Stage 4. Implementation and Enforcement Plan

The objective of the fourth stage is to create an implementation and enforcement plan based on the strategic objectives defined in Stage 3. The steps for this stage are shown in Table 4.9.

Step 13. Coordination between the operations and actors

Once the BMCO has been created or nominated, its first task is to establish permanent coordination systems for the destination brand management. The objective of this step is to build a structure and constant operations model for coordination between actors.

The process described above (Steps 1–12) has been designed to support this step. However, cooperation builds on the perception of potential benefits, commitment and trust. Neither one of these can be created overnight, but instead require persistent work and leadership abilities. The understanding of potential benefits grows over time and influences the commitment of

**Table 4.9 Stage 4 – implementation and enforcement
(destination brand)**

Step	Responsibility bearer	Actor (s)	Timetable (month)
13. Coordination between the operations and actors	BMCO	BMCO	11
14. Developing well-functioning internal communication	BMCO	BMCO	11–12
15. Establishing integrated external marketing communication plan	BMCO	Marketing communications agency	11–12
16. Arranging monitoring	BMCO	Global market communications agency	11–12
17. Ending the planning stage and reporting	BMCO		12

member companies. Gradually accumulated positive experiences of cooperation increase trust.

The activities required to reach the objective of this step cannot be clearly defined. No single best-practice exists, and despite the term ‘step’ at this phase destination branding may be considered more of a move towards developing continuous cooperation processes.

As discussed before, brand contacts are received from several sources (paid communication, uncontrolled communication, service processes, physical infrastructure), all of which contribute to the development of a brand image in the customer’s mind.

A significant challenge for all destinations is to ensure that the whole vacation experience is consistent with the brand identity. Destinations are typically entities in which several actors, from independent companies to public administration bodies operate, these product elements are owned and managed by different people in different organizations. Therefore consistency of delivery is fundamental. In an ideal world all the brand contacts a customer receives during the consumption process reinforce the intended destination brand identity.

Ability in coordinating resources and capabilities of different actors that participate in the production of a vacation experience of a destination is crucial in the development of a successful destination brand.

Returning to the earlier jigsaw puzzle metaphor, it is important that all pieces of the jigsaw puzzle (brand contacts) form one single picture. Each

actor (company) manages its own piece, which it can modify at will. However, these single pieces may contribute to the development of a picture (brand) only if the intended picture is similar for all piece-owners. If some of the piece owners have different objectives, and have pieces of other jigsaw puzzles, the probability that the customer will piece together a puzzle similar to the ones sought after by the piece owners, is reduced. Therefore, the competence in coordinating the different organizations, with their independent sets of resources and capabilities, so that they all, or at least most of them, modify their piece of the jigsaw puzzle to fit the larger picture (brand identity of the destination), is crucial.

The resources needed for destination brand development may vary from one destination to another, but typical examples of necessary resources include financial resources, competencies and capabilities, service know-how and innovative skills and creative individuals. Within the context of destinations the ability to access resources is not self-evident. Individual companies within the destination manage their own organizations and their resources, and submitting significant resources to the use of the network is not a matter of course. It is noteworthy, that even though the members of a destination network cooperate within the sphere of destination brand management, they may well be in fierce competition with each other. From the perspective of a BMCO, the ability to access resources, inside and outside the organization is of crucial importance.

The ability to identify deficiencies in internal resource and capability base, to detect opportunities in the external environment and to deploy resources and capabilities in a way that enables the organization to create new capabilities are significant organizational requirements of successful destination brand creation. Finally, the accumulation of knowledge and know-how is an important feature and the actions necessary of secure this accumulation need to be planned:

[In an organization] where all the managers and all the people are changing all the time, it is obvious that it [developing a brand] cannot succeed.

Five features, to which particular attention should be paid during this step are:

1. to detect, acquire and/or access internal and external resources;
2. to provide incentives for destination member companies to transform their processes to support the brand;
3. to develop clear tasks, task allocations and adequate resource allocations to support the tasks;

4. to promote the development and implementation of destination-wide quality standards in line with the brand; and
5. to accumulate knowledge and expertise.

Step 14. Developing well-functioning internal communication

When dealing with the external market, the role of the marketer includes the facilitation of a sense of shared understanding with external customers about the destination itself, its values, the identity of its brand and the specific benefits of its products/services. At the intra-organizational level, however, the communication process has been shown to have a variety of additional roles (see e.g., George and Berry 1981; Deal and Kennedy 1982; Smircich and Morgan 1982; Cheney and Vibbert 1987; Ruekert and Walker 1987; Kohli and Jaworski 1990; Wolfinbarger and Gilly 1991; Kanter et al. 1992; Piercy and Morgan 1994; Ford and Ford 1995; Ambler and Barrow 1996; Foreman 1997; Gilly and Wolfinbarger 1998).

These include:

1. The creation of a unified corporate identity by improving the insight that individuals have into the overall philosophy of the destination and its strategic direction.
2. Encouraging the motivation and commitment of employees by ensuring an understanding of the destination's objectives and goals.
3. Increasing the individual understanding of the process of organizational change as it occurs thereby reducing employee resistance.
4. Reducing the potential for misunderstandings, discrepancies and conflict, within and between internal units, e.g., divisions or independent companies of a destination.
5. Providing the tools and information to allow employees to perform their jobs.
6. Enhancing overall levels of service quality by ensuring that an understanding of the needs of the customer is fostered at every level within the organization.

Staff throughout the destination must be made aware of the destination brand's identity, the vision and role of the company they work for and their specific roles in achieving the destination brand vision. Reinforcing the

brand identity, there should be a clear view about the type of relationship between staff and consumers and the degree of latitude staff have in enacting this. Brand communications should first be directed at employees, then at consumers. Making a destination brand identity relevant to employees can motivate them to exceed consumers' expectations. However, this branding activity can only succeed with senior management's commitment to a particular type of corporate culture. Finally, at the emotional level, the brand's vision should encompass the values that the destination stands for and should inspire consistency and trust to consumers, thus supporting the functional performance values.

Internal communication competence can be divided into process factors and the quality of communication. The process factors are related to the capabilities to create and modify methods and ways of action so as to ensure that information, ideas and feelings of atmosphere are shared horizontally (between peers in different companies) and vertically (between organizational levels). The quality of internal communication refers to the capability of ensuring that communicated messages are understood by the recipient in the way the sender meant the message to be understood.

In this step effective internal communication processes should be created, with the aim of ensuring that information related to the destination brand is communicated to every individual operating within any of the companies participating in the service delivery process of the vacation experience. The best destination branders express a strong emphasis on the ability to communicate the brand to every individual operating within any of the companies participating in the process of destination brand management. Examples of methods used in internal communication range from seminars for managers and joint employee training for seasonal staff to newsletters and kick-start meetings.

In addition to the ability to develop effective processes, the ability to make individual actors understand the objectives and the essence of the brand identity is an important factor in developing a successful destination brand. The second goal of this step should be to increase understanding, referring to the BMCO's ability to ensure that all actors, from managers to front-line employees, have the same comprehension of the nature and meaning of brand identity. The quality of internal communication refers to the need to ensure that communicated messages are understood by the recipient in the way the sender meant the message to be understood. Specifically, the emphasis should be on improving the understanding of front-line employees. The ability to make front-line employees understand brand identity seems to empower employees to deliver the brand in service

encounters by adapting their behavior in unique service encounters to fit the common guidelines set by the brand identity.

Selected quotes from directors of leading ski destination brands demonstrate some of these points:

The greatest challenge is that when you have so many different players and so many different opinions that ... internal communication and being able to make everybody understand what is the message we are trying to communicate, those I think are the greatest challenges.

Really there [in an ideal destination brand implementation process] comes that same thing as in the planning phase, the ability to *deliver the message efficiently to every company and to every employee* [emphasis added].

We have a marketing department within the resort. And that's basically *the primary driver of the brand and marketing planning. But you know, all of the operating groups are involved. Because, everyone has to understand the brand message, and to deliver that message.* All the operating groups are involved, but the A's marketing team is really the group that's responsible for making sure that the brand is protected, and that we develop operating strategies etc to line ourselves with the brand [emphasis added].

The process is, you know, training employees, giving them all the tools, you're getting them to buy up to your culture and making them understand who we are, and what our customers expect [emphasis added].

There's not really a strong resistance. It is a *lack of understanding*. So we have regular presentations with these people, because the business owners change hands all the time. New staff come in. And I think the obvious way to market is to market functionality. And people who are not tuned to brand health and marketing can't quite understand what we are doing. So it's just a matter of explaining why we do it. Putting a good rationale behind it and it's a very rational argument. And then that ... *misunderstanding is corrected* [emphasis added].

Step 15. Establishing integrated external marketing communication plan

The objective of this step is to create an integrated external communications plan to support the enforcement of the brand from plan into practice.

The fundamental aim of external brand communication is to generate brand awareness and positive brand image, which is ideally identical with intended brand identity, within the minds of consumers. Thus, the ability to direct external communication to enforce the sought-after features of the

brand image and to correct and redirect unwanted features of the brand image are important facets of external communication competence. Thus, the classical objectives of brand management, *generating consumer awareness and positive image through communication, and ensuring that brand image and brand identity match* should be considered as key objectives of the plans created in this step:

But still the primary measure for assessing destination brand success is the awareness of what values the customers perceive as belonging to the brand and the ski destination. And are those the same ones that have been attempted to communicate?

Furthermore, brand is an abstract concept, which should focus on intangible, value-adding elements of the mystical 'Great Vacation Experience' and convey a strong, positive and differentiating message to more than one target segment. Communicating this is not an easy task to accomplish. Thus, the ability to *capture the essence of brand identity and to express that brand identity in marketing communication through all marketing communication channels*, as well as the ability to *communicate added value in a clear way* are of crucial importance:

So, making the brand message consistent in your paid communications, your non-paid communications and your PR. And your tour operator communication and your travel agent communications and your meeting planner communications. Throughout all of your market segments. Making sure that wherever your brand is, it's being communicated to your public in the same way, in a consistent way. So that you're reinforcing the brand continually.

During this step practical implementation plans, creative guidelines and instruments (e.g., visual imagery, campaigns) for reaching the objectives defined in Steps 11 and 12 via external communication are planned and the operational arrangements agreed.

Generally speaking, traditional tools and guidelines of external brand communication, mostly developed in the realms of physical goods, are directly applicable to the destination branding context, and do provide a rich and useful source of information for this step. Utilizing expertise of marketing communications agencies should be considered, while attempts to facilitate story-telling (to consumers and between consumers) might prove to be particularly effective in the context of destination branding.

Step 16. Arranging monitoring

You can only manage what you measure.

The objective of this step is to create a monitoring system, that provides sufficient information for destination brand management. Monitoring should be arranged so that the program's implementation can be adjusted if needed.

The monitoring should be directed at the factors that can be directly influenced with the procedures aimed to develop a destination brand. Indirect indicators should be avoided when choosing indicators for monitoring. For example, 'the arrivals', an indicator often used in the tourism industry, is an indirect indicator of brand performance. It is indirect, because although influenced by the branding activities, it is heavily influenced or even determined by many factors independent from the branding program (e.g., capacities of air traffic, general economic situation). During economic downturn or air-carrier strikes the arrivals tend to drop dramatically, whether or not the brand management has been successful.

Both internal and external monitoring is recommended for destination branding. In this step monitoring systems for assessing the brand image through several measurement techniques should be built. Examples of external measurement techniques include focus groups with visitors, non-visitors and staff representatives, as well as large quantitative surveys performed by independent research entities. The internal monitoring abilities unfold in the form of common financial measurements (e.g., ROI), but also in often informal monitoring systems (e.g., 'keepers of the culture').

Indicators to be considered include:

- match between brand image and brand identity;
- intention to travel/return ratio;
- values that the consumer attaches to the brand – perception of quality – number of positives and negatives;
- brand awareness;
- ability to attract cooperation partners, cobranding;
- unprompted brand recall;
- return-on-investment; and
- comparing overall performance of the destination with competing destinations.

Step 17. Ending the planning stage and reporting

The final step of the planning stage of the destination brand development is closing. During this step the process needs to be evaluated and reported for future needs, and a responsibility of the operations moves to BMCO.

Stage 5. Implementation of the Brand

After the planning and commitment building project has ended, the actual destination brand development begins according to the strategy and plans prepared in Stages 1 to 4.

Leadership is an elusive quality, but refers to the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal-setting and goal-achievement (Hersey and Blanchard 1988). Leadership, within the context of destination brand management, has two major components:

1. the ability to lead the brand management organization; and
2. the ability in keeping the destination brand management process ‘alive’, despite resistance and hardships.

Sophisticated network organizations with clear organizational structure, written rules and clearly expressed strategies, have been developed in the previous steps. The structure gives formal authority to the BMCO to perform operations in certain fields of activity. In addition to the formal arrangements, the mental aspects of leadership are vital to the success of destination branding process.

Previous examples of attempts to create destination brands show that disagreements and resistance in various forms are highly likely to occur at some points of the process. Typically disagreements and resistance is at its peak shortly after the beginning of the process, in the strategic planning phase, and diminishes when and if the process gains momentum.

The importance of having a leading actor, an individual or a team, who can inspire and encourage the group of companies and other actors (public sector, NGOs) to cooperate, while coordinating the activities toward common goals, is clearly visible in earlier success stories of destination branding:

It [the competence in creating a successful network brand] really comes from the organization and from the individuals leading it. You have to have the kind of leaders who can make that pretty fragmented group of actors to aim and run towards the same goal and ... to understand that consistent long term work.

Table 4.10 Stage 5 – implementation (destination brand)

Step	Responsibility bearer	Actor (s)	Timetable
18. Transformation of service processes to support destination brand identity where appropriate	Individual companies	Individual companies	Continuous
19. Transformation of physical infrastructure to support destination brand identity	BMCO, individual companies, public	Individual companies, public sector actors	Continuous

And then of course the cooperation inside the destination, and that there is one clear leader leading the whole thing. You cannot build a good ski destination brand without it, that's really obvious... It further underlines the necessity of having a leader: Because you can not create the brand alone, but instead you have dozens of companies involved, but then, however, there has to be the one who's really leading the pack.

Two more vitally important steps, transformation of service processes and physical infrastructure to support the destination brand, are described below. These need to be taken into account and began already during stage 4, but as they are by nature closer to continuous processes than clear-cut steps, they are described here under the heading 'Implementation' and contain steps 18 and 19 as shown in Table 4.10.

Step 18. Transformation of service processes to support destination brand identity where appropriate

The 'service encounter,' the moment of interaction between the customer and the firm, also known as 'the moment of truth', can be regarded as the defining issue in managing service firms. Since service depends on the culture of the organization and on the training and attitudes of its employees, it is more difficult to build and sustain, but also more difficult to copy. Some studies suggest that service may be the most sustainable differential advantage in building successful brands.

In the service delivery process the customer potentially interacts with physical products, service processes, service staff, systems and technicalities, e-commerce processes and managerial and economic routines. All of these episodes of the process contain communication and convey brand contacts to the consumer.

The aim of this step is to transform the service processes in such a way, that they support the destination brand as much as practically possible, and thus distribute brand contacts that support and reinforce the brand identity.

Obviously, the BMCO should design its activities and service processes to support the destination brand. However, the brand contacts created by the BMCO only cover a tiny bit of the brand contacts that the customer relates to the destination. An overwhelming majority of the brand contacts, which the consumer relates to the destination brand, are created in the service encounters between the individual customer and individual firms.

No external actor can force any changes to happen in service processes of individually owned service companies. Thus this step needs to be taken care of by the management of the individual service companies by themselves. It is their task to design and manage their companies, evaluate opportunities and need for modifications in their service processes, with the ultimate goal of creating equity for its owners. While it is clear, that all companies have their own strategic objectives, it should be kept in mind that by designing their service processes to support the destination brand, they contribute to the strengthening of the destination brand, thus creating more competitive advantage for the destination. This in turn creates opportunities for improved business performance to all the firms operating in the destination and for creating equity for the owners.

The role of the BMCO should be coordinative and supportive, providing information, materials, training and other types of assistance when required. Furthermore, the BMCO's main task in this step is to maintain the motivation for and momentum of the destination branding process. The foundations for the success of this step are built on the previous steps, and aim to create commitment, a feeling of comradeship and manage the organizational arrangements that facilitate the creation of a destination brand.

Step 19. Transformation of physical infrastructure to support destination brand identity

Following the same logic as step 16, the physical infrastructure of the destination contains communication, and delivers brand contacts to the consumer. Physical infrastructure refers here to all physical elements visible to the consumer, ranging from general outlook, e.g., architectural style and color-schemes of buildings, to parks and green-areas, road networks, parking areas, trash bins and general tidiness of the destination.

The objective of this step is to transform the physical infrastructure in such a way, that it supports the destination brand as much as possible and thus distribute brand contacts that support and reinforce the brand identity. Typically

this type of development requires close cooperation between the tourism industry representatives in general, public sector actors and BMCO in particular.

DESTINATION BRAND: SUMMARY OF THE OPERATIONAL PLAN

A summary of the operational plan for a destination brand is shown in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11 Summary of the operational plan of destination brand development

Step	Responsibility bearer	Actor (s)	Timetable (month)
1. Generating commitment	Board of Managers	Board of Managers	1–2
2. Creating organization	Board of Managers	Board of Managers	1–2
3. The project's visibility and broad communications	Board of Managers	Communications agency + Board of Managers	3–4
4. Stakeholder discussions	Board of Managers	Independent consultant	5
5. Research on destination brand images held by consumers	Board of Managers	Market research agency	5–7
6. Research on destination brand images held by staff members	Board of Managers	Market research agency	5–7
7. Completing the informational base if needed	Board of Managers	If necessary. Market research agency	7–8
8. Analyzing and interpreting the results	Board of Managers	Independent consultant	8
9. Choosing elements of brand identity. Core idea, identity, positioning, and a promise of value	Board of Managers	Board of Managers + Marketing agency participating to creative design	8
10. Interest groups discussion about the concept	Started by the Board of Managers. Board of Managers and the financiers approve the outcome	Consultant	9
11. Destination level strategic decisions. Creative concept. Brand's structure, organization and distribution of work, financing	Board of Managers + actors participating to financing	Prepared by a marketing agency with the most central financiers	10

(Continued)

Table 4.11 Continued

Step	Responsibility bearer	Actor(s)	Timetable (month)
12. Consulting and testing. Fine adjustment	Board of Managers	Interest group discussions – consultant Market testing – market research agency	11
13. Co-ordination between the operations and actors	BMCO	BMCO	11
14. Developing well-functioning internal communication	BMCO	BMCO	11–12
15. Establishing integrated external marketing communication plan	BMCO	Marketing communications agency	11–12
16. Arranging monitoring	BMCO	Global market communications agency	11–12
17. Ending the planning stage and reporting	BMCO	–	12
18. Transformation of service processes to support destination brand identity where appropriate	Individual companies	Individual companies	Continuous
19. Transformation of physical infrastructure to support destination brand identity where appropriate	BMCO, individual companies, public sector actors	Individual companies, public sector actors	Continuous