

## Brand “Bulgaria” — A Summary of Methodology and Brand Building: The Brand Story of Brand “Bulgaria”

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**Abstract:** Every tourist destination could have its brand using the innovative method for building and managing tourist brands. Here one can find the main steps in structuring and positioning the brand in a process where you first discover the identity of the destination and next you build its reputation. The method is universal — it has been already tested in building 6 primary brands at different levels and the result of this research will offer you for the first time ever the brand and the brand story of Bulgaria tourist destination. Offering much more than a strategy for sustainable tourism development of every tourist destination the method also could be used instead of a strategy for tourism development but also guarantees effectiveness of sustainable tourist development and offers the know-how for product development and management *vire* marketing. Coordinating all the marketing instruments and efforts of the destination this method helps destinations in not using any other marketing surveys except if they need monitoring of their development. Brand “Bulgaria” presents the destination as the land of Orpheus, where you can unravel the mystery of the Universe and the arguments you may read in the brand story “Bulgaria — the cradle of civilization”. You will find out how History, Literature, Marketing and Tourism coexist in the brand story.

**Key words:** tourist brand; destination identity; brand story; marketing and branding

**JEL codes:** Z380, Z330, Z320, Z300, Q560

The brand is the competitive advantage of successful tourist destinations in XXI century. The brand has many more functions than those assigned to it to this day, because it is a complete and comprehensive system for marketing the destination and its product. The brand and only the brand has the potential to achieve the effectiveness of marketing efforts when these efforts are managed through a brand. However, the marketing efforts of the destinations are still expressed only in initial guidelines how to present the tourist potential, the attractiveness of their attractions and the quality of their products. The brand is even more — it is a ready know-how formula for the sustainability of the created products of the destinations, as well as a way to reach the upmost number of target audiences. The brand displaces and makes redundant the strategy for the development of the destinations’ tourism, because it itself represents a strategic planning of sustainable development, which practically develops on the know-how into realized in practice know-how, creates and manages the product of the destination. Despite the marketing efforts of the relevant ministry, Bulgaria does not have and has never had its

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own tourist brand, even after attempts to create one. Yet now Bulgaria can declare to the world its bright identity, created on the basis of an innovative approach for building and managing a brand. The creation of a national tourist brand will have a huge contribution to the reputation and the economy of Bulgaria.

## 1. Summary of Methodology for Creating a Brand

In the heart of the methodology “innovative method for building and managing a brand of a tourist destination” is the theory of the brand nature and its structure. The essence of the brand is not “a set of associations in the mind of the consumer” (MEET, 2013). Not relevant for creating a brand is also the statement of the cognitive branding model, summarized by Zhelev (2010), that “Every strong brand has a unique combination of associations in the mind of the consumer, which is most often marked by the terms brand DNA, brand essence, brand mantra, etc”. The reason for the inapplicability of the definition in creating a brand is that the combination of associations is a consequence of a successfully built and positioned brand and is actually a successfully created image, but not the DNA or the structure of the brand. “The brand according to the cognitive model is a set of subjective associations that consumers relate to the product” (Zhelev, 2010) and can be illustrated by the “bulb model” (which includes the product as such (core) and external layers of associations). The essence of the brand is completely different - derived from the definition of Anholt (2007) for branding destinations, the brand essence is “identity and reputation”.

Another important pillar of the innovative method is that marketing research is not of critical importance to developing a destination brand. Indicative of the not created brand “Bulgaria” in 2013 is that in the absence of a brand of the destination marketing achieves the so-called “Vicious circle” - the market, ie. potential guests of the destination expect a clear message about who is inviting them and why, and marketing research relies that guests know the destination and can determine the identity of the host. The result “unknown destination” presents the sincere answers of the respondents, but in no case “unknown” is the competitive advantage and brand element for creating brand “Bulgaria”, as appointed in the study, but a signal that a brand cannot be built based on marketing research among guests of the destination. On the contrary - the brand is identity and reputation, and identity is a glimpse inside us - who we are, how we define ourselves, what distinguishes us from the others as a community. We are those to know ourselves best and we cannot expect anyone else to determine our identity. Therefore, the innovative method for building and managing a brand and brand personality of a tourist destination is a sequence of methods that first lead to the discovery of the identity of the destination and second - to building a reputation.

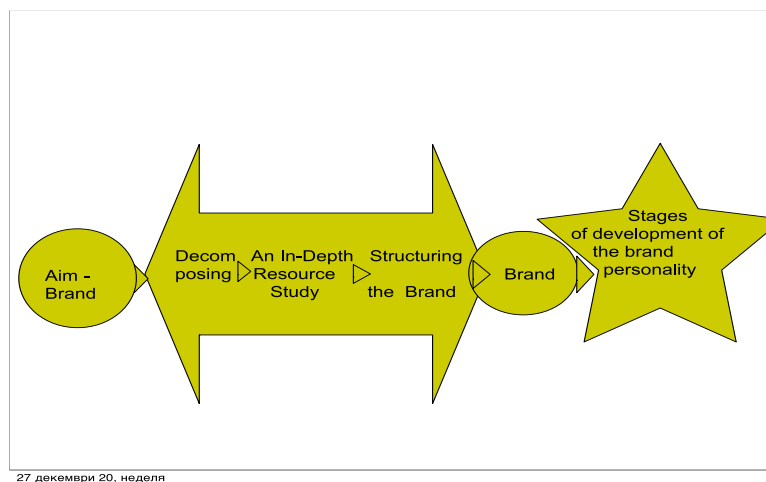
“National identity most entirely represents the cultural differences of larger communities, based on ethnic or other characteristics that unite the community” (Tsvetanova Tsaneva, 2015). For the national brand we are looking for the national identity in the direction of ethnic community, which distinguishes us as a specific community within the world. Smith (2000) identifies six attributes of the ethnic community that make it recognizable: a collective personal name; myth of common ancestors; shared historical memories; distinctive elements of our community culture; the connection to the “fatherland”; a sense of “solidarity of the population”.

In the selection of brand elements for regional and urban brands, one should look for this element of the ethnic community, which most strongly dominates as a specific of the region and reflects its connection with the national community.

In order to find the identity of the community of the respective tourist destination (which will be represented by brand elements in the brand) there should be sought those elements in the ethos of the community, in the

system of customs, traditions that preserve this ancestral memory and in which implemented and embedded are the self-determination of the community, its values. So traditions, myths, prejudices, history, archeology, etc. must be studied.

The second part of the methodology for brand building after discovering the identity of the destination is building a reputation. “Reputation contains the assessment of external audiences for the site/country, it is a community memory for the nation, it reflects cultural, historical assessments. It is changing slowly and difficult, but with the right brand building and the right steps in brand development, we have the opportunity to turn the brand into a parallel speaker of the international relations of the destination” (Dimitrova, 2021). We build a reputation through a brand story, which is a tool for brand positioning and stage of the brand development process (building a reputation) of the tourist destination. Thus, through the created brand of a tourist destination, we manage the product of the destination and the development and speed of the “functioning tourist system as a link between supply and demand” (Gunn, Var, 2002). Thus, the formula for creating and managing a brand of a tourist destination is a sequence of methods in which we first discover the identity of the destination through detailed resource research, and then we build reputation by telling a brand story - the so-called “cultural branding” (Holt, 2010) through the eyes of an influential brand person (Figure 1).



**Figure 1 An Innovative Method For Building and Managing a Brand and Brand Personality of a Tourist Destination**

Source: Dimitrova, 2016

“The secret of a powerful brand of a tourist destination is in building a primary brand of a destination” (Dimitrova, 2021, p. 13). These brands represent the pillars of the identity of the community of a destination. The innovative method for building and managing a brand of a tourist destination offers the know-how for building such primary brands — the most powerful brands and based on the most competitive element of the destination's identity. We turn the strongest element of identity into a brand, and the other elements come next as sub-brands that will support the development of the brand over time. Sub-brands can exist without the main brand, but without the main one they never build strong competitive brands. Through the brand story we position the brand — we state a clear identity of the destination and we can continue to tell sequels to the brand story by including all brand elements. In this way, through the brand story, we provide a presentation of the variety of services and the entire offer of the destination. In and through the brand story we determine the structure and the volume of the demand — they depend on 1) the elements of the tourist system that we integrate into the product and the story; 2)

the universal nature of the brand story and the significance of the brand and 3) the “contagious way” (Berger, 2013) in which we tell the brand story. Thus, the brand story is a tool to control the demand for the product, to describe the product, to emphasize the competitiveness of the product and to package it by first describing the route in the destination and second - connecting all elements (stops in the route) in narrative form. The brand, the brand story and the product of the destination are interrelated. Through the brand and the brand story, we completely form and present the product of the destination, and we “verify” the brand through various products from the destination and through places in the destination that we indicate and tell about in the brand story.

When we brand a destination, we present a brand story through a brand person — a person-metaphor. As a “metaphorical co-production of the brand” (Zhelev, 2010), the brand personality most strongly expresses the values of the brand and its individuality. It is important to select such a person related to the history of the destination, positive, already popular around the world, in the region or at least with popularity in the destination. A brand personality can also be a collective image. It is important for this person to present as comprehensively as possible the main brand element, on the basis of which the message of the destination is built, and to have the potential to develop a certain thematic range of tourist products.

In the brand story, we look for an opportunity to create a myth related to the history of the destination, because myths have always served as mechanisms for defining role models for society and people have always considered them instructive. Thus, by presenting a myth in the brand story, we educate and promote the Good. The narrative easily reaches all target groups if it is told well - as a legend, if it carries the power of myth.

The brand story is not just a narrative, but a complete message from the destination (Dimitrova, 2021), which tells about the most valuable competitive brand elements. It must be filmed to reach the upmost number of potential guests and markets. Through the potential guests of the destination they will get a real idea of the overall tourist product of the area.

An Art Plan for the development of the brand personality is created — how to continue the development of the brand personality and which other elements of the ranked as the most competitive for the brand can be developed in the next stages of the development of the brand personality. This is how we will manage the development of the brand over time. With the brand personality and the brand history we set coordinates for branding of the local goods and services.

## **2. Brand “Bulgaria” — Brand Building in Summary**

A detailed resource study of the destination Bulgaria has been made — its natural and cultural attractions, authenticity (the unique character, along with the rich nature of life in the destination; rituals, programs, events), culture, ethos, customs, believes and history, which create a characteristic distinctive mystique), as well as geography (natural resources, topography, relief), infrastructure, management and economics. All advantages in these areas are derived and ranked according to their global competitiveness. The strongest elements for the future brand architecture are authenticity, culture, ethos and geography.

First asset: The land of Orpheus, of the ancient Bulgarians — Thracians, a nation, chosen by God to pass the knowledge of the Atlanteans to the fifth race, the land of Dionysius, a nation who knew the stars and had an a precise calendar, the knowledge about space, ancient state traditions, construction-building skills, the cosmic music of the bagpipe, the Bulgarian folk songs and the specifics of the Bulgarian rhythms 7/8, of the “horo” folklore dance, which is an energy connection with the Cosmos, ancient alphabet and Bulgarian embroidery

manuscript.

Second strongest asset: The land of early Christianity and Orthodox Christianity, of preserved cultural memory and living traditions. Preserved pilgrimage traditions (also in pilgrimage routes), opportunities for thematic routes throughout the country. Religious tolerance, ritual wine in temples and wine roads, Christian calendar and holy monasteries.

Third asset: a huge spiritual and material culture that awakens living legends. A land that tells stories vire gold and treasures; a land that has preserved a wealth of messages - folk songs and folk dances, customs, rituals, crafts, holidays, legends and myths, along with beautiful and generous nature.

Fourth asset: Land of mineral springs (second in the world in number of springs after Iceland) and ancient healing practices of the Thracians, land of the oil-giving rose.

Thus, in summary of the most competitive assets, the Bulgarians are the heirs of the people, chosen by God to pass on the knowledge of the Atlanteans to the fifth race, they are the heirs of Dionysius, Orpheus and his philosophy. “Bulgarians are the heirs of the knowledge of the Atlanteans and guardians of the development of civilization” (Pophrystov, 2017). The Thracians and the Proto-Bulgarians (ancient Bulgarians) are one and the same people. Bulgaria is the land of the Goddess — mother and Bulgarians are a Thracian tribe, i.e., the most ancient people on Earth, the indigenous population of modern Bulgarian lands. “The rosette from Pliska is the seal of the living God” (Dimova, 2017), “Bulgaria is the land of God’s love” (Pophrystov, 2017). “The Thracian ruler’s tombs are schools of immortality of the Bulgarians” (Smolenov, 2017). Bulgarians are holders of a unique and ancient culture. The peculiarities of this culture make it possible to position a brand of a unique proposal — as a nation, the holder of the ancient knowledge of the Atlanteans, as a nation with a mission to preserve the development of civilization. The roots of this deep knowledge of the world and the cosmic order have remained (alive) in folklore, in the rites, in the believes of the Bulgarian people, coded in the embroideries and in the rosette from Pliska. They are supporting evidence of brand identity. These derived competitive brand elements enable Bulgaria to present a historically completely credible message of the destination, which is based entirely on historical facts derived by historians.

The slogan proposals for Bulgaria as a destination are:

“Bulgaria — touch the Orpheus’ secrets and the magic connection with the Universe!”

“Bulgaria — the essence of the Universe”/“Experience the magic of the Universe in Bulgaria!”

### **3. Brand personality of Bulgaria**

Orpheus is a collective image of all periods of Bulgarian history, a message of knowledge and cult practices coded in the system of Bulgarian folklore — in the songs, dances, rituals, as well as in the material heritage. Christianity developed on the basis of Orpheus’ philosophy of monotheism; the ancient rituals of Orpheus for connection with the Creator/Tangra/God pass through the Bulgarian rachenitsa folklore dance, which vibrates in the rhythm 7/8 like our heart’s chakra and through the purification of the soul with a song. Thus, the Bulgarian spiritual culture will be directly related to the tourist products, and it is an inexhaustible resource. Orpheus is a popular local image, a positive character and allows for the exhaustion (in presenting) of all the strongest brand elements. These are the reasons why Orpheus is the proposal for a brand personality of destination Bulgaria. Unlike the images of Spartacus, knyaz Boris I and king Simeon the Great, through the person of Orpheus we can present a longer period of Bulgarian history and protect important brand elements that stem from the theme

related to this person.

The brand story of the Bulgaria brand. The brand story was created by Dr. Tatyana Dimitrova as a piece of art, structured as a monologue of Orpheus, the brand personality of brand "Bulgaria". The proposed brand history for Bulgaria presents to the world the specifics of the culture, the heritage, the pillars of spirituality, the marks of the cultural identity of the Bulgarians.

#### **4. Bulgaria — The Cradle of civilisation**

Orpheus:

- If you have not seen the birthplace of modern humanity, “the cradle of the Mother Goddess” (Kirilov, 2013), “the land where the portal to the Universe is located” (Dimova, 2017), the God-inspired land of “sacred geometry and logic of standards, of knowledge of a system of proportions” (Krastev, 2010; Smolenov, 2012), come to my land! My land is Bulgaria! Here is the mythical land of Yin and Yang (Stoyanov, 2015), the energy of creation, woven into wonderful embroideries and martenitsas. Here the ancients told the history of the world in the drawings created on the mysterious rocks in the cave Magurata (Kirilov, 2013) during the Second Sun — 14,600 years ago ... God’s chosen people live here — the people of the Bulgarians, “the first recipient of the knowledge of the Atlanteans, charged with the mission to pass it on to the fifth race in order to continue the development of civilisation” (Pophristov, 2017). Here is my land of sacred places, where I preached the truths about the Divine love, the love of your fellow creatures and the rituals that connect us with the Creator. For the uninitiated, this land is mystical, but the mysteries are dispelled if you carry the blood of God’s people. Here people still sing my hymns, still carry the rhythm of seven eighths in their dances, still purify their souls with a song, because “this music resonates with the heart chakra and puts us in direct contact with our Creator” (Pophristov, 2019). Here is the land of God’s love, of God’s Wisdom. Here everyone discovers in himself the particle of the Divine essence. Here is the land of the big town squares, where at weddings and holidays people gather round and dance wonderful Bulgarian folk dances and wonderful handkerchiefs are waved in the air, and the energy of the playing Bulgarians merges into a united “we” and it vibrates with special purity and carries the message of a people that created and preserved the civilisation of man, labor and mind. Here is the home of light and fire-dancing, of the big purifying fires of Sirni Zagovezni. Here is the kingdom of Dionysius, as the Greeks called him, “but his name is Abar Kam, son of God and of a Bulgarian Thracian-Phrygian, he was king of Thrace for two millennia before the incarnation of the God-Word, he was the Bulgarian ruler and prophet, a spiritual leader” (Ifandiev, 2012). How do I know this? I am Orpheus — the contemplator and the teacher. I was sent by the Gods “to remind people of the knowledge that the great Abar Kam gave them. He declared the secret letter of the priests — the Bulgarian runic script, to be a national script and wrote the first book in the history of mankind in this Bulgarian alphabet, in which he justified monotheism - the belief in one God. Twenty years later, in Asia Minor, he created a second alphabet — Bulgarian ... Bulgarians wrote down only important things” (Ifandiev, 2012), they left knowledge to the generations and these still have not been destroyed. This knowledge lives here, in the land of Dionysius, in my land, the land of “Christianity, which for the Bulgarians has always meant love” (Pophristov, 2017). Here are the ancestral lands of the Bulgarians, where they have always lived. “Some of these Bulgarians traveled all over the Earth in the last 10,000 years, they have created several states on their way and a huge one — between three oceans, and left the knowledge of the Atlanteans among the new kingdoms, and then returned to their lands ...” (Pophristov, 2017) You will find traces of these on the wonderful Bulgarian embroideries, which are “embroidery

code” (Bongurev, 2018), on the titles kan and khan, on the carved horsemen in rocks like the Madara Horseman; in the calendar that the new kingdoms created, but they never managed to create it as accurate as the calendar of their teachers — the Bulgarians. Why did the Bulgarians give their knowledge to other nations? This was their mission. It happened in ancient times — when “humans communicated directly with their creators — the Gods, and the last sons of the great Atlanteans had to pass on to the fifth race the heavenly knowledge of the structure of the world, their knowledge of building and how to cultivate the earth, but also most importantly, their spiritual knowledge, which connected earthly people and their creators” (Pophristov, 2017). This knowledge is the key to civilization development. The Thracians were chosen by the universe with the mission to carry and to pass this knowledge on to the fifth race. And the Bulgarians were from a Thracian tribe and they specifically were among these selected Thracian clans. Thus, “they became the first recipients of this knowledge. On the island of Sardinia, the Atlanteans initiated them to this knowledge. And the Bulgarians travelled together with the Atlanteans - as an outpost, to pass on this knowledge the individual tribes and peoples” (Pophristov, 2017). Their path passed through the Two Rivers, Harappa and the Egyptians ... and there flourished, the first in the history of mankind, highly developed cultures and civilizations, that lasted for millennia on. Then the Atlanteans and the Bulgarians reached the Himalayas, where they created “the mythical country of Shambhala, the dwelling of the superhuman, which preserves the gene pool of mankind and which is part of all the ancient texts and many legends of various modern peoples” (Pophristov, 2017). The sacred text Vajrayana describes that “the mysterious Shambhala is located north of the Seetha River and is surrounded by eight snow-capped mountains that resemble a lotus flower”<sup>1</sup>. In their centre lies the capital of this wonderful country. There the mission of the Atlanteans ended and the mission of the Bulgarians began — to return the knowledge of the lands from which it originated — from the ancient Bulgarian lands! And the Bulgarians travelled East, leaving markers wherever they visited — a horseman carved into the rocks”. They were in the Hindu Kush and in the lands of present-day Iran, where there was already an empire, so they did not stay there, but they bypassed the Caspian Sea to return to their sacred lands South of the Danube River” (Pophristov, 2017). Here to the West of the Black Sea was “the oldest civilization on Earth” (Smolenov, 2017). To this day, Bulgarians have the most accurate calendar in the world, associated with deep knowledge of the planets and space, and the movements of celestial bodies. To this day, Bulgarians wear the Pliska rosette as “a sacred symbol that has preserved a deep knowledge of the micro and macrocosm, but they wear it on their chests and it promotes spiritual growth, and acts as an activator. It encodes a new calendar cycle, marking an era that can be 500 or 1,000 years long. The code of 7 reminds of the seven spiritual hierarchies through which the evolution of man passes, of the seven planets that affect the earthly man, and the sign of the Dulo clan on its back shows the royal origin of the Bulgarian clans so that the sixth race generations know about them...” (Dimova, 2017). They should know that Bulgaria is the sacred land of the biblical Flood and the oldest processed gold. Here is the land of higher vibrations, in which the Thracian ruler's tombs are not eternal homes of former kings, but the schools of immortality of the Bulgarians. The Bulgarians knew the new calendar cycles and all the Universal messages, they read the oscillations of the Universe and knew that life moves in an upward spiral. “They knew the geometry of the Earth to perfection, and their constructions were perfectly coordinated with the cosmic equivalents of distances and measures which they have left on gold plates and household items. Look at the location of the two Bulgarian capitals in Bulgaria today - an architectural-geometric formula of a sacred complex, with exceptional accuracy of the distance from each other of these sacred Bulgarian constructions -

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<sup>1</sup> <http://forum.renim.me>.

Pliska - Preslav - Madara - Sbornovo” (Smolenov, 2017). The earliest Christianity flourished in the Bulgarian lands, seven of the first apostles came and preached here during IV–VI century, and there were over 900 early Christian churches here. To this day, Christianity in Bulgaria has its own peculiarity — it carries the specifics of early Christianity and the memory of the lands of the Goddess — Mother and the Divine Wisdom.

Here live my traditions, the Orpheus traditions! Remember that each person is unique and has a particle of the Divine essence therein. Purify it with my rituals! Come to Bulgaria to experience these rituals and unravel the mystique of the universe! Consciousness is elevated with knowledge, and Bulgaria is an inexhaustible source of ancient knowledge. Get to know these!

#### 4. Conclusion

The developed methodology “innovative approach for building and managing a brand” is effective — in addition to creating a brand of “Bulgaria”, it has been tested in the creation of six more brands at different levels and allows each tourist destination to create its own powerful brand through which it will present its most competitive identity and will successfully manage interest therein over time. Bulgaria already has a brand based on this methodology and can proudly declare its competitive advantages, dressed in a brand story, as well as take its deservedly significant place in the history of mankind as a factor for the development of civilization. This is the way of Bulgaria to valorize its rich cultural and historical heritage and to gain recognition in cultural and geopolitical terms.

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