

BRANDING KAZAKHSTAN: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STATE AND NON-STATE
ACTORS

ҚАЗАҚСТАНДЫ БРЕНДТЕУ: МЕМЕЛЕКЕТТІК ЖӘНЕ ЖЕКЕ СУБЪЕКТТЕР
АРАСЫНДАҒЫ ҚАРЫМ-ҚАТЫНАСТАР

БРЕНДИНГ КАЗАХСТАНА: ОТНОШЕНИЯ МЕЖДУ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫМИ И
НЕГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫМИ СУБЪЕКТАМИ

by

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The 29th day of May, 2017.



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Abstract

This thesis is devoted to the analysis of Kazakhstani nation branding processes. The Republic of Kazakhstan faced the need to present itself on international arena right after the country's independence. The questions of nation branding were sidelined until the beginning of the 2000s, but they have recently received a new impetus. Academic literature on Kazakhstani nation branding tends to focus on separate advertising campaigns, thus failing to illustrate the whole mechanism of this phenomenon. In addition, it views nation branding as a top-down process, often overlooking the role of non-state actors. By focusing on tourism promotion as one element of the country's nation branding, this research attempts to distinguish between state and non-state actors engaged in Kazakhstani nation branding and to examine how the relationship between those actors influences the national brand. Although it is difficult to draw clear differences between these sets of actors, in-depth interviews with representatives of the tourist board, tourist associations and travel agencies reveal the existence of a distinction between state and non-state actors as defined by nation branders themselves. Analysis of websites, printed, video, and audio materials helps to identify the images of Kazakhstan that are promoted on the international level, as well as to highlight particular elements of these images that are stressed by different sets of actors. Using a grounded theory approach, this study comes to the conclusion that the level of interaction between state and non-state actors has a strong influence on the content of the national brand. In addition, the thesis explains how the close interconnectedness of nation branding with such practices as public and cultural diplomacy, the need to produce an image for several audiences at once, and lack of consensus between the actors resulted in a complex and not always consistent international image of Kazakhstan.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Imagine an eagle flying high in a blue sky to the accompaniment of a lively traditional melody. The images of vast steppes, yurts and galloping horses are mixed with illustrations of people in various traditional clothes, grand skyscrapers, industrial sites, and bustling cities. All of the images bear symbolic meaning associated with economic growth, stability, and peaceful coexistence of traditional and modern values in a tolerant and multiethnic society. This set of visual and audio elements can be found in any video advertising Kazakhstan to international audiences.

In this dissertation I examine what forces stand behind these visual representations and investigate the relationship between state and non-state actors that are involved in Kazakhstani nation branding. I thus analyse whether and how the activity of those actors influences Kazakhstani promotion campaigns and the resulting image of the country.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and in conditions of growing global competition, national image building received special attention in the newly independent and largely unknown post-Soviet states. Many governments used the help of international marketing consultants and brand makers to develop nation branding strategies in order to promote their countries abroad. Nation branding refers to a type of promotional campaign that is “increasingly adopted by governments as a means to promote national identity while encouraging the economic benefits necessary to compete in a modern globalized world” (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 43). Such promotional campaigns aimed at different audiences allow governments to create a favorable international country brand and to attract foreign investment, economic and human resources, as well as to be accepted as a legitimate actor on the international arena.

Kazakhstan has been no exception to this trend. In official statements by politicians and tourist slogans, Kazakhstan is always referred to as “crossroads of civilizations”, “Eurasian Bridge”, “the Heart of Eurasia”, “bridge between East and West” (Saunders, 2008; Marat, 2009). However, it is not yet clear if Kazakhstan has its own clearly defined nation branding strategy. First

of all, there is no literature examining such a strategy. Secondly, Kazakhstan's attempts at nation branding sometimes appear chaotic and inconsistent for an outside observer. International image and nation branding strategies have a major influence not only on how the country is perceived abroad, but also on all spheres of its development. Thus, in my opinion, topic of nation branding should receive more attention.

This thesis explains that Kazakhstani efforts at self-promotion are characterised by inconsistency, because Kazakhstan is still in search of its national brand, and a unified nation branding strategy only starts to emerge. Consequently, activities of an increasing number of nation branding practitioners that distribute different images of the country has not been coordinated. This complicated an already confusing international image of Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstani nation branding.

In the 1990s, the Republic of Kazakhstan became a new actor on the international arena and right from this moment it was necessary to make the country's presence known. However, due to the economic crisis and domestic issues, questions of nation branding were sidelined in the first years after independence. The development of nation branding received a new impetus in 2006 when the government undertook media campaigns in order to restore Kazakhstan's image after Sasha Baron Cohen's movie *The Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* that presented Kazakhstan in a distorted fashion. Before the creation of the Committee for International Information in 2006, there was no universal body focusing solely on the international image of Kazakhstan. The *Borat* movie was the final push to institutionalize the management of Kazakhstan's international image. Nowadays, Kazakhstan's candidacy for the post of a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and the upcoming EXPO exhibition made the authorities re-think the concept of nation branding and to establish the Commission on the Development and Promotion of National and Regional Brands in 2015. These measures indicate a shift towards what Gyorgy Szondi (2007 p.9) calls the "institutionalization of image-making", the process of setting up a specialized governmental institution in charge of a country's reputation management. The overarching goal of this strategy is to adopt a holistic approach to nation

branding and to achieve a high level of coordination among the actors involved in the process, as their number is constantly rising.

Kazakhstani promotional campaigns are, first of all, a tool of the state's foreign policy that serves multiple functions. According to Peter van Ham (2008, p. 127), place branding is just one element of the state's foreign policy along with soft power and public diplomacy. International image of a Central Asian country is built on the ideas of diplomats and ruling elites, and it reflects the political and economic interests they pursue (Marat, 2009, p. 1125). Kazakhstan, in particular, develops its image in order to appear as a reliable partner and a modern democratic state (Saunders, 2008, p. 73; Stock, 2009, p. 185), to attract talents and resources (Gaggiotti et al., 2007, p.115), to ensure the flow of investments and tourists (van Ham, 2008, p.129). In this way, Kazakhstani promotional campaigns are aimed at three groups: foreign businessmen, foreign politicians, and tourists (Marat, 2009, p. 1124).

Scholars also note that although the government controls the process of nation branding and the production of national images (Marat, 2009, p.1127), in the modern digital age other independent actors, such as mass culture and media, can influence the global perception of a nation (Saunders, 2007, 2008; van Ham, 2008). As the process of globalization deepens, proliferation of media technologies and information access grows, thus limiting the role of national authorities as the primary communicator (Wang, 2006, p.33). That is why national governments become more attentive to their national images (Saunders, 2008, p.240; Stock, 2009, p.180). One example of how an external event can influence the national image of a country that received special attention is the Borat case. Although Cohen's movie portrayed Kazakhstan in an unfavorable light as its plot was based on completely fictitious information (Saunders, 2007, p. 231), it generated curiosity about the largely unknown country (Saunders, 2008, p.71; Stock, 2009, p. 185) and promoted tourism (Saunders, 2008, p. 70). The reaction of Kazakhstani officials involved a ban on the film, speeches by government officials threatening the actor with a lawsuit, and a subsequent advertising campaign. They all showed that the Kazakhstani government was not ready to respond to what it perceived as a threat to the country's reputation, because the government's reaction was chaotic and

inconsistent. For instance, in order to overcome images produced by *the Borat* film, Kazakhstani authorities commissioned advertisements on BBC and *The Economist*. However, general attitudes towards the country and its people did not change as a result of these campaigns, because the audience of the movie and the audiences targeted by the BBC and *The Economist* did not overlap (Fullerton et al, 2008, p.159). Nevertheless, such active reaction showed that the government remained concerned about the protection of Kazakhstan's national image.

So, it becomes clear that scholarly works view nation branding as a top-down process and approach this topic through the analysis of goals, reactions, and practices adopted by state structures. Although the literature on Kazakhstani nation branding acknowledges the presence of non-state actors and their increasing role in the creation of Kazakhstan's international image, it limits their agency and scope of activity to one of intermediaries. It is unclear whether non-state actors in the context of Kazakhstani nation branding have agency of their own or whether their functions are reduced to the transmission of the state's visions of the national brand.

Research question and methodology.

The main task in my thesis is to analyse the relationship between state and non-state actors engaged in Kazakhstani nation branding and to draw the boundaries between their agency and spheres of influence. In addition, this work investigates how the relationship between state and non-state actors influences the international image of Kazakhstan and what constitutes the notions of state and non-state actors in the context of Kazakhstani nation branding. In order to answer these questions, I examine Kazakhstani governmental nation branding strategies, as well as focus on the impact of private entities that shape Kazakhstan's international image.

This thesis explores Kazakhstani nation branding from the vantage point of tourism promotion. Tourism promotion is associated with destination branding, a practice that focuses on the popularization and advertising of particular places, be it resorts, national parks, cities or regions of the country (Jojin, n.d.). According to Szondi (2007 p.10), destination branding precedes nation branding; it is more abstract and less controllable than nation branding. However, as Anholt (2007) noted, tourism is one of the elements constituting a national brand. In order to build a strong

“competitive identity” (Anholt, 2007, p.25), the government should pay attention to tourism promotion as well as other elements of national brand. In addition, tourism advertisements also disseminate information about the country, thus constructing an image of their own. That is why tourism promotion has far reaching implications for nation branding.

This thesis represents a mixed methods research, as it draws upon visual and textual advertising materials, and personal communications with representatives of state and non-state entities. Promotional materials that constitute the first set of data consist of information presented on touristic websites, videos, and brochures produced by governmental and private entities. By governmental online portals I mean websites that were commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or by the Tourism Industry Department. Private web pages also can be divided into those that are maintained by foreign and domestic travel agencies or online guides. All of the materials are publicly available and can be found either on the mentioned websites or video hosting services such as YouTube, Vimeo, etc. The majority of information is available in several languages including English, Russian, and Kazakh. Overall, this group of data materials includes overview of fifteen websites, thirty-eight promotional videos, and information provided by the application “Kazakhstan-the Land of the Great Steppe”. These sources help to identify how Kazakhstan is presented, what messages concerning Kazakhstani international image are distributed, who the target audience is, and whose discourse is prevailing.

A series of in-depth interviews and email conversations forms the second set of data for my analysis. My participants can be divided into representatives of state structures, employees of Kazakhstani travel agencies, and owners of foreign travel agencies and travel guides. All face-to-face interviews were conducted in Russian during the period from July to October 2017 in Astana and Almaty. Online correspondence was done in English during the same period of time.

Meetings with representatives of state institutions included an interview with the Deputy Chairman of the Committee of International Information and a conversation with the Head of the Department on Promotion of National Touristic Product.

Data on Kazakhstani travel agencies consists of five interviews with those agencies that are engaged in inbound tourism. A specialization on inbound tourism therefore served as the first criterion for choosing research participants. Another indicator according to which I identified possible interviewees is their websites. I have chosen those Kazakhstani travel agencies that have websites in English and other foreign languages, as well as those that have a section entitled “Kazakhstan” that is devoted to information about the country. Apart from contacting domestic travel agencies, I conducted an interview with the coordinator of Kazakhstan Tourist Association’s information center in Almaty.

As owners of the foreign travel firms are based abroad, I contacted them via email asking whether they could provide informative and descriptive answers to a questionnaire with open questions concerning their professional activity. The questionnaires were structured in a way that would help to understand how these actors define their responsibilities and limits of autonomy. I included questions on their cooperation with governmental structures and private sector, as well as asked about the terms and conditions of such cooperation. Apart from that the questionnaire contained questions about the process of development of their websites and informational materials: I was interested to learn how these agencies determined what kind of information to post, how they developed their informational materials, and who was responsible for updating information. From eight chosen agencies, only three travel agencies and two online travel guides responded. These travel agencies are based in Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. In contrast to local agencies, foreign tourist agencies were more willing to share their opinions and experiences.

It is important to note that although information provided by the respondents is subjective, it allows to understand actors’ perceptions of nation branding process and how these subjective perceptions form mutual interactions between actors engaged in Kazakhstani nation branding. Overall, these sources reveal the existence of a clear division between state and non-state actors, and also suggest that different categories of actors promote different images of the country. This

approach allows me to challenge the commonly accepted view of nation branding as a top-down process only, and to analyse the scope of activity of non-state actors.

Thesis structure.

The first chapter provides an overview of the literature on nation branding, as well as explains terms and concepts that are used in this research. In this part of the thesis I outline theoretical and analytical frameworks for the analysis of public-private interactions and their influence on the international image of Kazakhstan. The second chapter is devoted to the textual and visual analysis of Kazakhstan's international image. It identifies the most prominent themes used in nation branding messages and explores their practical and symbolic meanings. The third chapter is devoted to the investigation of various forms of interactions between state and non-state actors. Here I analyse how those actors distinguish between their responsibilities and spheres of influence, and how these subjective identifications affect their work and the image of Kazakhstan that they promote. Overall, through the analysis of public and private actors' attitudes towards each other, their perceptions of the roles they play in the process of nation branding, and content of the images they distribute, this thesis shows that state and non-state actors employ different approaches to nation branding, and level of cooperation between state and non-state actors determines whether those two approaches coexist alongside each other or come into conflict. In addition, this variety of relationship types between state and non-state actors influences the content of Kazakhstani international image.

Chapter 2

Nation Branding: Theoretical Background and Analytical Framework

Approaches to nation branding.

Nation branding as a concept can be understood differently, depending on the academic field in the framework of which this phenomenon is explored. There are three major approaches to nation branding identified by Nadia Kaneva (2011a): “technical-economic, political and cultural” (p.119). I use this classification, because, firstly, it is the only work devoted to a systemic analysis of nation branding scholarship and, secondly, because my thesis is situated within the cultural field of scholarship on national brands identified by Kaneva (2011a).

The technical-economic approach characterises academic works deeply rooted in the capitalist context that focuses on nation branding as an effective marketing strategy. Authors contributing to this branch of nation branding research are very often brand makers, national or independent consultants, marketing, management, and business specialists (Kaneva, 2011a, p.120). Some of the most prominent authors in this sphere are marketing experts such as Philip Kotler, Donald Heider and Irving Rein (1993), who clearly explained the use of marketing as a mechanism of territories promotion and suggested to consider cities, regions, and countries as products. According to Kotler et al. (1993), in order to construct an attractive image, it is necessary to create favorable investment and business opportunities, promote tourism, and provide social services and guarantees. In the aforementioned work, by examining nations and cities all over the world, the authors for the first time provided recommendations on how to promote territories by creating effective marketing strategies and advertising campaigns (Kotler et al., 1993).

Although Kotler’s (1993) edited volume is considered a classic in its field and it has served as a theoretical background for a number of works, the official term *nation brand* was introduced by Simon Anholt (1998) in the *Journal of Brand Management*. In continuation of Kotler’s ideas, Anholt (1998, p. 397) argued that nations and countries could be equated to trade marks or brand names that define the image of a country. He expanded Kotler’s model and developed the concept of *competitive identity* that includes six elements for a successful territory branding campaign:

“tourism, export brands, foreign and domestic policy, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, population of the country” (Anholt, 2007, p.25). It thus becomes clear that proponents of this approach define nation branding as a set of practical marketing measures that countries use in order to attract various resources.

The political approach to nation branding research characterises works that analyse the influence of a country’s image on its place on the international arena and its participation in international events (Kaneva, 2011a, p.124). Although scholars in this field recognize that the aim of nation branding is to accumulate resources, they shift their focus to culture, political ideas and foreign policies, trying to trace the link between the state and commercial practices. In this case, nation branding is on a par with such concepts as soft power, cultural and public diplomacy. For instance, van Ham (2008) considers place branding as part of soft power that “centers around concepts like values, norms, and rules in international politics” (p.20). In contrast, Melissen (2005) distinguishes nation branding from public diplomacy, but states that they have the same goals and methods – to create a likeable image of a country through popularization of its values and ideas. This study supports Melissen’s view, differentiating nation branding from public diplomacy, but also acknowledges the fact that these two practices share the same values and aims. In such a way, political approach to nation branding views this concept as a new method of “post-ideological propaganda” (Kaneva, 2011a, p.126), referring to the post cold war system of international relations, along with cultural and public diplomacy.

Academic works using the cultural approach are widespread in media and cultural studies. They analyze the impact of nation branding on national and cultural identities and the agency of different actors in communicating and negotiating this identity (Kaneva, 2011a, p. 127). National identity, in this case, is considered as “a dynamic struggle and negotiation, shaped by various local and extra-local agents, over collective and individual meanings” (Kaneva, 2011a, p. 127). Kaneva (2011b) in her analysis of Bulgarian and Romanian nation branding, defines this term as “set of discourses and practices involved in national self-redefinition and located at intersections of economy, culture and politics” (p.5). Melissa Aronczyk (2008, 2013), another scholar who adopted

a cultural approach to nation branding, refers to this phenomenon as to the process of formation and communication of national identity that creates particular systems of power, knowledge and exchange within the discourse. The main point is that although these definitions of nation branding include commercial and branding concepts, they go beyond the border of corporate marketing and investigate social, cultural, and political implications of the phenomenon, as well as its influence on identity formation and development. Advocates of cultural approach understand nation branding as a discourse that created grounds for various actors to negotiate what determines national identity, and by doing so to establish and improve their power positions.

Although my study uses concepts that were developed by scholars from technical-economic and political groups, it is the cultural field of research that it will contribute to. As my research is focused on the relationship between state and non-state actors in the context of Kazakhstani nation branding, it adopts critical approach to the study of this phenomenon and uses the following definition of nation branding: “a field of social practices and discourses in which institutional and individual actors are jockeying for position and struggling over desired resources” (Kaneva, 2011b, p.99). Although this work situates itself in the tradition of cultural approaches to the study of nation branding, connections between all three academic spheres focusing on nation branding cannot be ignored. This close connection reveals the importance of economic, cultural, and political factors in nation branding processes, which, in turn, results in complexity of the national images that are being promoted and in a big number of actors engaged in the process. Thus, firstly, I will outline a theoretical background for the analysis of Kazakhstani international image, and then for the investigation of the relationship between different actors that shape this image.

Complexity of international image.

The international image of Kazakhstan, even when studied from the vantage point of tourism promotion only, is very complex and consists of different elements. It contains information not only about the touristic potential of the country, but also about its political system, economic development, and internal situation. On the one hand, this set of images is typical for each representation of Kazakhstan that was analyzed. On the other hand, different actors tend to

highlight different aspects of the country depending on the goals of their activity and the audience which they address. Final recipients of the branding message indirectly influence the content of the image, as separate nation branding campaigns are aimed at separate audiences varying from politicians and investors to tourists and students not only outside the country, but within its borders as well. This is one of the reasons why the image is so complex. Another explanation of the complexity of the image is the fact that nation brands as such contain several components reflecting nation's achievements in various spheres of national competence. Thus, nation brand promoters try to combine a variety of approaches in order to convey a message. One of the challenges they face is the difficulty to incorporate all of these approaches in one consistent image that will be in conformity with the image distributed on both domestic and international levels. This leads to the development of complex and sometimes inconsistent images of the country.

Another reason for the complexity of Kazakhstani nation branding may be that various actors using the same set of images unite them under different labels or slogans. Kazakhstan is described as "The Heart of Eurasia" by the national airlines (<http://airastana.com>), "The Land of the Great Steppe" according to the MFA's recent online application (Kazakhstan- the Land of the Great Steppe, 2015), "The Country of Wonders" on international tourism fairs, or "The Country of Open Future" in accordance with recent videos promoting Kazakhstani economy (Braun Film and Video Inc., 2013). As a result, there is no common label that might be associated with the country. As the cases of Romania and Bulgaria show, production of short-term successive slogans results in the inconsistency of national brands and illustrates the lack of a national vision and coordination among actors (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011). In the Kazakhstani case, this can be explained by the absence or underdevelopment of a unified country brand. Systematic and comprehensive approach to developing a nation brand in Kazakhstan has just started to be initiated, and has not yet developed into one unified strategy.

As nation branding implies the promotion of national identity on the international level, the connection between nation branding, nation building, and diplomacy can be traced. This is another explanation for the complexity of the international image that is promoted mainly by governmental

structures. According to Fan (2008, p.6), national identity plays a very important role in the construction of a nation's image. First of all, a nation needs to define its own identity, self-perception, and then decide how to project it to the outside world. For a national identity to form, national governments engage in nation building, which is aimed primarily at a domestic audience. In addition, a nation's self-identity is not completely constant, as those nations that have undergone major political, social, and cultural changes are likely to reconsider their national identities. Consequently, those changes will affect the nation branding initiatives.

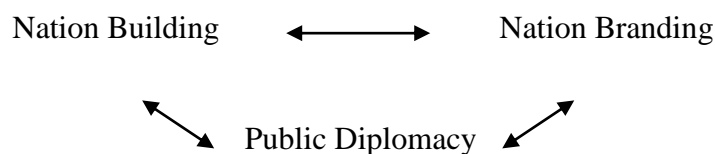
(Self) Identity → Nation branding → Image (held by other)

(Retrieved from: Fan, Self-perception and Significant Others, 2008, p.6)

Although nation branding is directed at an international audience, it also takes into account its own citizens as equally important (Szondi, 2008, p.12). In such a way, an image constructed during the national self-definition process is later fully or partially appropriated for nation branding purposes.

As nation branding is sometimes considered to be part of international communication, it has a lot in common with public diplomacy. Public diplomacy and nation branding are two separate concepts, but they share common goals, approaches, and methods, and are better used in conjunction (Melissen, 2005). Both public diplomacy and nation branding share the ultimate goal of creating a positive image of a country. The promotion of national identity, national culture and values is also one of the main elements of these two approaches. Moreover, although nation branding audience is broader than that of public diplomacy, it also comes down to the promotion of the country to politicians, businessmen, and tourists.

Nation branding is thus closely interconnected with nation building on the one hand, and public diplomacy on the other. All of those concepts have far-reaching implications and can influence each other's outcomes. Consequently, the relationship between those three approaches to national identity can appear as follows:



As the examples of Estonia, trying to re-imagine itself as a part of Europe (Jansen, 2008), Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Jordan, 2011) or China (Barr, 2012) show, nation branding often goes hand in hand with nation building. Thus, in Kazakhstan’s case, nation branding’s implications for nation building and public diplomacy also explain the complexity of the image that is being promoted.

Public-private cooperation.

As for the set of actors involved in nation branding, their variety of forms and of interactions also results in the creation of complex national images. Nowadays more and more new actors emerge and engage in international and domestic politics. Some of them do not have state affiliation and yet function on the same level with governmental institutions on both international and domestic arenas. Those actors are defined as non-state agents that have political, economic, social and cultural influence at national and international levels, but are not aligned to any country (La Porte, 2012, p.4). They include, but are not limited to, international organizations, transnational corporations, non-governmental organizations, and representatives of the private sector.

The rise of non-state actors pushed scholars to reevaluate the nature of such traditional concepts as international relations, multilateral cooperation, and diplomacy, as these spheres were no longer reserved for state entities only. John Robert Kelley (2014, p.1) argued that some non-state actors outdo their state counterparts in such fields as international development and direct investment. Analyzing changes in the sphere of public diplomacy, he concludes that non-state actors started to challenge states’ legitimacy in foreign affairs, adopting “diplomatic capabilities”, thus contributing to “agency change” in public diplomacy (Kelley, 2014, p.7). Wiseman (2010) calls this phenomenon “polylateral diplomacy” (p.24) – a form of diplomatic cooperation between official state actors and unofficial non-state entities. Melissen (2011) describes this situation as “democratization of diplomacy” that now becomes “less national in terms of actors that are

involved in the process and in terms of topics that states use in order to present themselves” (p.21). According to the author, cities and regions, large companies and small businesses become more aware of the importance of image and reputation and more often engage in diplomatic relations in pursuit of their own interests (Melissen, 2011, p.19).

As nation branding is closely connected to public and cultural diplomacy, it is not an exception to such a trend. Although state officials become more interested in managing their national images, the state is no longer the only source of image production. A state cannot manage its image by itself, because other actors have the ability to influence the way in which the international community perceives it (Saunders, 2008, p. 76). In addition, due to the spread of new technologies, national images have become more exposed to external influences. The point is that in comparison to non-state actors as a whole, the range of non-state actors in nation branding is much broader, as some of them might unintentionally affect the international image of the country. For instance, a negative review about the country posted online by a journalist or a traveler might affect the nation brand. Thus, some non-state actors such as international journalists and travel bloggers can operate independently from any state structures, while the activity of others might be under the control of governmental institutions via normative regulation or limited by agreement conditions.

In a variety of cases nation branding is considered as a top-down process initiated and executed by governmental institutions. *Promotion Bulgaria* (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011), *GREAT* in the UK (Pamment, 2015), *Brand Estonia* (Jansen, 2008), *Macedonia Timeless* (Graan, 2013), and *Malaysia – Truly Asia* (Morais, 2013) are examples of promotional campaigns initiated and executed by specialized state agencies. Such top-down management of brand identities is considered as a characteristic of countries in transition and, in some cases, a legacy of communist culture (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011; Kaneva, 2011b; Aronczyk, 2013). It is also critiqued as a non-democratic practice that prevents the participation of the general population and civil society (Widler, 2007; Jansen, 2008; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011; Pamment, 2015).

Nevertheless, as Anholt (2014) noted, a country's reputation is not primarily formed by governments. In other cases, various NGOs including business associations, cultural or tourism unions led the process of nation branding. For instance, in Ecuador and Romania, trade promotion organizations initiated nation branding strategies (Anholt, 2005, p.22). The brands of Latvia and Estonia were supported by the EU stressing "the Europeanness" of the nations. The *Branding Bulgaria* campaign was created by a foreign agency, the British Council, and was intended to include both public and private sectors (Kaneva, 2011b, p.105). It is thus evident that nation branding strategies are not always initiated by national governments, as foreign and national public and private agencies can also be behind the process.

This public-private cooperation appears as an important part of nation branding necessary for the campaign's viability. Olins (1999, p.32) included it as the seventh step of nation branding process aimed at the dissemination of national brands among state structures, in trade, industry, media, and the arts. Kaneva (2011b, p. 102) noted that client-service relations between state and non-state actors were an important structural characteristic of early Bulgarian nation branding strategies. According to Jansen (2008, p. 122), in Estonia cooperation between public and private sectors for both sides was a way to pursue commercial interests along with political agendas. However, the state reserved the right to define national identity and served a mediating role in relation to the international public. The state's responsibility to take a leading role in the process, to provide finance, and to represent a nation on the international arena was, once again, in compliance with popular expectations (Kaneva, 2011b; Graan, 2013). So, in principle, cooperation between private and public agents with clear division of responsibilities serves as an effective strategy for the successful implementation of a nation branding strategy.

However, interactions between state and non-state actors are not limited to mutually beneficial cooperation. In Macedonia, this link of nation branding to state power allowed its citizens to hold the authorities accountable for their activities (Graan, 2013, p.176). In contrast to the state project to reconstruct Skopje as a truly European city, members of NGOs formed an opposition to the project, claiming that it will harm Macedonia's authenticity (Graan, 2013, p.176).

This represents an instance of conflict between state and non-state visions of national brand and how it should be projected to the outside world. The importance of non-state actors, in this case, proves that agency of private actors can also define the nature of national brands.

Ideal types of interactions.

This variation in relationship between public and private actors that emerged from the literature also became evident during my research and led to the creation of four ideal types of interactions between state and non-state actors. To be sure, it is difficult to draw clear boundaries between state and non-state actors. State actors can be defined as governments, ministries, and other institutions or agencies that operate under the auspices of the state. In the case of Kazakhstani tourism promotion, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Commission for the Promotion of National and Regional Brands, Tourism Industry Department, and tourism city administrations belong to this group. If the situation with state actors is more or less clear, non-state actors are harder to define, as there is no universal definition of this concept. Definitions of non-state actors vary depending on the context in which the term is used. The United Nation's specialized agencies define a non-state actor as "an entity that operates independently from the government, is not part of any state or public institution" ("Framework of engagement with non state actors", n.d.). In accordance with this definition, "nongovernmental organizations, private sector entities, philanthropic associations and academic institutions" fall under this category ("Framework of engagement with non state actors", n.d.). However, it is not clear how the level of autonomy of non-state actors is measured and the range of institutions that constitute this category is too vague. Thus, this definition cannot be applicable in the case of Kazakhstani nation branding, as the aforementioned entities, independent as they might be, can still be influenced by the Kazakhstani governmental structures. Nevertheless, in practice, this differentiation exists, as actors who are engaged in the process of nation branding make a distinction between state and non-state actors, as well as put themselves in one of the two categories. For instance, tourism associations as well as local and foreign travel agencies can be considered as non-state actors in the sense that they consider themselves as such. In order to determine what the notion of state and non-state actors mean in Kazakhstani context, I will

analyze how actors involved in nation branding distinguish these terms and how such subjective identifications affect their work.

As the image of Kazakhstan is shaped not only by the activities of those actors that are involved, but also by cooperation and conflict between them, it is useful to identify four ideal types of cooperation between state and possible non-state actors. The first one constitutes the situations when cooperation between government and travel agency is limited to the issuing of licenses, visiting permits and visas. In this first ideal type of state and non-state actors' cooperation, the influence of the governmental institutions on the activity of travel agency takes the form of legal regulation. Thus, travel agencies operate under the national law, but pursue their private goals that might coincide or contradict the aims of the government. The development of their activity (the creation of touristic products, informational resources, and touristic projects) is controlled and managed by the owners of these companies.

The second ideal type of cooperation includes mutually beneficial cooperation in the form of public-private partnership. In Kazakhstan it is a widely used form of cooperation between state entities and private sector based on competitive conditions. The aims of such cooperation are “to create conditions for effective cooperation between public and private partners in order to ensure sustainable socio-economic development of the Republic of Kazakhstan; to attract investment in the state economy by combining resources of public and private partners for the development of infrastructure; to improve access to and quality of goods and services; to improve the overall innovation activity of the Republic of Kazakhstan, including the promotion of technologies and high-tech industries” (Law on public private partnership, 2015). In principle, the idea of public-private ownership implies that the government announces a competition for the provision of services and then chooses the most suitable firm among those that have applied. In tourism promotion, the same procedure applies to the development of informational materials about Kazakhstan, holding of exhibitions, design of stands, assistance in production of tourism promotion films, and solution of technical or marketing issues. However, all of the jobs should be performed

in accordance with technical task that is provided by the governmental structure. As a result, state institutions get the services, while private entities - the financial benefit.

The third ideal type of cooperation between state and non-state actors is characterized by a high dependency of non-state actors on governmental structures. This includes not only the issuing of permits, but also the distribution of informational materials produced by governmental structures. In this case, travel agencies operate as tools for the government to promote the country in accordance with governmental projects.

The fourth ideal type of interaction includes situations when the interference of governmental structures puts obstacles to the activity of travel agencies and complicates their work. These cases include encounters with bureaucracy, red tape or corruption that affect the image of the country promoted by the travel agencies and sometimes even ruin their efforts to promote a positive image of Kazakhstan abroad.

It is important to note that the four types of relationship outlined above present ideal types of interactions that emerged out of a more complex system of relations between state and non-state actors. In practice relationship between those two set of actors can fall into several categories of interactions at once. To attribute only one ideal type of interaction to one particular group of actors would limit the extent to which we understand the full scope of their activities, as any nation branding practitioner can be in various types of relationship with the state.

Theoretical concepts and frameworks described in this chapter will be further applied to the case of Kazakhstani nation branding in order to explain the complexity of the international image and to illustrate how cooperation between state and non-state actors influences this image.

Chapter 3

The Complexity of International Image

As was already mentioned, according to Anholt (n.d.) people's perception of a country is shaped by their attitudes towards six areas of national competence. They are "tourism, culture and heritage, people, governance, exports, and investments" (Anholt, n.d., p.186). In the author's point of view, successful nation brand should be developed across all of these fields. In order to draw a full picture of the country it is necessary to know the basic information about all spheres of its development.

Thus, my analysis of touristic web sites, video materials as well as of information provided by tourist agencies showed that even if the information is devoted to one specific group of people – tourists - it is not limited to touristic information. All informational materials have the same structure, providing general knowledge about Kazakhstan including its geography, climate, political structure, economy, culture, and traditions. Despite the fact that all tourism promotion materials share common characteristics, there are also significant differences in the way that Kazakhstan is advertised to foreign tourists. These differences are reinforced by the existence of distinct sets of actors who shape Kazakhstani national brand. They are state structures, Kazakhstani travel agencies, foreign travel agencies, and online guides. As each of these groups tries to address different audiences, they stress different and sometimes conflicting images of the country. The relationship between those actors also affect what set of characteristics is distributed by them.

As can be seen from the diagram (Figure 1), although different actors use general information about Kazakhstan, they highlight particular aspects of the country in their promotional strategies. For instance, governmental structures emphasize political stability and economic openness of the country, while foreign travel agencies put emphasis on real and authentic experiences hidden behind promotional campaigns. As the activity of those actors and the images that they promote are shaped by cooperation among them, there is an overlap in the case of close cooperation.

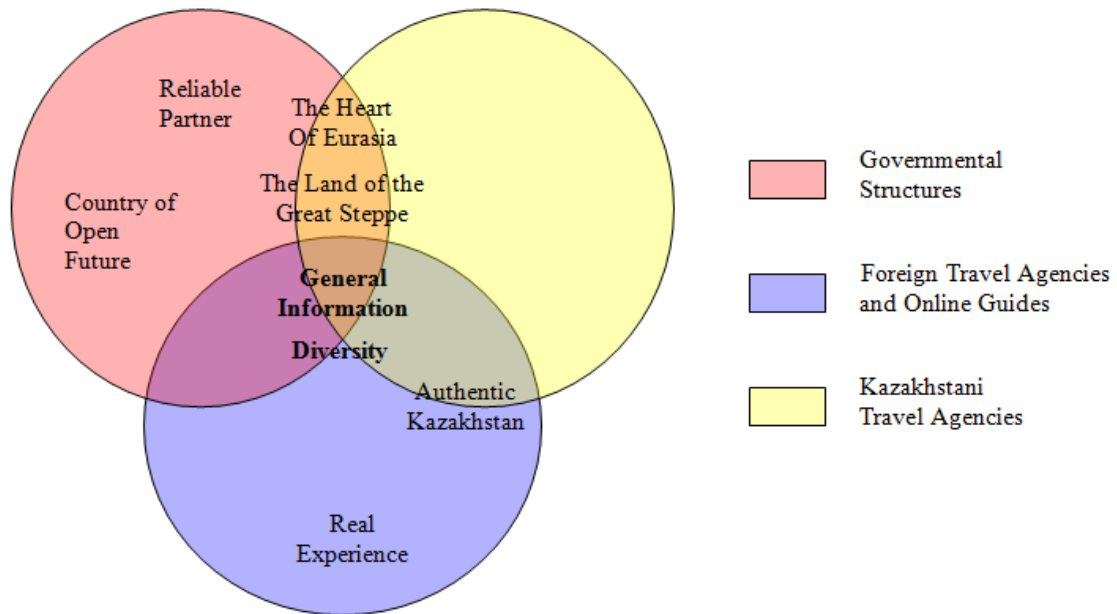


Figure 1. National features and relationships among actors.

For example, Kazakhstani travel agencies work more closely with the government, and that is why they use the same characteristics to describe the country. The image of a country is therefore influenced by the relationship between state and non-state actors in the sense that similar features are produced and reinforced by close cooperation, while weak ties result in the production of competing images.

This chapter presents a detailed discourse analysis of each element of Kazakhstani international brand. Having considered each type of images separately, I identified the most prominent themes which present Kazakhstan as a reliable international partner, a country with open economic opportunities, “heart of Eurasia”, “land of the great steppe”, diverse and authentically unique place. Each subsection examines the meanings of the images produced in nation branding campaigns, their practical application, as well as explores what actors produce these particular narratives and for what purposes.

“The heart of Eurasia”.

Due to its geographic location, Kazakhstan is often portrayed as a land that lies at the crossroads of the world’s most ancient civilizations and trade routes. According to the vast majority of online platforms, Kazakhstan is “the heart of Eurasia” (“serdtse Evrazii”), “bridge between East

and West, North and South” (“most mezhdu vostokom i zapadom, yugom i severom”), the place of social, cultural, economic exchange between major Eurasian nations. These interactions refer to the historical development of the region in a sense that it was a land of “the nomadic Skythian-Saka civilization”, “a powerful state formed by the Huns”, “large Turkic states known as kaganats”, and “the first Kazakh khanate” (<http://edge.kz>). These references to the ancient forms of state entities that existed on the territory of modern Kazakhstan illustrate the history of Kazakh statehood and are used as evidence for the existence of state-like entities prior to the Russian and the Soviet rule. This, in turn, supports the official point of view concerning the theme of Kazakh statehood and shows that tourism promotion is also a way to make a statement.

Tourist informational materials also refer to Kazakhstan and Central Asia as a place of cultural, social, and economic exchanges. References to the Great Silk road and its contribution to the development of science and culture of the region only support this point. In this case, great attention is devoted to prominent figures that were influenced “by the culture of the trade routes” (<http://edge.kz>). That is “Al-Farabi who was dubbed “the second teacher,” after Aristotle”, “the outstanding scholar of Turkic philology, Mahmud Kashgari”, “Yusup Balasaguni, a famous poet and philosopher whose works have played an important role in the development of many modern concepts, including sociology and ethics” (<http://edge.kz>). All of these mentions of famous scientists and poets who contributed to the development of cultural heritage and scientific thought of the region illustrate that the land which is now Kazakhstan was able to produce such talented individuals, it has a rich history and a “unique and authentic culture” which is influential and meaningful to the world (<http://edge.kz>). At the same time, it shows that nation building and nation branding, in the form of tourism promotion, are interconnected in the sense that the same strategies of stressing cultural heritage are used to attract tourists and instill a sense of patriotism in citizens.

The notion of *the crossroads of civilizations (na styke tsivilizatsij)* also illustrates that Kazakhstan has more than just the vast steppes and nomadic tribes, it combines “eastern peacefulness” with “western luxury” and at the same time represents its harmonious coexistence (<http://www.centralasia-travel.com>). It is curious that this East-West division, as well as the

stereotypic thinking behind this combination of words was used in order to overcome another stereotype, nomadic lifestyle. In this case, “eastern peacefulness” is connected with the country’s belonging to the Central Asian region which, in its turn, is associated with the Orient:

Spicy aroma of saffron, captivating dances of Asian beauties, fabulous interweaving of colors and tenderness of national khan-atlas, stargazing from the tops of oriental minarets and sweet afternoon sleep under endless wise songs of akyns ([http:// www.centralasia-travel.com](http://www.centralasia-travel.com)).

Exotic spices, national dances, handiwork, oriental architecture, slow and relaxed lifestyle are the most commonly used stereotypes associated with the Eastern world. “Western luxury” is, in its turn, described by “the gloss of capital cities” and “developed business centers that are not much different from the same center in a developed European country” ([http:// www.centralasia-travel.com](http://www.centralasia-travel.com)). Big cities, developed infrastructure, business and trade again are used to describe the Western, in this case, European country, which is modern and developed.

This might take us back to Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* and the debate over whether this framework might apply to the Central Asian region. From this point of view, the so called Orient world was associated with a slow pace of life, idle lifestyle and backwardness, while rapid development and modernization were characteristic traits of the Western civilization. However, the fact that this image was constructed by representatives of another, Western civilisation makes this explanation less reasonable as here representatives of the Central Asian region use the same concepts to describe their own way of life. Taking this into account, it is worth saying that in this case, tourism promoters engage in self-orientalisation or self-exoticism in order to strengthen the sense of belonging to the Central Asian region. In fact, it is a common strategy of self-representation for the vast majority of post-communist countries (Iordanova, 2007; Baker, 2008; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011). As cultural entrepreneurs in Romania that attempted to internalize the character of Dracula (Iordanova, 2007) or in Bulgaria that considers itself an internal *Other* of the European continent (Kaneva, 2011b; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011), Kazakhstani nation branders based branding narratives on already existing stereotypes and, by doing so, internalized them. By using such short clichés typical for both Asian and European parts of the continent, this website thus tried

to show Kazakhstan's belonging to those two groups in order to provide exotic and at the same time familiar image that will comply with the "tourist gaze" (Urry, 2001, p.2), in other words meets tourists' expectations.

As a result of self-exoticism, two contradictory narratives emerge. On the one hand, the nation branding discourse refers to modernity and economic development in order to overcome the stereotype of backwardness. On the other hand, it embraces those stereotypic characteristics of the East to emphasize its cultural and historic roots. As a result, we have a country that harmoniously combines Asian and European traits, which emphasizes its uniqueness. This is another feature of nation branding typical for countries in transition. By incorporating stereotypes in branding narratives they seek to illustrate the "authentic substance" (Kiossev, 2002, p.6) of the nation. At the same time, they juxtapose this authenticity with contemporary and modern (read Western) values that the aforementioned nation tries to achieve. As a result, those self-representations include two completely different and competing concepts "westernization" and "nativism" (Kiossev, 2002, p.6). This ambiguity of Kazakhstan's belonging to Eastern and Western civilizations at the same time portrays the country as a so called "golden mean", a land in-between that is able to find something in common with every country. However, it also reveals the transitional nature of the country and creates the impression that it is balancing between Asia and Europe than presenting a stable bridge between East and West (Cummings, 2006, p. 152).

"The land of the great steppe".

Apart from being a land between Europe and Asia, Kazakhstan is illustrated as "the land of the great steppe" (Kazakhstan- the Land of the Great Steppe, 2015). A lot of videos and websites refer to the country as "the treasure of the Great Steppe", "the spirit of the Great Steppe", while its people are described as "sons of the steppe" (<http://visitkazakhstan.kz/>; <http://www.kazakhstanlive.com>; <http://www.edgekz.com/>). In the vast majority of cases, stress is put on the role and meaning of the steppe in Kazakh history. In this sense, attachment to a place or a landscape involves some form of identification and serves as a cultural instrument that is used in order to create an image and understanding of themselves (Marsh et al., 2007, p.19). National

histories, as a major part of national identities, are intimately bound up with physical spaces in which they exist (Low, 1992, p. 166). Here the steppe, as a geographical landscape, is another indicator of belonging. In such a way, Kazakhstan is genealogically linked to the steppe land through its history which unfolded in this territory. Thus, the steppe is a place which bears historical and national value as a motherland and witness of the country's development. As the steppe as a geographical space is of great importance to Kazakhstani national identity, and nation branding is based on the promotion of national identity on the international level, it seems effective to use it as an element of Kazakhstan's brand image in tourism promotion.

One's identification with a place also implies possession of particular traits that are associated with the physical environment. The adjectives that are used in combination with the steppe (great, vast, boundless, open, treasure) are also used to describe the country and illustrate its value. In the case of Kazakhstan, it refers not only to the territory of the country, but also to its potential.

The mention of kin ties with the land refers to the nature of human interactions with the physical space. The word combination "sons of the steppe" (<http://www.edgekz.com/>) reveals close and harmonious relationship between people and their surrounding environment. This supports another theme that is evident in the promotional materials, that is the respectful attitude of Kazakh people to the nature and life in harmony with nature. Peaceful coexistence with the environment also implies friendly relationship with neighbors, which is also promoted by Kazakhstan on the international level.

"The Land of the Great Steppe" is also a new brand that was suggested by President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2015 during the celebration of the 550th anniversary of the Kazakh khanate:

We need to come up with some brand of Kazakhstan. I began to think about the question: for example, Japan is called the Land of the Rising Sun, Korea - the Country of Morning Freshness, Netherlands – the Country of Tulips, China – the Celestial Empire. We are the country of the Great Steppe. Great Steppe, the eternal blue sky, our ancestors lived here. Tengri - the sky. The colour of our flag was generated from the light, the greenery of the Great Steppe and blue sky. We are the children of the Great Steppe ("U Kazakhstan", 2015, para.5).

The mention of Tengri, the god of heaven, in the President's speech and its association with Kazakhstan is also curious. First of all, it also supports the idea of a harmonious relationship between people and nature, powers and spirits of which were equated to gods and were respected in the same manner. Secondly, it refers to the pre-Islamic religious traditions typical for the people who inhabited the territory of modern Kazakhstan. As Islamization of population as well as the spread of radical Islam cause public concern, such a statement helps to distance Kazakhstan from the common misconceptions and stereotypes that link Islam to terrorist organizations.

In March 2016, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched the new project "Kazakhstan- the Land of the Great Steppe". Although, it was commissioned by the MFA, the application was created by the Romanian company SA SIVECO, which develops software and consultancy projects for countries in the EU, the Middle East, North Africa, and the CIS (<http://www.siveco.ro>). It is a mobile and PC application in the form of a digital encyclopedia. It contains information on the geography, history, culture, society, state, economy, international relations, and tourism of the country. Textual materials are supported by photos, videos and other visual and audio materials produced by prominent photographers, musicians, and artists. The application is available in Kazakh, Russian, and English. It is supposed to assist foreigners who plan to visit Kazakhstan, as well as tourists, students, researchers, journalists, and businessmen.

At the moment of writing, on March 24th, 2017 one thousand downloads and two positive reviews say little about its effectiveness. Apart from timing the brand to the anniversary of Kazakh statehood, it is also an opportunity for the government to present a new brand in light of the upcoming EXPO-2017, which in itself is a major nation branding campaign.

Kazakhstan as a country of open future.

This section is devoted to the analysis of promotional materials that describe Kazakhstan as country of economic opportunities. In the vast majority of cases such messages are contained in informational materials that were commissioned by Kazakhstani state structures. Some of them mention Kazakhstan's economic potential briefly as part of the touristic message, while others are solely devoted to the promotion of the country's economic possibilities. The fact that all of the

videos are in English and there is no Russian or Kazakh versions of the advertisements show that these video recordings are produced for international consumption.

Here the focus is made on Kazakhstan's economic and investment potential. Some of the videos describe Kazakhstan as the largest Central Asian economy, a major player on the global energy market, experiencing a positive growth. Some of the materials briefly mention the rich natural resources and industry potential of the country, while others focus solely on this issue. Such video materials tend to be directed primarily at businessmen, foreign investors or business tourists. This is clearly visible on the example of *Kazakhstan- The Heart of Eurasia* program directed by "US-Television". US-Television is "an independent television production company" which focuses on economic profiles of different countries, providing comments of "the most competent and trustworthy professionals" on a country's economic and investment opportunities (http://www.us-television.tv/ustv_programs). It is curious that the list of client-states mostly includes newly emerging economies of the Middle East, Eastern Europe, South America, South East and Central Asia. Although there is no information on its relations with clients' governments, it is evident that those videos were commissioned by countries' authorities in order to raise its economic profile and investment. According to the aforementioned video, Kazakhstan is a modern and developing country that combines perfect conditions for business and leisure and has a favorable investment climate (US-Television, 2015). Kazakhstan's high economic profile is justified by its mineral resources:

We currently have about a billion tons of oil reserves, 4 billion cubic metres of gas reserves. By the amount of oil it puts us in the twentieth place in the world. With regards to gas reserves, we are in the top twenty (US-Television, 2015).

Except for statistics, such videos use visual images to support the idea of Kazakhstan as a developed economy. For instance, images of mineral deposits, power plants, factories, big cities, business, and trade centers are the most widespread. The industrial sites and cities that these videos portray exemplify the use of simplified, generalized signs that are associated with development and modernization for the construction of the country's image.

The video states that “although Kazakhstan is the most advanced of the –stans, there are also improvements to be addressed in its tourism services including a disconnect between the nation’s prices and service” (US-Television, 2015). On the one hand, it hints on the room for further development that might be used as an opportunity to invest in new touristic projects. On the other hand, this method illustrates that the image depicted in this material is real and does not focus only on the advantages of the country’s economic profile. In this case, the link between tourism promotion as part of nation branding and international trade is visible.

The slogan “Kazakhstan- The Future is Wide Open”, which is often used in a number of video materials, presents Kazakhstan as “a land of open horizons and opportunities, open to innovations, open to progress and open for business” (Braun Film and Video Inc., 2013). This slogan appears in a number of commercials filmed by Braun Film and Video Inc., an American company based in Washington DC which specialises in commercial and non-profit videos, clients of which also include American, Kazakhstani, and Georgian governmental agencies (<http://www.braunfilm.com/about/>). The focus in these videos is once again on the openness of the country, its willingness and readiness to cooperate with the outside world. Openness of the country is expressed through “open hearts” and “open minds” (Braun Film and Video Inc., 2013) of its citizens, and the variety of possibilities for political and economic development. The emphasis on the future is of particular importance as it demonstrates that Kazakhstan is on its way towards further modernization and economic progress.

Kazakhstan as a reliable partner.

The next feature of Kazakhstan that is often mentioned in tourist brochures developed by governmental structures is the country’s reliability. A separate section of every leaflet is devoted to the internal situation in the country, its foreign policy, and its contribution to world peace and security. Modern Kazakhstan appears as a leader in the Central Asian region, a democratic country that supports human rights and freedoms, civil society, and independent media. The word “democratic” here plays a special role, because the country develops its image in order to appear as a reliable partner and a modern democratic state (Saunders, 2008, p. 73; Stock, 2009, p. 185), and

thus, be accepted by international and predominantly Western community. At the same time, the democratic nature of political system is another feature that brings the country closer to the Western civilization.

Moreover, several videos appeal to Kazakhstan's history of Soviet nuclear testing presenting the country as a responsible international actor that aims to unite the world under the idea of peace, tolerance, and world security by launching non-proliferation and anti-nuclear projects (Intellectual club, n.d.; Braun Film and Video Inc., 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; This is America and the World, 2014). This helps to create a favorable international image of Kazakhstan as a country that participates in world peace and wellbeing programs. It is not surprising that the founder of the nation brand concept Simon Anholt created a *Good Country Index*, depicting how each country contributes to the common good of humanity. Kazakhstan is now in the 120th place out of 163, being at the same time 26th of those who try to improve the situation with nuclear weapons and 40th in terms of contributing to the world health and wellbeing (The Good Country Index, 2016).

Kazakhstan means diversity.

Another element of Kazakhstani international image is diversity. Diversity is represented in every sphere of national competence starting from a diversified economy through diverse tourist attractions to diversity in Kazakhstani nature, landscapes, and architecture. However, various actors attach different meanings to it. According to the state's discourse, the main meaning of diversity is expressed in Kazakhstani people, their ethnic and religious composition. Every promotional video or tourist brochure mentions that "Kazakhstan is forever home" for 130 ethnic groups who live in peace and harmony (Video encyclopedia of Kazakhstan, 2007). The information provided by "Kazakhstan- the Land of the Great Steppe" application states:

Maintaining interethnic harmony and tolerance has been Kazakhstan's hallmark in the world community. Mutual respect of the culture, language and traditions of other ethnicities is one of the fundamental principles of coexistence in the multicultural state. (Kazakhstan- the Land of the Great Steppe, 2015).

Ethnicity, in this case, is portrayed from an essentialist point of view, as something that is inherent and is expressed in one's physical appearance. At the same time, one's identification with a particular ethnic group is associated with possession of a particular set of symbolic instruments typical for this ethnicity, such as language, culture, and traditions (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Children in national costumes.
(Retrieved from “Kazakhstan- the Land of the Great Steppe”, 2015)

As illustrated above, on the vast majority of touristic brochures, websites, and applications, ethnic diversity is illustrated by photos of a group of people wearing different traditional clothes, dancing traditional dances, or practicing their traditional rituals (Figure 2). In this case, the image of *the yurt*, the traditional Kazakh dwelling, and *the shanyrak* in particular symbolizes the country, Kazakhstan, that united all those ethnic groups in one nation. Tolerance, hospitality and generosity of people are Kazakhstani phenomena. In addition, despite the difference in ethnic origin, tourism promotion materials suggest that all people have equal opportunities for their own development.

Another type of diversity that is being portrayed in nation branding campaigns pursued by governmental structures is religious diversity. Kazakhstan is portrayed as a country where religious freedom is of great importance, “a place where people are free and not afraid to follow any particular confession” (Religion in Kazakhstan, n.d.). Religion is viewed as another factor contributing to the harmonious coexistence of various ethnic groups and representatives of religious denominations, as it “opens up the minds and hearts of people to other cultures and religions”

(Religion in Kazakhstan, n.d.). Belonging to any particular religion is also illustrated, as in the case of ethnicity, through symbolic attributes and practical rituals, such as *namaz* for Muslims, icons typical for Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, reading of the Talmud for Judaists (Figures 3-6). In this way, peaceful coexistence of different religions is portrayed through the visual images of different types of religious architecture, be it mosques, churches, synagogues, or a Buddhist monastery.

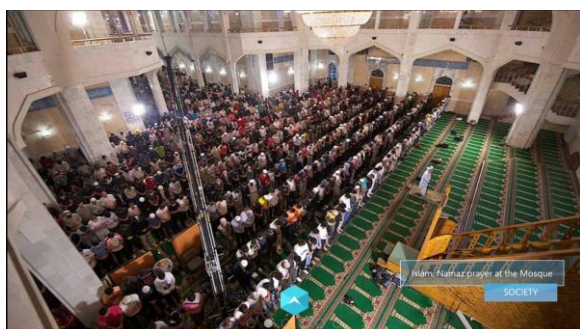


Figure 3. Islam. Namaz prayer at the Mosque.



Figure 4. Catholicism. Baptism Ceremony.



Figure 5. Orthodoxy. The celebration of mass.
(Retrieved from “Kazakhstan- the Land of the Great Steppe”, 2015)



Figure 6. Judaism

Firstly, the stress on diversity is made in order to present the country as peaceful and safe. Secondly, multiethnic composition of the country is one of the distinctive features of Kazakhstan. It seems effective to highlight those characteristics that make a country unique and distinguishes it from others. Thirdly, this message might have broader meaning and be intended for the international community as a whole as it helps to decrease the level of international pressure on the Kazakhstani government (Contessi, 2015; Cooley, 2012) and to gain international recognition and approval of its policy (Cooley, 2012; Anceschi, 2014).

Although the meaning of diversity promoted by the government is supported by travel agencies which also highlight the diverse ethnic and religious composition of the Kazakhstani population, some of the travel agencies attach additional meanings to the term. Diversity of the Kazakhstani population in images promoted by travel agencies also includes differences in social class. As was noted by the owner of a foreign travel guide, cooperation with “people from all walks of life” (Editor of a foreign travel guide, email communication, October 10, 2016) provides better acquaintance with the country. In comparison to state institutions, travel agencies also express diversity in terms of its nature and landscapes, stating that the territory of the country combines several natural areas ranging from deserts and steppes to forests and mountain areas. Another meaning of diversity applies to architecture of the country and described above co-existence of modern and traditional lifestyles:

The diversity of the country in Kazakhstan is especially interesting. From fashionable cities to the vast steppes, alpine mountains, lonesome deserts and historic sights there is so much to see. All in one country (Founder of an online tourist network, email communication, Switzerland, October 14, 2016).

Authentic and real Kazakhstan.

Another feature of the country that is being promoted is its uniqueness and authenticity. Efforts to promote Kazakhstan by Kazakhstani travel agencies are aimed at the creation of a unique product that is typical only for Kazakhstan. In this case, they stress the unique features of the country that will make it stand out among other countries.

We put emphasis on the fact that we can offer an exclusive product, which is characteristic only of Kazakhstan. Thus, we stress the ethnic component. It is necessary to emphasize our own native features. We should not be ashamed of our roots. On the contrary, we need to be proud of them. To explore them (Manager of Department of Tourism, personal communication, Almaty, July 4, 2016).

As is clear from the quotation above, one of the ways to attract foreign tourists to Kazakhstan is to stress the native Kazakh culture with elements of national clothes, cuisine, and handiwork. In some cases, domestic travel agencies organize tours to the so called “ethno auls” with yurts, examples of traditional households, and people in national clothes. All of these elements are identified as authentically Kazakh. This notion of authenticity coincides with the definition

developed by Tiberghien et al (2013). Analyzing the ecotourism sites in Central Kazakhstan, the authors defined authentic experience as “staying in guesthouses, sharing “nomadic lifestyle” and interacting with local population” (Tiberghien et al., 2013, p.38). On the one hand, this strategy allows to demonstrate “present-day practices” (Wallace and Russel, 2004, p. 235). On the other hand, sometimes those practices are “created, staged and carried out for external consumption” (Tiberghien et al., 2013, p. 36) by stakeholders, tourism operators, and locals. At the same time, one of the interviewees expressed concern about the accuracy of this “authentic experience” and partial loss of national characteristics:

Well, in real life we do not wear those national clothes, do we? The vast majority of population does not live in yurts anymore. Even right now we are having this conversation in Russian, not Kazakh. This indicates that we are somehow losing our native features. We are using them to present our country, but do not live up to them in real life (Director of a travel agency, personal communication, Almaty, July 7, 2016).

It becomes clear that as Kazakhstani travel agencies closely cooperate with the governmental structures responsible for tourism promotion, they adopt the same understanding of authenticity connected with Kazakh traditions and culture. However, as it is seen above, this notion of authenticity belongs to “performed authenticity” (Tiberghien et al, 2013, p.31) and adds another dimension to the international image of the country.

In comparison to Kazakhstani government and travel agencies, foreign travel agencies and online travel guides connect “authenticity” with “real life” experience. Special attention is devoted to the visits to rural areas and communication with locals in order to witness the “real” mode of life. It is interesting that the stress is on rural life and ecotourism, in contrast to the government’s attempt to illustrate the country as modern. Focus on these kinds of tourism allows to get individual and authentic experience, to see the country from the inside, behind grandiose promotional campaigns. The authenticity that foreign travel agencies and guides try to show in some sense coincides with Tiberghien et al’s (2013) concepts of real and constructed day-to-day practices, but also is defined as individual “unscripted” experience:

Nowadays lots of tourists seek for a real travel experience like meet local people, try authentic food and live like they were one of them. For example if a customer

wants to meet a real Kazakh family and live with them for a few days this would be possible with our local guides (Founder of an online tourist network, email communication, Switzerland, October 14, 2016).

What I personally mean by that is an experience that is unscripted and unsentimental. By unsentimental I mean that I don't want to scrub out the negative bits: some things suck in Central Asia, and travelers should experience that as well, they should not be served a sanitized dream world. By unscripted I mean that I hope this leads to real encounters between locals and travelers that go beyond the usual chitchat, where people actually make an effort to understand each others point of view (Editor of an online travel guide, email communication, Belgium, October 11, 2016)

Emphasis on authentic experience is justified by two main reasons. First of all, foreign travel agencies and travel guides seek to assist individual tourists. In comparison to the local travel agencies, the foreign ones are not aimed at mass tourism. Secondly, for foreign travel agencies, tourist activity is also a form of social entrepreneurship. By visiting distant areas and cooperating with local providers, travel agents make sure that money goes to those who need them the most, as locals who are engaged in mass tourism are not profiting as much as the tour operators that are organizing "authentic" tours (Wallace and Russel, 2004, p. 237). So, the image of Kazakhstan that is promoted by foreign private actors and strategies that they imply differ from the Kazakhstani government's agenda.

In sum, it is clear that Kazakhstan's international image is a sum of various elements representing different spheres of the country's activity. The nation brand consists of different descriptions of the political situation within the country, its economic development, geographical location, and its cultural and historic background in order to build a broad national image that will depict all the strong features of the country. At the same time, a deeper contextual analysis of the information presented in official and private tourist websites and visual materials reveals that information provided there has additional implications. In the Kazakhstani case, the image of the country that is promoted by the government as part of the nation branding is closely interconnected with the country's public diplomacy and nation building. This also illustrates that tourism promotion is not reduced only to the attraction of foreign tourists in the country; it is also used as a

method to make a statement about the country's self-perception on both domestic and international levels. At the same time, cooperation between governmental structures and travel agencies, both Kazakhstani and foreign, shapes the content of the image, either reinforcing similar features in the case of close cooperation, or adding additional implications to the same notions in terms of rare interactions. This can be clearly seen on the example of domestic and foreign travel agencies and their efforts to promote diversity of the country. While the former stress ethnic and religious composition of the population in line with the state's images, the later also emphasise social stratification which is not included in official representations. In this way, nation branders' attempts at combining all of those approaches and at developing a coherent national image can also explain the complexity of the image.

Chapter 4

Interactions between State and Non-State Actors: Cooperation, Conflict, and Implications for Tourism Promotion

This chapter identifies the range of state and non-state actors engaged in Kazakhstani nation branding and explores the relationships between them. In addition, it distinguishes between domestic and foreign non-state actors, as well as measures their level of interdependence with Kazakhstani state institutions. My primary goal in this section is to illustrate whether actors engaged in Kazakhstani nation branding identify themselves as nation branding practitioners and how they perceive their role in the process. Moreover, this chapter explores how public and private actors involved in tourism promotion understand notions of state and non-state actors, and how cooperation and conflict between these two sets of actors determines the outcome of Kazakhstani promotion campaigns.

State institutions.

As nation branding is concerned with the promotion of national identity, state structures play a prominent role in this process. Based on their professional experience and specialization in different spheres of national competence, government ministries and other state institutions form separate elements of the image that together constitute the national brand. In addition, through interactions within public and with private sectors they act as communicators of this national brand to domestic and international audiences. In the case of Kazakhstani nation branding and tourism promotion, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Tourism Industry Department, and the Commission on Development and Promotion of National and Regional Brands are the most prominent state actors.

Literature on Kazakhstani nation branding often points to the activity of the Committee for International Information as a body regulating the international image of the country (Saunders 2007, 2008; Fullerton et al, 2008; Stock, 2009). It is a structural department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which is primarily aimed at the promotion of Kazakhstan's foreign policy. The audience of such promotional campaigns is foreign political establishment, international political

figures, and the population of foreign countries (as far as public diplomacy is concerned). Prior to 2015 the Committee was the main body developing and monitoring the promotion of Kazakhstan's international image. In October 2015, the Commission on the Development and Promotion of National and Regional Brands was formed. It is an advisory body to the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and consists of ministers, heads of regional administrations, and representatives of state structures dealing with central communications (Decree on the Commission on the Development and Promotion of National and Regional Brands, 2015). The main aim of the Commission is to develop suggestions on the promotion of the national and regional brands of Kazakhstan by coordinating the decisions among different state institutions including the government and the ministries. Still the main working body that is responsible for the implementation of these recommendations remains the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Decree on the Commission on the Development and Promotion of National and Regional Brands, 2015). The Tourism Industry Department is another institution the main goal of which is to present Kazakhstan and especially its touristic opportunities on the international level. It is one of the subdivisions of the Ministry for Investment and Development that was founded in 2014 by restructuring the Committee of Tourism. In accordance with governmental Decree "On the departments of the central executive bodies of the Republic of Kazakhstan", control over tourism sphere was transferred from the Committee of Tourism to the newly established Department of Tourism Industry within the Ministry for Investment and Development in order to increase the efficiency of public institutions (Decree on the departments of the central executive bodies of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2014).

Regulatory function.

All of these state institutions, first of all, perform regulatory functions. They monitor the activities that belong to their sphere of responsibilities and their compliance with the state legislation. In addition, they are responsible for the development and further implementation of strategic programs and development concepts. For instance, the Tourism Industry Department has the Concept of the Development of the Tourist Sphere, which provides evaluation of current state

of tourism industry and recommendations for its improvement (Concept of the Development of the Tourist Sphere, 2014). The Commission on National and Regional Brands along with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for the development of future nation branding strategy that will be defined at the end of the competition on determination of national brand (The Decree on the Commission on the Development and Promotion of National and Regional Brands, 2015). State structures therefore control professional activity of non-state actors and coordinate the implementation of governmental programs by both sets of actors. This form of interaction between state and non-state actors thus falls under the category of legal regulation.

State institutions as mediators.

State institutions that are engaged in nation branding and tourism promotion also play a mediatory role. First of all, they act as mediators between Kazakhstani travel agencies and foreign tourist boards, embassies, and foreign travel agencies. The Tourism Industry Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organize road shows and local and international tourism exhibitions in order to present Kazakhstan on the international arena. By doing so they provide Kazakhstani travel agencies with the opportunity to establish professional contacts with representatives of foreign tourist industry, as well as present their offers to foreign tourists. Secondly, state structures function as channels through which tourist associations and travel agencies can address other state institutions. According to representative of a travel agency that is based in Astana and focuses on government sponsored inbound group tourism:

The Tourism Industry department helps us in everything, especially if we have problems with the state. We have had a couple of problems, for instance with the MFA. We hosted our first touristic groups, and everything was spontaneous, fast and unregulated. The first group of tourists, about 300 people, needed to prepare the documents. To open a visa, you need 14 days, but they did not have enough time. So, the department negotiated with the MFA, the MFA negotiated with the embassy, and they made some concessions as an exception. Overall, it took five days to prepare all the documents (Head of the department of inbound tourism, personal communication, Astana, October 10, 2016).

This shows that some state institutions act as mediators not only between Kazakhstani travel agencies and foreign tourism boards, but also between travel agencies and other state structures.

Moreover, state actors view themselves as tools of communication between Kazakhstani population and foreign audiences. For example, according to a representative of the Committee for International Information, the Committee is not an active developer of the national brand, but an instrument for its further promotion and a communicator of a nation brand that should be chosen by the Kazakhstani population:

We are not forming the brand. Just because we are working with international audiences, it does not mean that we know how to create a brand. Kazakhstani brand should be created through the collective work of Kazakhstani citizens and all state structures. We, as the ministry, are the channel for broadcasting it on international informational platforms (Deputy Chairman of the Committee of International Information, personal communication, Astana, October 1, 2016).

This suggests that although the Committee recognizes the role of other state institutions in developing the Kazakhstani international image, it defines itself as well as other state bodies as tools for the promotion of a national brand abroad. According to the representative of the Committee, the nation brand should coincide with how citizens define their country. People should decide what the nation brand should look like. State institutions, in this case, play a mediatory role, expressing people's ideas about the country they live in.

Public involvement in nation brand design.

The idea of involving Kazakhstani citizens and even foreign nationals in designing the nation brand is taken seriously by other state actors, too. The Ministry of information and communication announced a competition for Kazakhstan's national brand on 31 August 2016 (Competition on determination of the "National Brand of the Republic of Kazakhstan", 2016). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not play a major role in the organization of the competition at this stage. All administrative and organizational issues fall within the competence of the Ministry of information and communication. After the winner of the competition is announced, the MFA will be responsible for the development and implementation of further strategy in accordance with the winner's concept. The contest takes the form of an open tender to identify the most appropriate national brand. It consists of two stages. First, everyone willing to participate should submit an application consisting of a logo, a slogan, and a concept behind it. The top five candidates, selected

by internet voting, will proceed to the second step, which is the presentation of their concepts to a board of experts consisting of prominent figures, representatives of cultural intelligentsia and government officials. These arrangements create possibilities for people to express their wishes either by participating or by voting for the most suitable national brand. It is interesting that there are no restrictions as to who can participate in the competition: individuals and legal entities, as well as Kazakhstani and foreign citizens are allowed to take part. According to an MFA representative:

Concerning the absence of limitations on citizenship, it is a thoughtful step. Well, first of all, there might be Kazakhs who migrated to another country, took different citizenship, but that does not mean that their feelings towards Kazakhstan have changed. They might still care about the future of the country and want to take part in its development. In addition, it is another indicator showing the level of interest towards Kazakhstan. If there are hundreds of applications from citizens of other countries, it will show how Kazakhstan is perceived abroad (Deputy Chairman of the Committee of International Information, personal communication, Astana, October 1, 2016).

The involvement of the public in designing the Kazakhstani nation brand could help to maintain the image of a democratic state that is widely promoted on the international arena. However, in February, 2017 the competition was declared invalid, because submitted drafts of national brand did not meet the requirements (“Results of tender to select national brand”, 2017). According to an official statement, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry for Information and Communication will carry out the process of national brand development (“Results of tender to select national brand”, 2017). The state thus retained control over the process of image-making.

Importance of public-private partnership.

The first law “On Concessions” regulating the sphere of public-private partnership was adopted in 1991 and provided a legislative basis for cooperation between the state and foreign investors (Law on concessions, 1991). Due to the economic crisis and budget shortages the state encouraged private investment in development projects. However, the law regulating partnership between Kazakhstani public and private partners appeared only in 2006. Nevertheless, inflexible conditions of cooperation, red tape and time-consuming process of concession granting made this

type of cooperation less appealing (Chikanaev, 2015, p.10). In 2015 the law “On Public-Private Partnership” gave a new impetus to the development of public-private cooperation. It expanded the scope of cooperation and the number of potential partners. Although education, healthcare, transport, and electric power industry are considered as priority sectors, according to the new law, public-private partnership could be implemented in every sphere of the economy, and tourism is no exception (Law “On Public-Private Partnership”, 2015).

In their efforts to promote Kazakhstan abroad, state institutions heavily rely on cooperation with private companies. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Tourism Industry Department developed several video materials in collaboration with foreign companies on Kazakhstani foreign policy, as well as on the country’s economic and touristic potential. For instance, an American company “Braun Video and Film” produced several videos dedicated to Kazakhstan’s candidacy to the United Nations Security Council at the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, the strategic document that the Tourism Industry Department uses is a result of public-private partnership, as it was developed by the Kazakhstan Industry Development Institute (KIDI) in accordance with the technical task and information provided by the Department.

The concept was developed by the KIDI, and they work with consulting companies. You understand that in such matters marketing or consulting companies that have international experience are usually involved. We provided them with our data, they conducted research. According to this document, we can see how the development of tourism industry will go. It contains recommendations and suggestions. This is as a consulting company, based on international experience, sees how tourism in Kazakhstan can be developed. Then, we act based on these suggestions and recommendations (Head of the Department on Promotion of National Touristic Product, personal communication, Astana, July 12, 2016).

It is clear that the research institute is not the only actor involved in the development of the strategy, as it also employs consulting and marketing experts. Other examples are development of websites, brochures, maps or organization of tourist exhibitions. Therefore, cooperation between the actors once again takes the form of a public-private partnership, but in this case not only with travel agencies, but also with other companies specializing in informational infrastructure. As state institutions perform several functions, they prefer to cooperate with private companies in order to

balance their responsibilities. Public-private partnerships are a prominent example of the relationship between state and non-state actors that seriously influences the activity of both sides.

Concerns of state actors.

State actors recognize that there are problems that complicate their activity. But when they identify these problems, they refer to the state (*gosudarstvo*) in general, without naming specific institutions. The main problem identified by a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the absence of a unified informational network that could tie all foreign missions abroad in one system and allow them to provide uniform information about the country independently of their location.

At this moment all embassies have their own contractors, who develop their websites. Information posted online is a purely subjective choice of the ambassadors or employees who work in press departments. We are planning on developing unified websites for all embassies and a unified database for all Kazakhstani missions abroad and Kazakhstani ministries, where they will post information about their activity. Each embassy will thus have access to similar information (Deputy Chairman of the Committee of International Information, personal communication, Astana, October 1, 2016).

An employee of the Tourism Industry Department mentioned the same set of problems concerning the lack of infrastructure and skilled professionals trained in touristic sphere, as well as lack of prior experience in tourism development.

Yes, we do have weak sides. We have weaknesses in infrastructure, problems with roads, with airports. There are a lot of problems, but they are solvable. They are solved gradually. The government tries to gradually help, to develop tourism. The tourism field is not heavy industry, you know. Kazakhstan puts emphasis on heavy industry and raw materials, but now we have all experienced what life without oil is like (Head of the Department on Promotion of National Touristic Product, personal communication, Astana, July 12, 2016).

Besides the state's focus on the extraction of resources and lack of experience in the development of the service sector, constant restructuring of the institution from the ministry through committee and to the department is another reason for its ineffectiveness. As was noted by Melissen (2011, p.15), constant changes of administrative boards and advisory committees make it harder to implement a strategy in practice, as different heads of the administration might have different visions of how it should be.

Problems identified by non-state actors.

One of the most common complaints from the side of travel agencies and tourist associations is the inability or unwillingness of state structures to prioritise most burning questions relating to the development of tourism. This ignorance is expressed by the fact that financial support is insufficient or completely missing. Employees of travel agencies and tourist associations also complain that important projects are postponed, particularly because bureaucratic procedures delay their implementation. The burning questions identified by non-state actors include roadside infrastructure, informational database, and the restoration of historical places. For instance, as the representative of tourist association notes, the amount of money allocated by the state is enough for starters but does not help to develop the project further.

The state started to allocate some funds, but again, in my opinion, the result is poor. It could be much better if the allocated resources were distributed properly. We always talk about that, but who hears us? It is very difficult for those who are above us to hear what we have to say. They spend money on advertising and PR. PR is also necessary, but there are more important issues. It is necessary to develop the market, it is necessary to create a tour product; this tour product should be subsidized. Once it is developed, you can leave, because it will sustain itself. And now you are lucky to even get a little amount of money (Coordinator of Kazakhstan Tourist Association's information center, personal communication, Almaty, July 4, 2016).

The reason for problems is not only the uneven distribution of resources identified by the representative of a touristic association quoted above, but also corruption that is inherent in some state institutions. In this case, it is curious that it is not the particular state structures that are blamed for corruption, but particular group of people, "*krutiki*" (*cool/rich ones*), who might have some political influence. Representatives of both travel agencies and Kazakhstan's tourist association acknowledged this fact:

For instance, some of the associations were built just because some people could not get the influence they wanted. As a mean to attain higher social status. That's how they tried to live comfortably, in big offices, with huge salaries. I am not saying this as a pure critique, I am telling this to you as a researcher (Coordinator of Kazakhstan Tourist Association's information center, personal communication, Almaty, July 4, 2016).

In Uzbekistan all of the historical monuments are in a good shape. Well done, they renovated each famous site. We had the remains of the Silk Road near Medeo.

Now there are houses there, you know. Just because *krutiki* wanted to live there (Director of a travel agency, personal communication, Almaty, July 7, 2016).

This situation, revealed by the owner of a travel agency and the tourist association representative, shows that conflict between private and public spheres exists not only in a formal dimension, but in informal contexts. At the same time, it is hard to define the affiliation of those rich and influential people, whose activities create obstacles to the promotion of tourism. However, their connection with the authorities, on which the interviewee hinted, becomes evident. The respondents thus indicated two types of corruption that they faced in tourism sphere: when people in power manipulate situation to their advantage in order to sustain their authority or to acquire desirable material resources. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that travel agencies' encounters with corruption might present single cases and in order to make broader conclusions on the state of corruption in tourism sphere more thorough research is needed. Still this information is important, because it presents through what lenses these particular non-state actors see their cooperation with the state.

It is clear that in comparison to state actors non-state ones see more problems in their cooperation with state institutions that complicate the promotion of Kazakhstani international image, and often connect those problems with ignorance or insufficient support from the government. Although the governmental structures, in their turn, reduce their own role to one of the channel between Kazakhstani population and foreign audience, their responsibilities are not limited to it. They perform a mediatory role not only between domestic and foreign audiences, but also between non-state and state actors within the state, as well as between different state institutions. Their cooperation with non-state actors combines all of the ideal types of interactions. However, special attention is paid to public-private partnership as it helps government to fulfill its goals with the help of private companies.

Tourist associations.

In Kazakhstan professional associations are regulated by the laws "On non-profit organizations", "On public organizations", and "On professional unions". According to official

definition, “professional union is a public association with fixed membership which is voluntarily formed on the basis of common labour and professional interests of citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan for representation of labour, social, and economic interests of its members” (Law on professional unions, 2014, para.6).

During the Soviet times professional unions were headed by the All-Union Central Committee of Trade Unions and performed three main functions: served as “a transmission belt” (Kubicek, 2002, p.607) between the party and workers, participated in distribution of social funds, and defended workers from managerial injustices.

Soviet unionism influenced post-Soviet professional associations in the sense that at early stages some of them were artificially created by the state, instead of emerging in accordance with workers’ needs. For instance, the Kazakhtani Tourist Association was formed at President Nazarbayev’s initiative in 1999. However, as later analysis will show, at the present time professional unions, in the form of tourist associations, became more active in their respective fields, defending the interests of the industry, lobbying the government for support, and initiating their own projects. This indicates a shift from a mere “transmission belt” of the communist era.

Tourist associations are forms of professional unions, representing the interests of the touristic sphere. They are funded through membership fees or tenders that are organized either by state institutions or foreign organizations. The association has several sections within its structure that deal with different types of tourism and issues connected to this. At the same time, people in charge of these sections are businessmen who are working in the touristic sphere. They accumulate problems and convey them to the association in order to find a solution.

Those people are people of touristic business. They are not constantly sitting here, doing some paperwork or performing some tasks. They identify problems, tell us about them, and then we together try to deal with them. Then we can hold an educational seminar, raise some legal questions, make suggestions to the department or regional administration (Coordinator of Kazakhstan Tourist Association’s information center, personal communication, Almaty, July 4, 2016).

This suggests that travel agencies appeal to tourism associations if they have problems that should be dealt with either on associational level or on the national one. In the latter case, they are mediators between travel agencies and state structures.

For instance, I as a businessman, as a private entity cannot address the state structures directly, because I have other questions to deal with. I speak to the association that our organization is a member of, and it then solves the question with state institutions. I pay a membership fee for that. So that I could do business, while the association deals with the questions that concern us (Head of the department of inbound tourism, personal communication, Astana, October 10, 2016).

So, one of the main functions of touristic associations is representation of the interests of the field, cooperation with state structures, and problem solution.

The tourist association also provides informational support for tourists by issuing brochures and maps, or by updating information on the informational website. It also maintains a tourist information center in its own office. In addition, it holds informational seminars for representatives of travel agencies, provides students with internship and working places. Cooperation with state structures involves participating in tenders that they announce, for instance for the development of a master-plan on tourism sphere in different regions of Kazakhstan or taking part in international and local tourism exhibitions. At the same time there is a clear opinion on how responsibilities between the Tourism Industry Department and the association should be divided:

Generally, the tourism industry is a mess. I want to say that at present moment our association does the work for the whole department, and prior to this for the whole committee. And even for the whole ministry before that. To be honest it is the responsibility of the state institution to do what we are doing here (Coordinator of Kazakhstan Tourist Association's information center, personal communication, Almaty, July 4, 2016).

It is clear that not only the association took over the department's functions; it also blames the state structure for ineffectiveness and low level of support that they show to the projects that the association sees as important. Apart from misunderstanding with the Tourism Industry Department, the interviewee mentioned other state institutions, such as the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs (NCE), with whom they have a difficult relationship:

Now according to the law, each travel agency should be a member of the NCE and pay a membership fee. Actually, it can lead to the dissolution of our association. We cannot work without support, the government does not support us, we do not

get grants as it is done in other countries, and now the NCE attracts our members. I would not say that they actually do a lot of work, it is mainly a nominal professional organization (Coordinator of Kazakhstan Tourist Association's information center, personal communication, Almaty, July 4, 2016).

On the one hand, this conflict situation with another state professional association might just be a consequence of the competition between the two unions, as the NCE usually supports and funds all the international fairs, forums, and seminars for its members. On the other hand, the institutional structure and its nominal character identified by the interviewee might also be a reason for its actual ineffectiveness and prioritisation of questions that need to be addressed first.

The tourist association presents professional union that expresses the interests of tourism industry and deals with the problems on associational or national levels. It is an instrument connecting its members with other state structures. Although, its cooperation with state institutions usually takes form of a private-public partnership, conflict situations between the two also take place when prioritization of burning issues and allocation of funds is concerned. As a result, it complicates the activity of the association.

Kazakhstani travel agencies.

One of the main actors involved in the promotion of tourism are Kazakhstani travel agencies. They are specializing in outbound, domestic, and inbound tourism. Outbound tourism served as the main specialization of the vast majority of travel agencies for a long time. Some of the agencies started to engage in inbound tourism only recently, forming the relevant departments within their structures. Information gathered during the interviews with Kazakhstani agencies engaged in inbound tourism showed that almost all participants had the same view on their contribution to the promotion of Kazakhstan abroad, as well as their relations with the state.

Division of responsibilities.

All firms identified themselves as privately owned companies, thus differentiating themselves from state institutions. They defined their sphere of activity as purely business oriented, but also mentioned that the state should provide necessary conditions for the development of their initiatives. In this way, cooperation between Kazakhstani travel agencies and the state combines the

four ideal types that were described above. First of all, the state acts as a supervisory body, issuing licenses, permits, and visas and making sure that the activity of travel agencies comply with the law.

Second of all, the state acts as a mediator between local travel agencies and foreign audiences. My participants stressed that when it comes to cooperation with foreign tourist boards, international organizations or foreign state institutions, it is the responsibility of the government to conduct those negotiations.

We are a private company. We do not have close ties with international organizations. For instance, the UNWTO, it is good that it exists. We attend conferences or seminars, but that's all. It falls more into the responsibilities of the state structures (Director of travel agency, personal communication, Almaty, July 7, 2016).

Currently, we are working with China. But the whole country does not know about us. Beijing maybe, and a couple of border regions. There is a need to advertise the country [Kazakhstan] on Chinese national channels. The Tourism Industry Department works on it right now (Head of the department of inbound tourism, personal communication, Astana, October 10, 2016).

In addition, state structures, such as the Tourism Industry Department, organize meetings and exhibitions with representatives of foreign tourist branches, thus providing local tourist agencies with a platform for cooperation. Those fairs are usually held on a professional level in the sense that Kazakhstani travel agencies present Kazakhstan to travel agencies from other countries. In this case, individual tourists themselves rarely visit those fairs. So, it is clear that there is a division between the functions of the state structures and private companies in tourism promotion. Travel agencies perceive state institutions as supervisors of their activity and mediators between Kazakhstani travel agencies and foreign audience, and coordinators of cooperation with international organizations and foreign state structures. These forms of interactions combine the first two ideal types of cooperation.

Informational materials.

Informational materials include promotional videos, films, souvenir books, maps, brochures, and leaflets containing general information about the country. They are sometimes ordered by public structures and thus contain the state's branding messages. In other cases, they are created by

private agencies themselves and present information that, in their opinion, will attract tourists. Informational tools that are used by local travel agencies are usually developed at their own expense by their own marketing departments. They use their own data when they promote their own company as a brand, while informational materials promoting the country are based on the data that is available to the public, including books and brochures that are issued by state structures or information available on the Internet. On international fairs and meetings held by the Tourism Industry Department, domestic travel agencies use materials that are provided by the department. Kazakhstani travel agencies therefore present the country by using their own informational materials or products designed by the state tourist board. In the latter case, they act as communicators of the state's vision of the country.

Nation branding, tourism and business exchanges.

Another distinctive feature of the local travel agencies is that in the vast majority of cases they host groups of business tourists that come to Kazakhstan for business purposes, but are willing to explore the country during their stay. Kazakhstani travel agencies noted that their main client base consists of companies who wish to send groups of tourists to the country. Thus, this specialization in mass tourism also explains the complexity of the image that is promoted by local travel agencies.

We are working mainly with groups of tourists. Individual tourists come to us very rarely. Recently we had a group of Chinese tourists. They were the guests of Chinese consulate. They came here for work purposes, but decided that they want to see the country at the same time, visit Astana and Almaty, try our national food and learn about the culture (Head of the department of inbound tourism, personal communication, Astana, October 10, 2016).

There is a link between nation branding, tourism promotion and government sponsored business exchanges. As nation branding is directed at increasing the level of investment, tourism is one of the ways of doing so. In this case, Kazakhstani authorities appeal to travel agencies to host their business partners, and at the same time present Kazakhstan as a place attractive for tourism and more investment. The choice of China is justified by the large population and high level of activity of Chinese tourists. It is also the effect of the signed ADS Agreement and the Memorandum of

Understanding between the Ministry of Investments and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the China National Tourism Administration. In accordance with this document, Kazakhstani authorities simplify visa conditions for Chinese tourist groups and are obliged to provide list of travel agencies that are responsible for their hosting (“Kazakhstan and China”, 2015). Such strategies practiced by both the government and private travel agencies are purely economic and profit oriented. This type of cooperation falls under the category of mutually beneficial cooperation as it allows both sides to get their share of benefits.

Division among state structures and conflict.

At the same time travel agencies perceive other state institutions that are not directly involved in tourism promotion as an obstacle to their activity. Such agencies include the Committee of National Security, customs and migration police. For travel agencies, interaction with those governmental structures is unavoidable, as they provide permits for their clients, but as was noted by the representatives of travel agencies, this cooperation is complicated by the behavior and informal practices of those structures, such as bribes and red tape. This creates a conflict between private travel agencies and state controlled agencies that affect tourism promotion.

We have many problems with governmental structures. For instance, we cannot prove it, but we know that this takes place. Our Chinese tourists complained to us. We are ashamed of that. When they were going back to China from Almaty, our local border guards requested five hundred Yuan from the group. They complained to us, they said that they would not come back again, because there is corruption everywhere. It is very offensive, when you work for a month to attract them here, and just in a minute the whole impression is ruined (Head of the department of inbound tourism, personal communication, Astana, October 10, 2016).

It becomes evident that corruption that is present among some governmental institutions provides another dimension for the scale of cooperation among state and non-state actors. It complicates the issuing of permits that allows visits to border regions or particular areas of national parks, affects the arrival, stay, and departure of foreign tourists in the country. At the same time, those illegal acts are not documented and are hard to prove, although they do exist. Such activities of state institutions are considered by tourists as offensive and disdainful. They affect the experiences and

impressions of foreign tourists that were formed during their stay with the help of travel agencies, and eventually, the image of Kazakhstan that is promoted.

Real image – promoted image.

The relationship between real image and the image that is promoted is another concern shared by Kazakhstani travel agencies. This is mostly discussed with reference to the discrepancies between the idealized image of the country in tourist brochures and tourists' experiences during travels across Kazakhstan. In the assessment of tourist agencies, these experiences are shaped by the underdevelopment of infrastructure and the service industry in particular, high prices, red tape, bribery, and even the mentality of people. It is clear that those problems are not highlighted in promotional campaigns where the stress is once again put on attractive features of the country.

Naturally, I do not say these things to foreigners, Kyrgyz or Uzbeks. I don't tell them what problems we have. It is okay to say those things between us; Kazakhs can say we have such and such problems. But when we are with others, we say: "Wow, we are a great country, you know! We are the ninth biggest country in the world. Everything here is chic and smooth." When in reality it is not like this at all (Director of a travel agency, personal communication, Almaty, July 7, 2016).

It is evident that promotional materials, naturally, do not inform tourists about the difficulties that they may encounter during their visits. However, as was noted by the participants, those problems exist and become evident when they have already arrived. This leads to a situation when Kazakhstan, on the one hand, welcomes everyone, and, on the other hand, appears as not so hospitable after all.

Concerning the mentality of people, it is said that the Kazakhstani population, and even those who work in tourism sphere, are not suitable for the hosting of foreign tourists. It is an interesting remark in a sense that Kazakhs are presented as a very hospitable nation.

Our mentality is such that we are hospitable. Kazakhs are hospitable, but we are not complaisant. However, if you work in tourism, you need to be more flexible, more complaisant to please the tourists (Director of a travel agency, personal communication, Almaty, July 7, 2016).

It is also mentioned that the mentality and work ethics of local people affect the quality of the services that are provided. Travel agencies are concerned with the quality of services in the tourism sphere. This, in its turn, affects the image of the country. Tourists and foreign tourist providers get

an impression that they are not that welcomed, that the country is not interested in the promotion of tourism. They noted that all actors, be it private company or governmental authorities need to teach their staff how to work properly and to behave in order to attract tourists and show that the country is hospitable. This concern is also shared by scholars of nation branding who point to the importance of the people of the country that are living “advertisements” and need to “live the brand” (Anholt, 2005; Aronczyk, 2013).

Taking everything into consideration, it is clear that, by promotion of their own companies that are specializing on Kazakhstani tourism, local travel agencies also contribute to the promotion of the country. Although they identify themselves as private entities, their actions are influenced by the cooperation with state structures that either assist them in their professional activity or put obstacles to it. It is important to note that state agencies that are not directly involved in tourism promotion also affect the image that is formed once foreign tourists come to visit.

Foreign travel agencies and online travel guides.

Besides local travel agencies who host foreign tourists, there are foreign travel agencies that organize tours to Kazakhstan. Some of them include Kazakhstan as one of the destinations within the wider Central Asian region, but some focus solely on Kazakhstan. I excluded large travel companies that offer Kazakhstan as one of the many destinations because they put Kazakhstan in one group with other countries under the “Asia” label and at times do not even differentiate between South East Asian or Central Asian regions. Information about Kazakhstan provided on the websites of such agencies is very limited. In contrast to big agencies, the smaller ones, which are managed by owners themselves, are more concerned with their role as agents that inform the foreign public about the country through the information they provide on their websites and through trips that they organize. Apart from the generation of profit, my interviewees noted that their aim is to inform people about Kazakhstan.

Structure.

All travel agencies and guides that were analyzed are rather small and managed by the owners themselves. Their choice of Kazakhstan as a tourist destination, their impression of the

country, as well as a foundation for the image that they want to promote lies in their own personal experiences with the country, be it living in or travelling across the country. Foreigners who organize trips to Kazakhstan either are ethnic Kazakhs who live abroad, or foreigners, who lived in Kazakhstan for some time or have relatives from Kazakhstan:

I lived there and my wife is from Kazakhstan, I like the country a lot. My view was established during stay from 1998-2001 (Owner of a foreign travel agency, email communication, the Netherlands, July 4, 2016).

Because I love this country myself and for me it is very interesting to travel here (Owner of a foreign travel agency, email communication, Germany, July 15, 2016).

Communicating image.

At the same time, foreign travel agents noted that Kazakhstan still lacks a clear image as not many foreign tourists know anything about the country. However, according to them, this can be used as an advantage. Thus, they tried to attract people with the mystery of an unknown country:

Unbekannte entdecken – to open the unknown land. In other words, nothing concrete, we play with the unknown. Ninety per cent of (western) foreigners have either a poor idea of the country or none at all. So, it appears that Kazakhstan is a clean slate, *tabula rasa*. *Tabula rasa* is a plus! We can write everything we want there. But! Everything we will write on the board should be truthful (Owner of a foreign travel agency, email communication, Germany, July 15, 2016)!

The emphasis on the truthfulness of the image and its conformity with reality is interesting, because it is important for the brand image to coincide with tourists' actual experiences in order to be effective. This point is supported by scholars who are specializing in nation branding. For instance, Saunders (2008, p. 65) stated that national brands should be realistic and free of any misconceptions, as images based on flattery or false statements may later damage the reputation. However, at the same time, many countries tend to highlight the positive images and conceal the unflattering ones. Representatives of foreign travel agencies and online platforms noted that situation at hand is not always favorable to the development of tourism. They mentioned the negligent attitude to nature, unexpected circumstances and time difficulties with arranging tours, as well as red tape and the absence of the unified informational infrastructure. Despite these facts, in order to attract tourists, they underline mostly attractive features of the country:

I update the information on my own. We try to attract people, that is why I exclude the negative. Put the stress on the nature, culture and people (Owner of a foreign travel agency, email communication, Germany, July 15, 2016).

Lack of democracy and human rights in Central Asia is a big thing for Westerners. I do not talk about that on the website, because I think this is covered in detail in other publications. Actually, it is almost the only thing that gets attention from the Western mainstream media, together with environmental catastrophes. But in my mind, it is not a very important part of life, and to understand and appreciate the region, one needs to know much more about the culture, history, landscapes, food, urban environments, etc (Editor of a travel guide, email communication, Belgium, October 11, 2016).

On the one hand, these issues make the promotion of tourism more difficult as it worsens the impression of the country. Frustration with media representations of Kazakhstan identified by the interviewee is of particular importance. First of all, it shows that in most cases Western mass media put emphasis on lack of democracy and human rights violations which present the country in unfavorable light. Secondly, this remark demonstrates the interviewee's intention to counter such unfavorable portrayals by promoting Kazakhstan through his professional activity.

On the other hand, unflattering characteristics of the country served as a reason for some travel agencies to present the country as adventurous, because things never go as planned and it is difficult to predict what will happen. In addition, the lack of informational infrastructure, for instance, served as a reason for some of the respondents to start their activity:

Nobody else was doing it when I started it, or not good enough. Many people had to cancel part of their trip, or got into serious trouble with the law, because of a lack of correct information. My goal is to help travelers to achieve their travel goals, and help local tour operators earn more money (Editor of a travel guide, email communication, Belgium, October 11, 2016).

Cooperation with state structures.

Owners of foreign travel agencies and web sites choose what information to post on their web sites by themselves. Thus, Kazakhstani officials do not have direct influence on what kind of image is promoted by those agencies. Cooperation with state institutions, such as foreign embassies, the Tourism Industry Department, and the Committee for National Security, is mostly reduced to paperwork, the issuing of visas, and visiting permits. However, state agencies also turn to such travel agencies for help:

In May we worked together with the Ministry of Sport & Tourism in Astana of a 5-day tour & film-shooting in Astana, Karaganda and the region (Owner of a travel agency, email communication, the Netherlands, July 4, 2016).

Besides direct cooperation with governmental institutions, foreign travel agencies independently attend international touristic fairs. Although their aim is to promote their own company, they noted that it seemed that most of the time they were promoting the country:

I remember that mostly I had to explain about the country itself, more than about the tours. People hardly knew Kazakhstan. This was in 2006 and 2012. Now, this may have changed, more and more people know Kazakhstan, though very few connect the country with tourism. I showed big pictorial books with landscapes and yurts, nomads, also Astana. So, more than promoting the tours I was promoting the country. Indeed, I think this is more a task of the Kazakh authorities but in their absence I do it (Owner of a travel agency, email communication, the Netherlands, July 4, 2016).

The shift identified by the interviewee above also hints on the fact that, in comparison with earlier years, nowadays Kazakhstan is not as unknown as it was. Partly it is the result of actions undertaken by those travel agencies, who promoted the country in the absence of the state in earlier periods, partly because at the moment Kazakhstani government started to pay more attention to its international image. In addition, it shows that the promotion of the country is seen as mainly the state's responsibility. Thus, in the cases when state is not present or does not fully fulfill its obligations, non-state actors replace their position where it is possible. In this case, online travel agencies present a unique case as at the present moment they do not cooperate with any state structures, although they do not exclude this possibility in the future.

Although the connection between Kazakhstani governmental structures and foreign travel agencies is less strong than with the local ones, it is evident that cooperation still takes place. However, in the vast majority of cases, it takes the form of mutually beneficial assistance rather than direct influence. As was noted by Melissen (2011, p.19), states can learn from private sector in marketing and branding. Sometimes inaction from the side of the governments can fuel the activity of non-state actors, initiative of which might appear as more effective (Kelley, 2014, p.7). In such a way, foreign travel agencies assist the Kazakhstani government in promoting tourism abroad by pursuing their own direction.

It is hard to fully distinguish state and non-state actors in the context of Kazakhstani nation branding. However, it is easier to do so, firstly, by analyzing how actors engaged in nation branding identify themselves and their responsibilities. For instance, state actors view themselves as channels of communication through which international brand is projected to the outside world. Non-state actors, in turn, identify themselves as promoters of Kazakhstan's image, but still reserve the leading position in the process to the state structures.

Secondly, we can distinguish between different types of actors engaged in nation branding by examining the cooperation between self-identified state and non-state entities and by identifying the level of their interdependence. State structures consisting of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Commission on the Development and Promotion of National and Regional Brands, and Tourism Industry Department combine both advisory and regulating functions controlling the process of nation brand promotion. They are state structures that are responsible for the coordination of activities aimed at the promotion of international image on national and international level. Those institutions should provide favorable conditions for the development of national brand in forms of necessary infrastructure, financial support, and platforms for cooperation. They act as mediators between Kazakhstani travel agencies and representatives of foreign countries, be it tourist boards, embassies or international organizations.

Tourist associations, Kazakhstani and foreign travel agencies belong to the group of non-state actors as they identify themselves as such. Non-state actors in the context of Kazakhstani nation branding can be defined as privately owned organizations that pursue their private financial goals, define themselves as promoters of Kazakhstani international image, and are subjected to different levels of the state's influence. Their connection with state structures varies from legal regulation through private-public partnership to high level of interrelation depending on the type of cooperation they engage in. Tourist associations, being independent professional associations in this case, play a mediatory role between travel agencies and state structures.

Although the cooperation between state and non-state actors takes place, there are cases when their activity is influenced by the conflict between two sets of actors. In cases of cooperation, collective work mainly results in the improvement of national brand. For instance, close cooperation between state institutions and domestic travel agencies during tourist fairs provides opportunity to collectively promote the country with a unified strategy. In contrast, conflict situations, as for instance insufficient funding or bribing, create unfavorable international images and sometimes even ruin non-state actors' efforts at tourism promotion. As both state and non-state actors recognize the need for cooperation, the nature of relationship between this two set of actors shapes not only the activity of those actors, but also the image of Kazakhstan that they are promoting.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This thesis adopts a systemic approach to the analysis of nation branding on the example of Kazakhstani tourism promotion. In comparison to previous scholarly works that are devoted to separate advertising campaigns and view nation branding as a top-down process, my approach also takes into account the agency of non-state actors. Although nation branding appears as a top-down process, there are private actors whose activity should not be neglected. The relationship between public and private actors varies from legal regulation and mutually beneficial cooperation to high level of dependency and conflict situations. These forms of public-private interactions shape Kazakhstan's national brand which has a complex structure. The most prominent themes that emerged during the analysis of video and printing materials include positioning the country as "the heart of Eurasia", "country of open future", reliable international partner, tolerant multiethnic and multiconfessional society which is on its way towards economic development, but still preserves cultural traditions. Although the juxtaposition of contradicting notions of East and West, tradition and modernity creates ambivalence within the image, it compliments the whole brand by stressing the country's uniqueness. My analysis of messages promoted by domestic actors, both state and non-state, shows that all of these messages compliment each other and are parts of a unified image of Kazakhstan which is illustrated from various viewpoints. Meanwhile, messages promoted by foreign actors go beyond the scope of the image created by Kazakhstani practitioners, but they do not pose a particular threat to the activity of state institutions.

Despite the fact that all actors disseminate the same general information about Kazakhstan, including facts about the country's political and economic system, history, geography, and culture, they put emphasis on different elements of the image. While state structures stress the democratic nature of the country, its economic potential, and reliability, non-state actors in the form of domestic and foreign travel agencies focus on exoticism and traditional "authenticity". This, in its turn, leads to the complex structure of Kazakhstan's international image.

Defining state and non-state actors.

The most prominent state-actors engaged in Kazakhstani nation branding are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Committee for International Information, as well as the Commission on the Development and Promotion of National and Regional Brands and Tourism Industry Department. For them, to be a state actor is to promote a favorable image of Kazakhstan with a particular focus on its “democratic” political system, peaceful and tolerant society, peacemaking efforts, rapidly developing economy, and attractive investment opportunities. These sets of images are mostly directed at international politicians and businessmen, who are the main audience for government-promoted images.

However, state actors define themselves in opposition to non-state actors as a channel of communication and not as creators of the national brand. Their goal is thus to serve as a mediator between Kazakhstani citizens and the international community. In practice, they also perform regulating and monitoring functions, implementing development strategies and coordinating activities of subordinate entities. Although representatives of state institutions did not directly mention the idea of control over the image-making process, my analysis of state practices reveals that it is their primary aim. The Kazakhstani state dominates the nation branding discourse in order to eliminate any alternative and undesirable portrayals of the country. It is thus engaged in what Edward Schatz (2008, p.51) calls “discursive preemption”, a strategy of preventing undesirable images before they arise without discrediting the favorable reputation by using coercion. For instance, by producing promotional materials about Kazakhstan, state structures dominate the nation branding narrative and through cooperation with private travel agencies disseminate the desirable image at local and foreign exhibitions. Stressing successful domestic and international achievements, the state builds its legitimacy on the domestic and international level (Fauve, 2015). In this way, by taking control over the discourse, managing the producers of knowledge, and forming regime-friendly images for popular consumption, the state seeks to legitimate itself. For state actors, nation branding is therefore a set of strategies and discourses aimed at increasing the power to define and control the national image. State actors can thus be defined as public

institutions producing an image of the state within their respective spheres in an attempt to control the process of image-making.

Non-state actors involved in Kazakhstani tourism promotion distinguish themselves from state structures by pointing out that they are profit-oriented privately owned organizations. Travel associations, Kazakhstani and foreign travel agencies, as well as travel guides fall into this category. Owners of private travel agencies mentioned the popularization of Kazakhstani tourism and increasing of the country's recognition as their objectives, identifying themselves as promoters of Kazakhstan's international image. Another distinctive feature of non-state actors is the ability of private entities to replace the state in cases of its absence and inactivity. For example, the tourist association resolved the pressing issues of travel agencies, while online guides provided tourists with informational infrastructure that was absent on official government websites. In these cases, the absence of state actors in the sphere of nation branding, or their inefficiency, served as an opportunity for non-state actors to fill the gap. As financial benefit is the primary goal of non-state actors, for them nation branding appears as a chance to acquire additional material benefits that come with the opportunity to participate in the process. Non-state actors can be defined as private entities engaged in nation branding with purpose of resource acquisition and that are subjected to various degrees of state's influence.

Domestic and foreign non-state actors can be differentiated by the level of cooperation with the state and the content of the image they promote. Domestic private actors, travel agencies and tourism associations, rely on self-exoticism as their main strategy in producing the image of Kazakhstan. They stress cultural and historical components of Kazakhstan's image in an effort to exoticise the country and to comply with the "tourist gaze" (Urry, 2001, p.2), i.e. to meet tourists' expectations. At the same time, domestic non-state actors are more subjected to Kazakhstani government's influence, as cooperation between these two groups includes all of the ideal types of cooperation. Kazakhstani travel agencies represent the country at international fairs and road-shows organized by state structures, and facilitate governmental business exchanges by providing services

to business tourists. In the case of tight cooperation with the state, Kazakhstani travel agencies appear as a tool of communication of the state's vision of national brand.

Foreign non-state actors are small travel agencies or online travel guides managed by owners themselves. Although they also cooperate with Kazakhstani governmental institutions, the level of state influence in most cases is limited to legal regulation. As domestic travel agencies, foreign ones emphasise the uniqueness of Kazakhstani culture and lifestyle, but they go beyond polished branding stands in their representations of Kazakhstan. They focus on the “authentic experience” which is based on their own personal encounters with the country and is defined as “real and not idealized”. By providing tourists with full information about the country from insiders' viewpoints, describing difficulties that tourists might face, foreign non-state actors present the country with all its advantages and disadvantages. In this case, their attempts to illustrate things on the ground contradict with positive official representations.

The will to improve the image of the country out of patriotic feelings and personal attachment to the country expressed by both state and non-state actors should not be dismissed. As interviewees noted they want to contribute to the creation of attractive Kazakhstan's international image through tourism promotion. However, this trait constitutes a common feature which unites both state and non-state structures rather than distinguishes them from each other. Therefore, in order to differentiate between these two sets of actors, I will focus on commercial and political approaches that they employ.

Political and commercial approaches to nation branding.

State and non-state actors' approaches to nation branding can be respectively divided into political and commercial. The political approach seeks to obtain control over image production, while the commercial one is concerned with the acquisition of economic resources. These two approaches operate in a symbiotic relationship when private-public cooperation takes place, and clash in conflict situations. In the first case, state and non-state actors heavily rely on public-private partnerships, because such cooperation makes it possible to address particular commercial interests along with the national political and ideological agenda (Jansen, 2008, p.122). In such cases, the

state's excessive control over the image production does not come into conflict with non-state actors' pursuit of financial gain.

In the second case, visions of non-state and state actors do not coincide in the sense that private actors advocate for more practical application of funds and their investment in transport infrastructure, as well as construction and restoration works, rather than spending money on advertisement. The state's concern with construction of symbolic images determines allocation of the resources into branding campaigns. However, inadequate funding of infrastructural projects limits the activity of non-state actors and creates discontent with the state's actions. Coexistence of political and commercial approaches to nation branding thus depends on type of interaction between state and non-state actors.

Soft-authoritarian and transitional state.

Difficulties in drawing boundaries between state and non-state actors in the process of Kazakhstani nation branding reveal the authoritarian and transitional nature of the Kazakhstani state. The state's cooperation with non-state actors strengthens the image of a "democratic state" that Kazakhstani officials actively promote. By providing the private sector with some leeway, the soft authoritarian government creates the impression of an inclusive system (Melissen, 2011, p. 17). The strategy of involving Kazakhstani citizens in defining the national brand also provides an opportunity to avoid the common critique of nation branding as a non-democratic practice reserved for national governments and branding experts (Kaneva, 2011b, p.112). In Bulgaria competition on determination of national brand was held among the young population of the country, but the logo was never used in official campaigns, thus proving that nation branding is an exclusive practice (Kaneva, 2011b, p.108). Similarly, competition held among Kazakhstani citizens did not lead to expected results. Members of the expert council rejected submitted drafts of national brand, because they did not meet the requirements of Kazakhstani national brand. The development of national brand will be continued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry for Information and Communication. In such a way, by engaging the general population in the development of national brand, Kazakhstani government tried to support the promoted image of a

democratic state. However, it failed in doing so, because control over national image remained in the hands of state structures.

Moreover, as scholars noted (Szondi, 2007; Kaneva, 2011b; Pammet, 2015), the top-down approach to nation branding is a feature of the transitional state and a remnant of the Soviet system. The necessity for the state to take the lead in crafting the international image is shared in many post-communist countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Poland (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011; Kaneva, 2011b). The fact that in Kazakhstani case non-state actors also advocate for the state to guide the process and provide basic support suggests that Kazakhstani nation branding practices can be classified as transitional. According to Szondi (2007, p.13), a combination of conflicting characteristics and stress on rapid changes in nation branding messages are widely used by countries in transition for their international representations. The presence of such themes in the Kazakhstani international image also points to the transitional nature of promotional strategies.

Kazakhstani case study and literature on nation branding.

This research adopted cultural approach to nation branding and on the example of Kazakhstan demonstrated how nation branding creates a platform for struggle over power positions and resources (Aronczyk, 2008, 2013; Kaneva, 2011b). On the one hand, the case study of Kazakhstani nation branding presented in this research supports general understanding of nation branding as a state-driven campaign (Schatz, 2008; Marat, 2009). As an analysis of state structures' attitudes towards Kazakhstani nation branding and examination of state produced narratives suggests, the state takes a lead in nation branding process and by doing so tries to control the process of image-making (Schatz, 2008; Marat, 2009).

On the other hand, my research expands the scope of actors involved in the process and adds the activity of foreign and domestic non-state actors into the analysis. Although the literature on Kazakhstani nation branding acknowledged the influence of non-state actors, it did not consider them as independent actors in their own right (Saunders, 2007, 2008; Marat, 2009; Stock, 2009). By identifying what entities can be considered as non-state in the case of Kazakhstani nation branding this thesis also established the link between state and non-state actors through the analysis

of interactions between them. A typology of state-non-state interactions consisting of four ideal types of cooperation allows to demonstrate that in cases of loose ties with the state institutions non-state actors can act as independent entities.

Broadly speaking, the detailed analysis of components constituting Kazakhstani international brand falls in line with Anholt's (2007) concept of competitive identity revealing the complex structure of a successful national brand. However, according to Anholt (2007), tourism is only one dimension of international image. Therefore, examination of relationship between state and non-state actors in other spheres promoting image of the country serves as a possibility for further research. It will allow to understand whether the types of interactions identified in my analysis can be applied to analysis of nation branding practices in other fields.

To conclude, this research systematized Kazakhstani nation branding efforts by bringing together image-making practices adopted by different actors involved in the process. My grounded theory approach has allowed me to firstly identify the most prominent elements of the Kazakhstani international image, and then to connect them with the agency of particular actors on the ground. The analytical framework for the investigation of interactions between state and non-state actors illustrated that level of cooperation between the actors influences the content of the image that they promote. While strong connections between Kazakhstani state structures and domestic travel agencies create a unified picture of the country, loose ties between public institutions and foreign travel agencies allowed the later to highlight alternative representations. Although boundaries between state and non-state actors are vague, a focus on the content of images, primary goals and audiences helps to draw the line between the two sets of actors. Furthermore, highlighting differences between state and non-state, as well as domestic and foreign practitioners, has enabled me to broaden the notion of "nation branding" beyond the exclusive focus on state-driven practices and to include the role and contribution of private entities into the analysis.

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