

# Reflecting Images: The Front Page of Icelandic Tourism Brochures

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**Abstract** – One of the most popular tools to promote tourist destinations is the publication of travel brochures. This study explores image-making in material that promotes Icelandic tourism on a regional and national basis and its effect on the conceptualization of different regional tourist destinations. The pictorial content of the front page of the main travel brochures has been studied in order to identify images put in the foreground by both the national tourism board as well as various regional destinations' marketing bureaus. In addition, key players in tourism development and regional marketing have been interviewed about the destination image-making process and the interaction between regional and national image-making.

**Keywords** – Destination image, destination promotion, travel brochures, photographs, regional tourist destinations, Iceland

## Introduction

This country is all about majestic, muscular vistas, raw and brutal expanses of Tolkien-strength geography: unclimbed peaks, desolate, thunderous waterfalls, horizon-spanning lava fields, arctic deserts and glaciers where man has left no mark. An unfinished corner of the universe, as one Victorian traveller very deftly described it.<sup>1</sup>

Tourist destinations are created in an increasingly competitive environment, and there is hardly any place left on the globe that is still untouched by tourism development. Emerging destinations compete fiercely with older destinations for the attention of potential tourists. For many countries, tourism is an important source of foreign exchange earnings, income, and employment, and for these countries, a successful positioning in the global marketplace is of great importance. The role of destination images has received much interest

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<sup>1</sup> Moore 2009.

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in tourism research in the last decade.<sup>2</sup> The path towards being a well-recognized destination presents a difficult marketing challenge. The crux of the problem is identifying a unifying image or feature that represents the whole destination, while at the same time differentiates it from other destinations.

Armed with the right strategy, it is still a considerable challenge to get the message across, not least for rural and peripheral destinations that often find it difficult to succeed in projecting the selected images to the target markets. Numerous studies have been carried out to explore the ways in which destinations' marketers can affect and manipulate potential tourists' perceptions with effective image-making.<sup>3</sup> Many of these studies point out that visual material is a significant vehicle for creating and managing a destination image.<sup>4</sup> Hence photographs in tourism promotional material are an important part of the image-making process.

This study explores image-making through visual material in Icelandic tourism marketing material, both on a regional and a national basis, and its effect on the conceptualization of different regional tourist destinations. The goal is to explore the interrelation of national and regional destination marketing and the ways in which image-making on a national level affects regional product development and the identity of the regional tourist destination. The pictorial content of the front page of the main travel brochures has been studied in order to identify images put in the foreground by both the national tourism board as well as by various regional tourism boards. In addition, key players in tourism development and regional marketing have been interviewed about the destination image-making process and the interaction of regional and national image-making. In total forty-seven people were interviewed. All are involved in regional tourism development and have participated in decision-making regarding marketing and promotional activities. A few participants work at the national level.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Buhalis 2000; Gallarza, Saura, & García 2002; Nadeau et al. 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Tasci & Gartner 2007; McCartney, Butler, & Bennet 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Jenkins 2003; MacKay & Couldwell 2004.

<sup>5</sup> The interviews were part of a larger research project carried out by the Rural Tourism Department at Holar University College and the Iceland Tourism Research Centre with the aim of assessing methods of regional marketing in Iceland.

## Promoting Destinations

Marketing creates narratives, images and brands that mediate a place to the potential tourist in the traveller-generating regions.<sup>6</sup>

Destinations appear in various shapes and forms, and as Jarkko Saarinen has stated, “destination is by nature a problematic concept.”<sup>7</sup> No exact definition of the term “destination” really exists, and many studies do not clarify what exactly constitutes a destination.<sup>8</sup> Wolfgang Framke observes that the definition of the term varies according to the research approach adopted.<sup>9</sup> Thus, business and marketing studies often have different definitions of a destination than studies that employ sociological research methods. The former usually focus on geographical boundaries as well as supply and demand when defining destinations, whereas the latter generally view destination as a social product. Thus, Saarinen observes that the notion of physical or administrative units as a way to define tourist destinations may be a convenient approach, but he stresses the need to understand tourist destinations as a more fluid entity. He suggests that the identity of a tourist destination is a discursive formation of a dual nature, combining discourse of the region with discourse of development:

The discourse of the region (or “place”) refers to our knowledge and meanings related to tourist destinations (the idea), and the discourse of development (or “action”) aims to represent the practices and larger processes constructing destinations.<sup>10</sup>

Tourism literature, such as guidebooks, brochures, advertisements, maps, and blogs, are influential factors making up the discourse of the region. The discourse of development, on the other hand, reflects the actions of tourism organizations and institutions, such as destination marketing offices, travel bureaus, information centres, etc. Together

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<sup>6</sup> Framke 2002: 106.

<sup>7</sup> Saarinen 2004: 164.

<sup>8</sup> Hunter 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Framke 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Saarinen 2004: 167.

then, these discourses shape the identity of the tourist destination. It is important not to forget that the discourses are never static; thus the identity of a destination is the product of constantly evolving and changing discursive practices.<sup>11</sup> This means that destinations are constantly shaped and reshaped, developed and promoted.

In recent years, growing emphasis has been placed on organized marketing efforts on a regional basis. Regional imagery has become more and more important, and this has been especially noticeable with the promotion of quality food products and with the application of heritage and history as a place promotional tool.<sup>12</sup> Each region thus strives to recognize its key attractions and make them the focus of all promotion. It is not a simple process to translate all the various factors that give a region its special appeal into a synthesized marketing concept that creates a strong image of the destination. Susan Horner and John Swarbrooke maintain that coordination between different geographical levels is one of the major challenges of destination marketing throughout Europe.<sup>13</sup> The regional–national dynamic in destination marketing is certainly not a simple one, as Stephen W. Litvin and Nacef Mouri found out in their study of visual content of destination advertisements. They conclude that political correctness, in the sense of trying to favour lesser-known regions in destination promotion, is not an effective strategy for building up a strong destination image.<sup>14</sup> Thus, destination marketing on a national level tends to promote selective features, which may then result in the exclusion of some regions that may have little relevance to those selected features.<sup>15</sup> In general, the strongest promotional power is at the national level, and individual regions try to benefit from that while simultaneously developing their own unique and identifiable image.

Destination marketing aims at creating a positive image of a place to lure potential travellers to visit. Brochures are an important tool for systematic image-building.<sup>16</sup> According to Robert Dilley, the image

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<sup>11</sup> Saarinen 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Williams 2001; Fox 2007; Storey 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Horner & Swarbrooke 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Litvin & Mouri 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Seaton 1996.

<sup>16</sup> Hunter 2008.

presented in national travel brochures is “the closest thing to an official tourism image of each country [...] this is how the countries themselves wish to be seen.”<sup>17</sup> Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan agree with Dilley and point out that the design of the brochure cover is particularly critical. “The cover establishes eye contact and initial interest [...] It is also the marketers’ main opportunity to establish a brand identity for the destination.”<sup>18</sup> This was written long before the era of extensive Internet marketing of various types (websites, blogs, banners, videos, etc.) as well as all kinds of different mobile technologies (phones, videos, and such) that have opened up new ways of image-making and projection of images.<sup>19</sup> Despite these newer marketing media and despite certain controversy regarding the impact of tourism promotion, the brochure retains its status as most destination marketing bureaus, national as well as regional, still publish their yearly brochure and spend considerable money and time on this.<sup>20</sup> Most of those brochures are characterized by a profuse use of beautiful glossy pictures. The pictorial content of brochures is undeniably of great importance and influence in image-making.

## Photographic Images

Indeed without photography there would not be the contemporary global tourism industry.<sup>21</sup>

In his seminal work *The Tourist Gaze*, John Urry describes how tourism is characterized by a hermeneutic cycle where photographs play the main role.<sup>22</sup> That is, tourists seek places they have seen in travel brochures or other promotional material. Once there, they take pictures in order to demonstrate to others that they have really been there. In his attempt to empirically prove Urry’s theory of this closed circle of representation, Brian Garrod demonstrates how

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<sup>17</sup> Dilley 1986: 65.

<sup>18</sup> Pritchard & Morgan 1996: 357.

<sup>19</sup> Jansson 2007; Gren & Gunnarsdóttir 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Govers, Go, & Kuldeep 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Urry 2002: 130.

<sup>22</sup> Urry 2002.

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the imagery employed by the tourism industry to draw tourists to particular destinations becomes the object of the tourist gaze and thereby the subject of tourists' photographs.<sup>23</sup>

Other studies have demonstrated how pictures of certain places have repeatedly been used in brochures, even for decades, causing tourists to feel that they have not experienced the destination until they have encountered the places that have been presented in the promotional material.<sup>24</sup> Thus, photographs are crucial in constructing tourists' expectations that easily affect the way in which they experience the visited destination.

Photographs are the essence of modern tourism; hence carefully selected visual material is of great importance.<sup>25</sup> However, it is important to note that photographs do more than only present the product: they also tell a certain story. That is, the selection of visual images can communicate values and ideas.<sup>26</sup> The focus in research on image-making in brochures has primarily been to understand the ways in which the picture selection affects tourists' views of the destination and its inhabitants. Image-making always creates systems of meaning and the discourse of tourism imagery can reveal power relations that can affect the way we see ourselves and others—tourism images are not only selling a place/destination, they also reveal the power relations that underpin the image construction. Thus, the pictorial content of tourism brochures often projects the host population as stereotypes, people belonging to minority groups are only portrayed in service roles, and women are often presented as the object of the tourist gaze whereas men are more active and dominant.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, several studies indicate that image-making in tourism promotional material affects the way in which the host population sees itself and its community. Garrod, for example, found out that “residents identify more strongly with the tourism-related

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<sup>23</sup> Garrod 2009: 356.

<sup>24</sup> MacKay & Fesenmaier 1997; Nelson 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Molina & Esteban 2006.

<sup>26</sup> MacKay & Fesenmaier 1997: 538.

<sup>27</sup> Morgan & Pritchard 1998; Urry 2002.

image of the town than its contemporary economic role.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, residents as well as tourists are affected by the visual images projected by the promotional material. William Hunter actually warns that photographic representations in tourism material can be socially negative and those who promote destinations should pay more attention to the photographic material they are using, “before it is too late and local people are left vigorously struggling to retrieve their already compromised identities.”<sup>29</sup>

Tourism operators, tourism officers, and all those who are actors in regional tourism development are also residents at the tourist destination; hence they too are receivers of destination images. Little attention has been paid to the way in which image-making affects the actors in tourism, their decisions, and their understanding, both regarding product development and marketing strategies.

### Iceland’s Front Page

Tourism is an important pillar in Iceland’s economy and a major source of foreign revenue. The international promotion of Iceland as an attractive tourism destination is an important part of its tourism development. Icelandic tourism authorities, as well as a range of private companies, have invested heavily in constructing and developing Iceland’s image as a tourism destination.

The issue of marketing has been a hot topic in the discourse on Icelandic tourism in recent years. Marketing of rural areas has been of special interest, and arguments have risen concerning methods and strategies applied by the national tourism authorities.<sup>30</sup> At the beginning of this century, controversy arose regarding image-making in Icelandair’s promotional material. The suggestion of sex tourism implicit in slogans like “One Night Stand in Iceland” and “Fancy a Dirty Weekend” became a target of feminist critique.<sup>31</sup> Others have argued that Icelandic tourism promotional material has been

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<sup>28</sup> Garrod 2008: 395.

<sup>29</sup> Hunter 2008: 364.

<sup>30</sup> Gunnarsdóttir 2003.

<sup>31</sup> Dagsdóttir 2002; Elisson 2003.

influential in asserting nationalistic ideas that do not necessarily accurately reflect Icelandic reality and recent societal changes, for example, in terms of immigration.<sup>32</sup>

The so-called *Iceland brochure* is published yearly by the Iceland Tourist Board (ITB). It is published in ten languages (English, German, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, French, Italian, Spanish, and Dutch) with additional special publications for North America. The Iceland brochure is distributed worldwide in printed form, on a DVD, and as a PDF document accessible on the Iceland Tourist Board's website, [www.visiticeland.com](http://www.visiticeland.com). For the purpose of this study, the visual images on the front page of eighteen brochures were studied, thirteen of the main brochure and five of the North American brochure. Most of the brochures were published in the first decade of the 21st century. It should be noted that no systematic preservation of older copies of the Iceland brochure seems to exist. Thus, the National and University Library of Iceland does not have a collection of the brochure, nor are any copies from before 1995 available at the office of the Iceland Tourist Board. This limits the possibilities of systematic research over an extended period of public tourism promotional material.

Nature images dominate the front pages. There is only one instance among the covers where nature is not prominently on display. Without exception, it is a wild, uninhabited landscape that is presented (Figure 1).

Nature has for years been the main theme in the promotion of Iceland as a tourist destination. The early slogans of the 1960s and 1970s used the theme of drama in nature, ice, and fire, whereas in recent years the accessibility of Icelandic nature is stressed, for example, in slogans like “Reykjavík: Next Door to Nature.”<sup>33</sup> The material places a heavy emphasis on a pure and pristine landscape. Since 1999, Iceland has been promoted in the United States by a marketing consortium labelled “Iceland Naturally,” and in recent years the same strategy has been employed in the main European markets (see also Edward H. Huijbens in this volume). As the name

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<sup>32</sup> Einarsson 1997; Grétarsdóttir 2002; Þórarinsdóttir 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Stefnumót—stefnumótun í ferðþjónustu í Reykjavík [Policy Meet—Policy Meeting in Reykjavík Tourism Activities] 1999.

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indicates, nature has been emphasized as the main attraction. Surveys, carried out the whole year round among foreign tourists, also clearly confirm that nature is by far the main reason for visiting Iceland.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, a recent study also reveals that tourists' image of Iceland is that of a scenic nature destination.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the imagery employed in the promotion of Iceland seems to have successfully directed the tourists' gaze and constructed their view of Iceland.



Figure 1. The front page of the Iceland brochure: 1991, 1993, 2003, 2002, 2005, 2007.

Given this emphasis on nature as the main attraction, it is surprising how monotonous and passive the image of nature is on all the covers. The passivity indeed implies that this is a place that waits for the tourist to explore and there is no nuisance that will disturb. This pattern is indeed typical of other destinations. Thus, after

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<sup>34</sup> Óladóttir 2004; Óladóttir 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Magnusson & Gudlaugsson 2008.

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analyzing brochures and travel guides published by twenty-one tourist destinations around the world, Hunter concludes that “photographic representations in tourism tend to depict vacant and pristine spaces awaiting the tourist.”<sup>36</sup> Hunter labels this type of representations as “groomed spaces”; in other words, the brochures depict space that is neat and tidy, nothing too messy to distract the eye.

A study of twenty-eight tourism brochures for Wales also revealed that the covers were remarkably similar, most of them displaying one photograph of scenic imagery, blue images in particular.<sup>37</sup> Bluish covers are also naturally predominant on the Iceland brochure, since water (sea, lakes, and waterfalls) is a recurrent theme. The abundance of water is hardly surprising for a North Atlantic island destination characterized by fjords, lakes, and waterfalls. Indeed, many other cold-water islands also focus on water as an attraction.<sup>38</sup> Blue is also the colour of northern and cold regions, and Stefan Gössling concludes that this is manifested in Icelandic tourism promotional material (on this matter see also Daisy Neijmann in this volume):

The general image represented is that of a cold, unusual, majestic country, which is also the image reflected in books on Iceland, including titles such as *‘Lost in Iceland’*, *‘Magic of Iceland’*, *‘Wonders of Iceland’*, *‘Colours of Iceland’* or *‘Land of Light’*.<sup>39</sup>

This reflects what Oystein Jensen and Tor Korneliussen call perceptions of the overall North that are constituted by “an idea of wild and untouched nature with an ‘arctic’ climate and people living close to nature.”<sup>40</sup> Morgan and Pritchard have pointed out how a masculine landscape characterizes tourism imagery of the North. This is the image of an active, wild, and rough landscape that is connected to the themes of adventure, excitement, and exploration. In the South, however, feminine landscape (passive, sensual, waiting to be controlled) is more dominant in the tourism promotional material,

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<sup>36</sup> Hunter 2008: 360.

<sup>37</sup> Pritchard & Morgan 1995.

<sup>38</sup> Baum 1998.

<sup>39</sup> Gössling 2006: 122.

<sup>40</sup> Jensen & Korneliussen 2002: 325.

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especially in less powerful countries that are populated with First World tourists.<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, the cover of the Iceland brochure does not emphasize adventure and activity. Rather, a certain passive tone is dominant (see Figure 1). The gaze is often from a distance looking at calm water and landscape stretching, as it seems, infinitely, emphasizing scenic landscape ready for exploration. Bearing in mind that Iceland's volcanic landscape features large glaciers and numerous hot springs, it is surprising to note that glaciers, volcanoes, and geothermal places are not featured on the covers. As mentioned before, preservation of older copies of the Iceland brochure is sporadic, but it seems that both spouting volcanoes and geysers were more common features on brochure covers from the 1970s and early 1980s.

Cultural aspects are hardly visible on the Iceland brochure cover, and people perform, at best, a supporting role. At the same time, there has been an explosion in the supply of both cultural tourism products as well as opportunities for excitement and adventure. It should be noted that this study focuses only on the covers; hence, a content analysis of the brochures may present a somewhat different image than the one emphasized on the covers. Indeed, Gössling's analysis of information material (both from private companies and public authorities) on display in the tourist information centres in Reykjavík revealed "that Iceland seeks to market itself as an 'extreme' and 'different' destination."<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, Gössling notices that the capital area is presented in a very different way from the rest of Iceland. In the case of the city, culture and modernity is stressed, whereas

[for] the "rest of Iceland", pictures mostly depict landscape views, often aerial, ice formations, snow scooters, dogsleds, super jeeps, Northern lights, waterfalls, horses and whales. People shown usually wear sweaters or coats, often raincoats.<sup>43</sup>

This analysis of the front page of the Iceland brochure reveals a consistent emphasis on scenic nature. At first glance this image-

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<sup>41</sup> Morgan & Pritchard 1998.

<sup>42</sup> Gössling 2006: 122.

<sup>43</sup> Gössling 2006: 121.

making should be beneficial for image-making on a regional level since the whole country is characterized by scenic nature. In order to explore that national/regional relationship further in terms of destination promotion, we need to take a closer look at the covers of brochures promoting the regional destinations in Iceland as well as investigate how key players within the tourism sector in each region identify the destination image.

### Image-Making Closer to Home

The growing emphasis on regional destination marketing has certainly been the case in Iceland, resulting in the establishment of regional marketing bureaus around the country.<sup>44</sup> Their operating environment is based on that of the regional tourism associations established in the 1980s. Those regional tourism associations in turn were established according to the boundaries of electoral districts for the national elections at that time. Hence, it is fair to say that an institutional setup outside the tourismscape has been dominant in defining the regional tourist destinations in Iceland. Regardless of their origins as tourist destinations, those regions all have ambitions of enhancing their tourism activities and are operating, as all other tourist destinations, in an increasingly competitive environment.

The Icelandic Tourism Association (ITA) was established 1984 and is comprised of eight regional tourism associations, which in turn have individual memberships made up of both business people, municipalities, and the interested public. The regional tourism associations vary dramatically in their activities; some have been inactive for years, and others are instrumental in developing and promoting tourism in their area. The main purpose of both the regional tourism associations and the newly established regional marketing bureaus is to enhance regional visibility and promote the regions on the national and international markets.<sup>45</sup>

The ITA supervised publication of brochures for each region in the years 2005 and 2007 (some brochures were not published until 2008). A publishing agency designed a standardized format for all the

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<sup>44</sup> Huijbens & Gunnarsdóttir 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Huijbens & Gunnarsdóttir 2008.

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regions and drafted the content, which was then sent to each regional association for revision and approval. The publication of those brochures coincided with the establishment of the new marketing bureaus. In some cases, the regional tourism association had already been replaced by a marketing bureau, which was then responsible for the supervision of the brochure. The cover of the second round of the regional brochures (see Figure 2) is the subject of this study.



Figure 2. Front pages of the regional tourism brochures.

Interviews with key players in each region revealed that regional image-making has seldom been based on a systematic approach. Emphasis in the promotional material has mostly been negotiated on an informal basis and is based on what the key actors within the tourism sector in each region view as important elements of their product. Incidentally, respondents often find it difficult to describe the image of the destination they are promoting. Commonly, people stated that it was tricky to nail down the image of the region, and much work remained undone in terms of identifying key factors that could be appealing to the main target markets. Many interviewees talked about a weak image and complained about their region being more or less invisible in the Iceland Tourist Board's promotion. In recent years, a regional approach has actually become more apparent in the promotional material (brochures, websites, posters, etc.) published by the Iceland Tourist Board. However, the content of this representation has been decided upon solely at the national level. The interviews revealed that this frustrated the regional destination promoters and that they wanted to have more to say in the image-making process.

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At the same time, people were conscious about the regions' weak images, and some felt that the images promoted were in essence Iceland in a miniature; hence, nothing distinctive came to mind. In general, "diversity" was the first word that people mentioned when they were asked to describe the image of their region. When asked to explain this diversity further it became clear that it was first and foremost based on various descriptions of the Icelandic landscape and that the variety is such that it is almost complete. The key headings in the brochures are also in this spirit: "*All* you can desire," "Cross-section of *all* that is Iceland," "Experience *everything*," and "*World* of enchantment," just to name a few. The diversity of nature is prominently on display on all the brochure's covers (Figure 2) as well as in the introductory text inside the brochures:

East Iceland—a magical region of natural phenomena. Glaciers, forests, bird cliffs, vast expanses, deserts, majestic mountains and narrow fjords. Waterfalls, rivers and the sea. The ocean air and highland scents!<sup>46</sup>

South Iceland is a nature traveller's daydream, a sampling of all that is Iceland including some of the most treasured natural attractions.<sup>47</sup>

Regional imagery is not prominent on the covers, although selected natural icons of the region add some sense of locality. However, it is doubtful that the location of those natural wonders is universally known, except maybe in the case of west Iceland, where the glacier Snæfellsjökull is on display. Thus, there seems to be a limited effort to establish a strong regional destination image. An attractive destination is based on the whole community; hence it is the interaction of nature, culture, and lifestyles that creates a unique experience or perception for the tourist. The covers of the regional brochures, however, display pristine, untouched nature, an "empty" landscape, so to speak. This is by no means uncommon, and Morgan et al. note that there is a strong tendency to emphasize landscape rather than cultural attributes, posing the question: "Why do destination marketers so often ignore a place's unique cultural attributes in the rush to promote

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<sup>46</sup> Hlöðversson & Nielsen 2008a: 5.

<sup>47</sup> Hlöðversson & Nielsen 2008b: 3.

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sun, surf, and sand or lake, land and mountain?”<sup>48</sup> One answer is that physical aspects translate better into photographic images. The complexity of culture and society is more difficult to convey.

It is clear that promoters of many regions in Iceland feel that the characteristics of their regions have not been represented adequately in the national promotional material. This demonstrates some of the problems in representation and how complex the issue of destination marketing is. Tourism destinations are sold largely on image—the Icelandic image being one of a pure, raw environment—as well as emphasizing the promotion of Reykjavík as a modern city of high culture and with a vibrant nightlife. The covers of the regional brochures underline this clearly since only the brochure for the capital region has culture in the foreground (see Figure 2). Thus, in some ways we seem to end up with two Icelands: cultural capital and empty landscapes, neither of them representing the rural areas of Iceland as living communities and worthwhile destinations. Tourist facilities and infrastructure in rural areas are ignored or de-emphasized in order to promote a wild and pristine landscape. Not only does this image affect the way the local tourism actors present their product, it is also in stark contrast to their product development and emphasis on service delivery.

As Claudio Minca has pointed out, this is a pattern all too common in modern tourism marketing:

Tourist landscapes continue to be represented as objects, as simply a collection of endlessly reproducible images—all the while tourist mediators’ expend great time and energy in order to invest those images with meaning, to render them able to elicit emotions, sentiments and, above all, a sense of belonging.<sup>49</sup>

Destinations coexist on national, regional and subregional levels. Hence, the discourses of region and development that shape the identity of the destination take place on multiple levels as well. In the case of Iceland, the discourse of region does not comply very well

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<sup>48</sup> Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggot 2003: 297.

<sup>49</sup> Minca 2007: 439.

with the discourse of development, with the result that the identity of the regional destinations is unclear and confusing.

## Conclusion

It is increasingly important to understand how tourism reinforces and encourages particular ways of seeing and thinking. Promoted images affect the way the host population perceives itself and its environment.<sup>50</sup> In the case of Iceland, actors in regional tourism development seem to suffer from an identity crisis based on limited representation of the region in the national marketing material. The regional representation reflects very much the image promoted on the national level, which does not necessary comply with the emphasis on the region's product development and service delivery.

Much in the same way tourists are affected by repeated images and motives in tourism promotional material, regional tourism officers and tourism entrepreneurs are also receivers of those same images. Carla Santos has pointed out how travel writers constantly focus on similar items in their narratives, thus "they do not constantly create new representations but rather fall on previously established organizing narratives."<sup>51</sup> The interviews revealed that people felt that they were governed by a dominant narrative constructed on the national level and that the need for a more aggressive local initiative is pressing. So far the conceptualization of the regional tourist destinations seems to be rather limited, and the design of the brochure cover is primarily based on the selection of a photograph presenting an empty and pristine landscape that often seems to have little connection with the tourism supply of the region.

There is no dispute that nature is Iceland's primary tourist attraction, and it is certainly the focus of all promotion. However, the passive nature image presented in the national as well as the regional brochures has become rather static. Promotion is dynamic and multifaceted, so regions must complement but also distinguish themselves in the promotional material. The emphasis on passive nature images offers limited opportunities for development or

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<sup>50</sup> See for example Adams 2004 and Garrod 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Santos 2004: 123.

differentiation, therefore limiting regional destination development and promotion. The Iceland brochure cover presents a gaze from the distance, rendering an image of a slightly mysterious country far away in the bluish north. Static images of nature have been dominant, and the reflection of those images has in some ways been too bright and prevented the development of distinct regional destinations, resulting in the image of an “empty” and “groomed” Iceland for the tourists to explore—a corner of the universe waiting for the finishing touch.

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