

Italy as a brand.

A view of Italy's country brand through the gastronomic lens
in Helsinki.

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DEGREE THESIS	
Arcada	
Degree Programme:	International Business
Identification number:	16552
Author:	Cristina Munita L’Huissier
Title:	Italy as a brand. A view of Italy’s country brand through the gastronomic lens in Helsinki.
Supervisor (Arcada):	Christa Tigerstedt
Commissioned by:	
Abstract:	
<p>This thesis explores the topic of country branding. The aim of this thesis is to find the connections between a country and its brand, focusing on the relation between food and the country image and identity. Italy has been chosen as an example to describe a more in depth view about what is the image of this country representing. In order to have a complete and realistic understanding of the topic, the research explores an authentic example of an Italian restaurant in Helsinki, Finland.</p> <p>The methodology research consists on two parts. The first has been a reflective literature review surrounding the topic of country branding. Secondly, primary data for the empirical part has been collected following a qualitative orientation using interviews. To complement the interviews research, a questionnaire has been used to collect data from the customer’s point of view.</p> <p>As a result of this thesis the empirical and theoretical part have been able to be connected throughout a model presented in the theoretical part of this thesis. Furthermore, three main themes have been analysed and pointed out as most important in the Italian gastronomic sector in connection to the country branding.</p>	
Keywords:	Country branding, food and branding, Italy as a brand, gastronomic sector, Made in Italy.
Number of pages:	65 pages, 4 appendices
Language:	English
Date of acceptance:	

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INTRODUCTION

“Foreigners have been quick to spot the potential of anything associated with Italy and market it around the world. Italy reminds people of life’s pleasant things — art, music, good food, great wine, chic design and an enviable lifestyle.” (Severgnini, 2014, The New York Times).

Every country has a brand. This brand is not uniform or static. It is perceived differently from an individual to a country, culture, religion, etc. A country’s name has been built during years and centuries. It relates not only to an image or logo, but also to a set of values that many people stand for. A country’s image is powerful and strong, and many companies in different sectors have learned to use it as an added value for their products or services.

Italy is a known country that has a very strong brand surrounded its name. There are certain stereotypes that have transferred universally. Sectors such as design, gastronomy, furniture and tourism have known how to take advantage of these values and used Italy’s name as a brand.

On the other side, Finland is a country with a very different country brand than Italy. Its values, cultures, languages and stereotypes differ greatly from each other.

The food sector continues to attract millions of consumers and therefore, marketers are always interested in positioning themselves amongst the best brands. Finland’s food sector has gained reputation in the last decade and has suffered a profound cultural transformation. This is changing the Finnish consumer’s behaviours towards consumption and acquisition of food products and services. (Vesikansa, 2008; Suomi Finland 100, 2015).

Italy has a big presence worldwide, and despite the differences between countries, it continues having a strong presence in Finland throughout different markets. Therefore, the area of interest in this thesis is the study of the gastronomic and country branding of Italy and its perception in the Finnish market.

1.1 Research aim

The aim of this study is to describe and reflect on the Italian country brand and the gastronomic sector. This thesis aims to gain more insight into the phenomena of country branding through the gastronomic lens.

The research is based on theoretical and practical insights. This is done by studying an example from the existing Finnish gastronomic scene: Casa Italia, an Italian restaurant in Helsinki.

1.2 Research questions

The researcher aims to answer the following question:

1. How is the Italian country brand perceived through the gastronomic lens?

During the research study there are few sub questions that are aimed to be the guide towards a better understanding and helping answer the main question.

1. What is a country brand and how is it created? (Secondary data)
2. What is the relation between the gastronomic sector and the brand of a country?
3. What is the Italian country brand and its gastronomic sector? (Secondary data + primary data)

1.3 Methodology

In order to collect the data needed for answering the research question, two main different types of data are recognized. Both primary and secondary data are building and distinguishing at the same time two of the main blocks of this thesis.

Secondary data is based on literature research, which is formed by: news articles, scientific journals and books. This forms and bases the stepping point in chapters two and three.

1.3.1 Research method

The purpose of this research is to study the phenomena of country branding, and due to the nature of this study the methodology chosen is a qualitative one. Therefore, in this context a social phenomena is in the focus of the research, the qualitative approach offers a better understanding and closeness to the phenomena than a quantitative approach. “Qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live” (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002, p.3).

This thesis is a qualitative study with an abductive approach. This method of abduction refers to the process of moving from the way that social actors are describing their way of life, towards a social scientific description of that social life. This methodology consists on dividing the work into two stages: the first where the activities are described, and the second where categories and concepts are created in order to create a better understanding of the problem that is being studied. (Blaikie, 2004).

Therefore, the collection of data will be prior to the development of a final theory. It is a process that starts with theory researching in order to create an understanding of the field. Followed by an empirical study that alternates between theory and empirical facts where both act as a source of inspiration and enlightenment for the final results and discussion. (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2010).

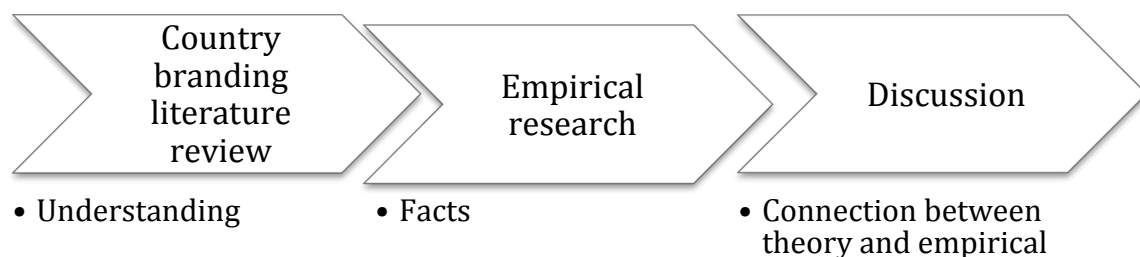


Figure 1 Thesis structure using abduction model (adapted from Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2010)

In order to answer research questions, the previous theoretical study will develop followed by the empirical research, and the conclusions will be drawn comparing the results of both areas.

1.4 Demarcation

The research focuses in the theoretical part on country branding and its characteristics in the gastronomic scene. More concretely, this study focuses on the Italian brand as a country and its view through the gastronomic lens.

The empirical part focuses on gathering data about the Italian brand through interviews and questionnaires. Moreover, there is a second interview conducted with a representative from the Finnish-Italian Chamber of Commerce in order to gather more insight from another perspective.

This study explores one of the main branches attributed to Italy's country brand, the food sector, and its specific presence in Finland. This study does not explore food brands present in the Finnish market for the general consumption; neither does it come up with deeper analysis on the overall Italian restaurants' scene present in Helsinki.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter aims to introduce the basic notions of brand and branding. Furthermore, the concept of country branding is presented. In the first part, branding as a concept needs to be defined and settled to later create the connection with the second approach, country and nation.

2.1 Branding and brand definition

Branding is a marketing concept that has been studied for decades. The definition of a brand has been related to a product or service since its early origins. Later on, the definition broadened its significance relating itself to countries, places or other more complex notions. For instance, the industry of tourism has been very interested in developing further this connection. (Kotler, Jatusripitak, & Maesincee, 1997). Decision makers have learned the powerful effect of potential brands in other sectors such as businesses, industry, politics and culture. Brands are more significant than a simple logo or an image. A brand can represent a culture, attitudes and stereotypes. A brand is also formed by the user's perceptions. (Dordevic, 2008).

In general, brand is a concept that has been attributed to two different areas. The first one, brand is related to the visual, verbal and conceptual elements that create the identity of a product or service. The American Marketing Association defines a **brand** as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.” (Kotler, 2012, p. 241). A brand is thus a product or service whose dimensions differentiate it in some way from other products or services designed to satisfy the same need.

The brand could be therefore, the way to distinguish one product or service from another. This need to distinguish the products from one another is a method that has been present in the society for centuries. The moment when people were selling and trading goods, they put trademarks symbols, in order to identify their products and proclaim its origin. (Kotler, 2012). During human history, branding has had a negative connotation by branding not only animals but also people. To identify slaves and also during the

World War II, Nazis used numbers to identify people in the concentration camps. Fortunately, the commercial side of branding has prevailed and the negative adoption of branding has been abandoned. (Landa, 2006).

On the other hand, there are broader definitions that address a brand as having an essence, being a symbol and providing authentication. These differences may be functional, rational, or tangible—related to product performance of the brand. They may also be more symbolic, emotional, or intangible—related to what the Brand represents or means in a more abstract sense. (Kotler, 2012).

Nowadays, as mentioned, brands are not only emphasising upon the product, but also concentrating more on the intangible and abstract aspects as described by different authors. As de Chernatony & McEnnaly (1999) argue; a brand is not simply a reference (unique functional benefits), or a personality (incorporated emotional values), but also an icon: it can be used to stand for something beyond itself. (Dordevic, 2008, p.61.).

2.1.1 Brand equity and brand management

The evolution of the brand concept has deeply affected the way businesses put in practice their branding strategies. The competitiveness existing nowadays in the global market demands that companies know how to manage their brands to achieve a major efficiency and profitability. To begin with, companies are responsible for knowing in the first place, the importance of their brand equity as well as, brand image, branding strategies and branding management. As it is discussed in the next section, there are common and different factors between the branding strategies used for companies and used for country branding.

As Philip Kotler defines it “**Brand equity** is the added value endowed on products and services. It may be reflected in the way consumers think, feel, and act with respect to the brand, as well as in the prices, market share, and profitability the brand commands.” (Kotler, 2012, p. 243).

The direct response of a brand is reflected by the consumer’s behaviours. “Brand equity is the differential effect that knowing the brand name has on customer response to the

product and its marketing.” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010, p. 260). This is the key concept from brand equity: the consumer’s response and behaviour.

When the point of view from the consumer is what matters respective to a brand, this can be defined as **customer-based brand equity (CBBE)**. This model addresses the concept of brand equity seen from the customer’s perspective. It is used as well to know how to create a strong brand. According to this model, the power of a brand lies in the minds of consumers or customers and what they have experienced and learned about the brand over time. (Keller, 2008).

However, to make sure the consumer’s brand image is the one corporations want to deliver to them, there must be an important coherence that brand management needs to take care of. “Brand management is the application of marketing techniques to a specific product, product line, or brand. It seeks to increase the product’s perceived value to the customer, and thereby increase brand franchise and brand equity” (Kapferer, 2008).

The ultimate goal of brand management is to create a coherent image of the brand in the consumer’s minds, no matter what or where the brand is placed. It is important to highlight the factor of maintenance through time and space. In order to achieve this goal, all marketing activities must be handled systematically homogeneously. Only value can be perceived and created through a strong and powerful brand management. “Branding strategy should not be seen as a formal design problem but rather a matter of deciding on the value flows to be created between the different parts and products of a company. The central issue is therefore the valuation of the offering, through the agency of the company itself.” (Kapferer, 2008, p. 354).

In the next section, the focus is on country branding since this is the main topic of interest in this thesis.

2.2 Country branding

“A nation’s brand image is its most valuable asset: it is national identity made robust, tangible, communicable, and – at its best – made useful.” (Anholt, 2005, p.187).

A country’s image has been evolving and changing since the beginning of its history. It is an image that is dynamic, developing and growing throughout time and space. This

image its influenced by many institutions, organizations and people. It is an image that is subjective to every person.

This image is related to the more intangible and abstract definition of the concept of brand. Therefore, the difficulty lies on the process of homogenising all these perceptions into one single brand. “A national image is the set of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person holds regarding a specific country.” (Kotler, 2001, p. 273).

Country branding is a concept that has emerged in the last decade. Countries and all actors involved in this complex concept of creating a brand for a country have been discussing the difficulties and controversies around this topic. According to Dinnie (2008) there is not enough literature about this complex topic where different actors and political influence create different viewpoints and opinions.

A country brand consists on both image and identity. “A national brand is a national identity that has been proactively distilled, interpreted, internalised and projected internationally in order to gain international recognition and to construct a favourable national image” (Deloire, 2000, quoted in Dordevic, 2008, p. 65).

2.2.1 Corporate branding and country branding

There is a lot of controversy about the comparison between corporate branding and country branding. There are similarities between both of them as well as big differences. It should be reminded that each area is to be treated with respect and within their own boundaries.

Similarities

Many people might be in disagreement with this comparison between nation branding and corporate/commercial branding. They can claim that the second is too superficial, it has the purpose of creating direct benefits for the company in financial terms and it creates a superfluous and insignificant relationship. However, the truth is that brands are the bridge of connection between the company and the final customer. There is a sense behind them and a strategy that is well thought to find this connection and hopefully trigger the emotional side of customers. The reality is that brands can give this sense of

belonging; they create an identity and provide real emotional value to some people. (Dordevic, 2008; Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Kapferer, 2008).

Wally Olins (1999) is one of the earliest researchers of country branding and has pointed out the fact that nations and companies are similar to each other. With the changes in globalization, companies are taking advantage of “nation-building techniques” with the purpose of being coherent and more involve in society.

Companies want to create brand loyalty not only with their customers but also with their own employees, business partners, investors and suppliers. All actors involved in any business activity want to reach a higher loyalty level to their brand than their competitors. In order to reach their objective, they strategically create a brand, a mission, a vision, a story to believe in, symbols and their own language. These elements are very similar to those that want to create a country brand. They use their own history, their culture and language, their own symbols and myths. The ultimate purpose in country branding is to strengthen the sense of belonging of their people. This feeling might be easier to identify and claim in country branding, however, is not so far away from what many companies would like to have with customer loyalty. Trying to engage customers with their brands, not only by increasing their sells but giving back to the customer is the objective of creating a close bond within customer and company. The brand will be the symbol identifying this relationship. (Olins, 1999).

Differences

Nowadays, products and companies are changing in a very fast speed. Customers do not have time to acknowledge and create a meaningful relationship with the all brands and products they are using. As Frost (2004) states in (Dordevic, 2008, p. 66), products can change, be modified and moved away from the markets very easily. However, places are not as freely replaceable or modified as products. The image of a place is not as easily changed and it could take a long process to do so.

One of the complexities of country branding is the difficulty to change its image and to “re-brand” a country might be an arduous challenge. Countries are more limited in changing their brand and image compared to corporations. Companies can be built in a

very short time as fast as they can be disappeared and forgotten, or be long lasting companies that survive through decades and generations of people. The same happens with their products.

Nonetheless, countries cannot change their image and brand from one day to another. Countries do not change their names, they do not merge, disappear or born in a matter of days. History and politics have shown that the world is a place that is constantly changing, but in another path and speed than the business world. However, is not an impossible task to re-brand a country's image. There are examples of countries such as Spain, which have been very successful refining their image as a country. It is needed a big brand management work between all institutions that are part of this, not only one agency can do the job. All actors must be involved in order to create a new message that the exterior world will capture as one homogenous figure. (Olins, 2002).

Swedish researchers like Lind (2012) have also questioned if the brand of Sweden is affected and perceived differently by the impact of the media. In particular, one of their studies '*Sweden beyond the Millennium and Stieg Larsson*' researches about the influence of the Stieg Larsson's Millennium books to the image of Sweden as a country. Due to the success of these stories, the interest in Sweden was affected by an increased interest in the country. They state that culture exerts a great influence on how people perceive a place, and this connection represented in the books depends on how close the reality is adjusted to the literature. Their study concludes affirming the impact that these stories have had on the image of Sweden by becoming a marketing strategy that have attracted more tourism, has opened a dialogue and visibility through discussions about their society and the topics presented in the books, and in general has created a greater awareness about Sweden. (Lind, 2012).

Therefore, the relationship between corporate and country branding is present throughout similarities and differences. Both sciences require an understanding of their own purposes, goals and definitions in order to achieve their goals. Country branding is therefore influence and affected by many different fields and actors.

2.2.2 The national brand dimensions

Most country brands can be segmented into different dimensions. Anholt is recognized as one of the world's leading authorities on the topic of country branding. Anholt (2003) defined a hexagonal dimension system for classifying the different dimensions forming a national brand. This model consists on six different elements surrounding the centre where brand strategy (country brand) is created and fed by all its dimensions.

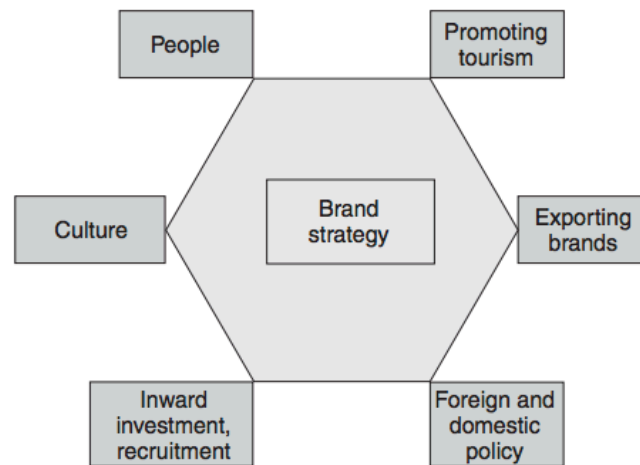


Figure 2 The national brand hexagon. (from Anholt, 2003, p.118)

People. National branding must start from the nation itself. The people who belong to this country should feel related to this identity and it is best when it is also created from the people inside the country. They will understand better which image they want to show to the outside world and its most representative features, its people behaviours, culture and all the other aspects that matter.

Culture. It represents the essence and the core meaning of a country. It is one dimension that lasts in time carrying the values, images and story of a country throughout its history. It represents change and perpetuation at the same time.

Investment. This financial dimension worries about the benefits that every country receives from external investors. For this to happen, they need to be attractive as well as offer high quality in their products and services.

Tourism. This dimension is the most visible of a country brand and it is usually the main marketing tool at a national level.

In reference to Italy, Dordevic (2008) states that the tourism dimension in Italy represents the 4th biggest export industry in the world. More specifically, Italy has consolidated its position at 5th place in arrivals and 6th place in earnings in 2014, which represent nearly 50 million people.¹

Exporting. This dimension has been notably of interest in the last decade where the economical situation of many countries has suffered from a big crisis. In this context, the competitiveness of the exports has increased and been affected by the crisis. Countries want to remain competitive and increase their exports.

Foreign and domestic policy. The leaders of every country give and send an image to the external world that needs to be in accordance to its own country brand. The values that are transmitted are being judged and is the task of the diplomats and politicians to also take responsibility of the country's image they are representing.

The main characteristic and success in this model relies on its attempt to measure and rank a country's reputation as a whole, not just focusing in one single dimension. In this sense, a country's brand can be described and addressed in these six different dimensions making a more coherent and comprehensible description of a country's image.

Fan (2005) on the other hand, has a particular view about the complexion of country branding. He disagrees on the scope of country branding defining three concepts: "product related, national level and cultural focus." (Fan, 2005, p. 6) Accordingly, he does not put much focus on dimensions such as culture stating that "Other terms such as national identity and cultural stereotypes have little direct implication in branding or marketing because they have a clear focus on the culture and people of a nation". (Fan, 2005, p. 6).

Therefore, in the researcher's opinion, comparing the different theories exposed above, Anholt's model is more complete and broader. It exposes and emphasizes on one of the most relevant dimensions, culture, that are important for the overall branding of a coun-

¹ www.world-tourism.org (Organization)

try. In this thesis, this is one of the most important dimensions and is therefore being further investigated in the coming chapters.

2.3 Gastronomy and branding

Gastronomy is an important cultural representation of any country, and can be a strategic asset in terms of marketing and branding that should not be ignored. Food is very important and different in each and every culture, and it represents more than the food-stuff itself. When talking about gastronomy and food it illustrates a lifestyle, an interaction between people, an excluding factor from a group or sector of people, it creates a symbolism around itself. (Maynadier, 2014). In this thesis, it has been therefore chosen to look at the phenomena of country branding through the gastronomic lens.

Gastronomy as a concept has been developed and defined through centuries involving the study of food and drinks. The etymological definition of the word itself is separated into *gastro*; which relates to the stomach and the whole digestive system, and *nomos*; which means rule or regulation. Starting its first use as a word and concept per se, gastronomy was early developed in Greece, in the 4th century BC by the Sicilian Greek Archestratus, who wrote a book being consistent with the etymology of the word. (Santich, 2004).

Since the first record and use of the concept of gastronomy, its development stands out during the 19th century as an important period. The European history and evolution started to outline the relevance of gastronomy creating the first journal of gastronomy, by Grimod de la Reynière in 1804, and many other publications started to appear. (Santich, 2004).

Throughout the history and the present, “They suggest that the focus of gastronomy is not the material substance of food and drink, but rather...the how, where, when and why of eating and drinking...To the extent that the act of consumption is a convivial rather than a solitary activity, gastronomy extends to sociability and communication.” (Santich, 2004, p. 17).

In the contemporary field of gastronomy, the definitions still have the concepts of food and drinks in their core, but they have added a new perspective that want to know *how*, *where* and *why* the act of eating and preparing food takes place. With these questions, not only definitions and practices are being involved but also values and traditions are being connected. Culture, social and historical aspects of food and eating are related. (Santich, 2004).

2.3.1 Food branding in relation to country branding

Food culture refers to a complex transformation of the raw materials, in this case food products, into an “eating situation” and a processed product that has transformed itself in a valuable way. Food culture becomes a tool to gather people around it, share values and create a way of self-expression. Therefore, the value of food goes beyond its nutritional purpose and is one of the oldest tools and cultural human expression. (Tellström, 2011).

The study of gastronomy engages an assortment of disciplines. Gastronomy and food have a strong relation with the image of a city, country and nation. “It is argued that the effective positioning of the identity of food can become a powerful tool in marketing and branding a destination” (Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2009, p. 35).

There are authors researching into the concept of city branding and it is said that the relation of food linked to geographically areas has existed since the times where food started to be sold in markets. Tellström (2011) mentions specifically the time when the relation between food and drinks became a branding tool was back to 1851, when the Great Exhibition in London took place and pointed out the beginning of the industrialization era.

On the other hand, authors such as Berg and Sevón (2014) state that this relationship has not been studied in depth leaving a non-theoretical framework around the questions ‘why’ and ‘how’ this relation is being formed. They have carried on a study that aim to find answers to this topic, and their conclusions are that “The character of a place does not only affect the experience of food and gastronomy in that place, but also food and

gastronomy is -directly and indirectly- affecting the character of the place and its brand-image”. (Berg & Sevón, 2014).

In this sense, “if one is to understand the means and mechanisms in place branding through food, it is not enough to describe the direct and official branding activities, but also the indirect, informal and in many cases independent activities and events that makes up the totality of the way in which a city communicates itself to its audience.” (Berg & Sevón, 2014)

In this thesis, the second dimension presented above by Anholt (2003), culture, is mainly represented and studied as mentioned through the lens of gastronomy. Particularly, this research focuses on how culture is perceived when looking at Italy in the Finnish context.

2.3.2 Regional food branding

One of the theoretical concepts that Tellström (2011) discusses is the association between country-of-origin and marketing; he sustains the notable relation between a country and its food. “It is impossible to think of food products without also thinking of their origin or relationship to places, people or other status-related definitions.” (Tellström, 2011, p.63) With this statement, the link between food and a country, a nation or a specific area is recognized.

Tellström (2011) has as well drawn attention to the regional identity. He explains that there is competition in a global market in a similar way where smaller areas compete between each other. (Heldt-Cassel, 2003 in Tellström, 2011, p. 65) “The stimulation of the senses is an important factor, not only in attracting capital to a region and encouraging tourists to travel, but also in making people proud of the area in which they live.” (Tellström, 2011, p. 65).

In the food sector, there are many actors involved such as producers of different sizes, the whole hospitality industry, tourism sector, etc. Every single one of the actors in-

volved has a different view and interest in relation with food and gastronomy. They have as well different audiences, and therefore, the message they send to them, can be conflicting or very different from each other. (Berg & Sevón, 2014).

There are several bodies that can benefit from an already existing region that has been branding itself. In the first place, there are restaurants and hospitality businesses, which aim to take advantage from this region by identifying themselves with it. On the other hand, the food producers profit from the values related to the area. The message is a combination of values, historical background and food culture that characterizes the region. This message can act as guide for the food culture of this region reinforcing its profile. (Tellström, 2011). “Branding linked to a place, region or city is a work of fiction in which certain elements are under communicated and other elements are emphasized, particularly those elements which the entrepreneur considers to be relevant for the consumer.” (Tellström, 2011, p. 68).

The recipients of these messages are the customers. These can be divided into the touristic customers from the restaurants, food shops, wineries, farms, etc. and the local people from this region. And at the same time there is a differentiation between domestic tourists and international ones. (Tellström, 2011).

The relation between food and place is stated as “obviously implicit and explicit”. In the first place, the natural environment; where products physically come from and secondly, their qualities, creating a final product with determinate qualities. This relation becomes important depending to the attention given by the consumers and producers. In addition, there are the stereotypes and images that people have attributed to the traditions and origins where a product comes from. (Askegaard & Kjeldgaard, 2007).

In this thesis the “obvious relation” between food and place, stated above, offers another point of view since the study focuses on Italy as a brand and its gastronomic sector in another country, in Finland. Therefore, the brand ‘Made in Italy’ is viewed in another context where the environment, different from the country of origin, has an influence on the perception of the country brand.

2.3.2.1 Regional and local food promotion

Askegaard and Kjeldgaard (2007) introduce a different view on how globalization has played a major role in the homogenization of cultures and diffusion of local cultures. In their research they state that globalization can lead to a self-reflection that consumers will realize in order to engage with their own cultural identities. “The local cultural capital can be applied in any context where such capital exists” (Askegaard & Kjeldgaard, 2007, p.139).

In their study, they remark the advantages of local producers and the challenges and benefits of a local food culture. They affirm that having the local culture capital, they can explore these values and create a sustainable local business and culture. Highlighting the power and importance of culture per se, “culture can therefore play a key role in economic and welfare development. This insight may inspire policy makers and industry to focus on local cultural resources...”. (Askegaard & Kjeldgaard, 2007, p. 145) “The supply side of a destination, such as travel agencies, special interest groups, official and nonofficial organizations, national and regional governments, hospitality and tourism businesses, should act in coordination to provide a clear promise, such as authentic local cuisine or local experience, to the intended markets.” (Anholt, 2007 quoted in Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2009, p. 43).

2.3.3 Food and tourism

Talking about food and country differentiation, the study of tourism trends is inevitable since the vast majority of studies related to food and country branding are related to the industry of tourism. (Berg & Sevón, 2014) However, this relation between food, culture and tourism, has been only recognized by researchers, governments and the industry since the mid- 1990s. (du Rand & Heath, 2006).

In order to attract more tourists, many places have decided to create a stronger relation between food and marketing, with the purpose of strengthen at the same time their tourism. Many researchers point out the success of any tourism strategy that relies as well

on the food of the place and their sustainable competitiveness (du Rand & Heath, 2006 quoted in Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2009, p. 31).

Tourism tries to promote and demarcate each country and city with certain aspects that make them recognizable and attractive to tourists. Branding a city or country through its food culture, pretends to not only attract more tourism, but create an image by itself that describes and attract the people who live there as well. “Food and meals are also used to attract investment, strengthen a sense of local identity among citizens and mobilize local stakeholders” (Berg & Sevón, 2014, p. 6).

Lockie (2001) mentions that food is as well interrelated to other aspects of a place such as culture and social aspects, and this means that symbolic meaning is as well present in this relationship between the concepts. (Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2009). Therefore, food can be used as a powerful tool to emphasize the social characteristics about a place and at the same time strengthen the branding of a place. “The food of a given place could serve as a cognitive cue in activating destination brand-relevant information retrieval” (Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2009).

There are other strategies that cities or countries are using actively to brand their identity in relation to food. All sort of events such as festivals, fairs and exhibitions related to food or architectural or spatial city transformations such as the creation of food markets or transformation of food halls. “Food can also be used as an element of a destination branding strategy and then as a way to contribute to an atmosphere attractive to visitors.” (Berg & Sevón, 2014, p. 6).

What all these activities have in common is the promotion through food of a country brand and image. This relation is undeniable when directly or indirectly this country image is created with the help of food and gastronomy itself or as a part of culture. (Berg & Sevón, 2014).

It is clear that the food culture has increased thanks to the collaboration and increased visibility of journalists and bloggers on the Internet. It is recommended to all the actors, stakeholders and organizations involved in creating an image of a place or destination,

create coherent messages to ensure successful marketing. Communication should be strengthening between all the parts implied in using food to promote these places. (Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2009)

This section of the research concludes about the importance and clear relationship between different aspects of a country in creating its country brand, image and identity. Culture and food have been underlined and in the next section it is highlighted the construction of Italy as a brand, its culture, food sector and gastronomy identity. For this thesis it is important to emphasize as well, the context and environment where country branding is studied: the Italian brand in the Helsinki food scene.

3 'MADE IN ITALY'. THE BRAND OF A COUNTRY

In the present chapter the focus is on the presentation of Italy as one of the strongest countries in country branding. The concept of “Made In” is introduced and the Italian food industry and food gastronomy is described. This is necessary to include since it helps contextualizing and understanding the empirical research of this thesis that focuses on a real Italian restaurant in Helsinki.

3.1 Italian facts and culture

Italy has a population of a bit over 60 million inhabitants, becoming the fourth nation most populated in Europe. Among the most developed countries, Italy has the 4th largest economy in Europe and 9th in the world. (CIA, 2015). The country is well known for its industry in various business sectors such as high-quality automobile, fashion, industrial and furniture design, and its innovative and competitive agricultural sector. Its economical structure consists on small and medium-sized enterprises where the traditional family owned are still in the core of Italian infrastructure. (USDA, 2014).

The culture represents one of the most distinctive aspects of any country. A culture has been built for years and centuries of history, and it is changing over time. It definitely shapes people, cities and history. It is crucial to understand the aspects that represent a country by its culture and traditions.

According to Hofstede (1980), there is a model consisting on six variables that helps to describe the culture of any country. This model is formed by:

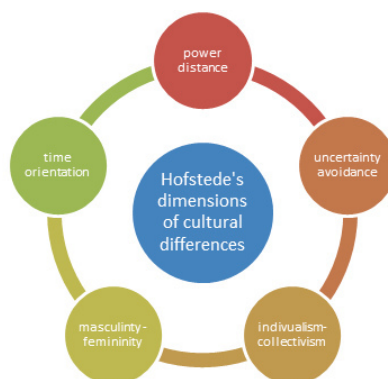


Figure 3 Cultural Dimensions. Adapted from (Hofstede G. , 1980)

Each of these dimensions represent one big important part of a country's culture. Applying this model to the Italian culture, the results show that the dimensions, which are more representative of its culture, are the 'Individualism', 'Masculinity' and 'Uncertainty'. (Hofstede, 2015).

Italy is a country where 'Individualism' is more present in its society. They do look after their individual person and families as well, and in general it is a country where the family has a very important role. This can be seen and represented on their business traditional structure, where family owned companies and small-sized enterprises are the base of the Italian economy in many sectors, food being one of them. Small producers and distributors are a big representation of the structure and character of the food sector.

Italy is very "masculine" country according to this dimension that measures power, competition and success. It can be related to the previous dimension where the centre of the focus is the person. The way that a "masculine" society acts is by showing off their best belongings. This aspect is represented on the behaviour of Italian people and their priorities on showing and possessing design products, clothes and high quality in general.

"In Italy the combination of high 'Masculinity' and high 'Uncertainty Avoidance' makes life very difficult and stressful. To release some of the tension that is built up during the day Italians need to have good and relaxing moments in their everyday life, enjoying a long meal or frequent coffee breaks. Due to their high score in these dimension Italians are very passionate people: emotions are so powerfully that individuals cannot keep them inside and must express them to others, especially with the use of body language." (Hofstede; 2015).

The culture of this country is a basic fragment that forms a country's brand. (Anholt, 2007). It becomes the centre of understanding for researchers, politicians and businesses. The basic trades defining the culture of Italy are defining their people and traditions. Therefore, it is in the best interest of all actors involved with this country or its activities, to understand the origins, culture and behaviour of its nation. A country's brand should capture the essence of all its dimensions and trying to condensate them into one unique image. This task might be challenging, however, the more the influential people,

leaders and managers try to understand the representative features of a country the better the connection will be later.

3.2 Country of origin: 'Made in Italy' as a brand

Stakeholders have started to understand and use the concept of country branding in order to become more competitive. In this fierce globalise context, the markets are difficult to enter and it is challenging to differentiate one from the other. This is applicable for businesses and countries. Country branding helps and gives value, for instance, to each country's exports, tourism industry and investments. (Anholt, 2007).

Country of origin (COO) is a concept, within the country branding approach, that has an important influence on the customer's perceptions and purchasing behaviours. Country of origin is the theory used to describe where products or goods come from and includes agriculture, manufacturing or production. Nowadays, the concept of "Made In" makes reference and its related to the same approach. (FutureBrand, 2014).

FutureBrand is one of the leader companies in brand consultancy, which has dedicated an important attention to this topic of "Made In". One of their reports (FutureBrand, 2014) studies the customer's responses and perceptions about this theory. Their conclusions show that customers, indeed, are influenced and "Made In" affects their purchasing behaviour as well as their perception about the country of origin. They found with their study that COO is a driver of consumer's behaviour where the country of manufacturing is very important for the consumer's choice. (FutureBrand, 2014).

Another interesting fact resulting from their report is that consumers had a clear image about countries with a stronger brand. More specifically, Italy ranks in their study as second in the food and beverage sector. This factor affirms the importance of Italy as a brand and its perception in their gastronomic sector.

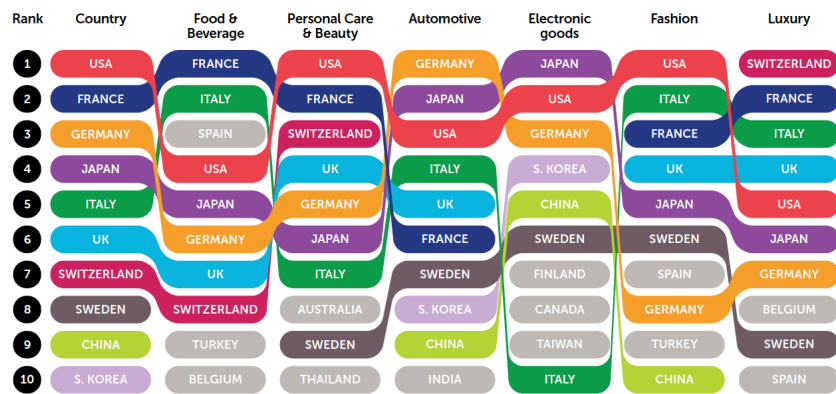


Figure 4 Rankings across industry sectors. (Retrieved from www.futurebrand.com/, 2014)

While developing country branding theory it is crucial to understand the positioning of the country in the minds of the customers. It is clear that a country seen as having a stronger brand and higher position will have a deeper impact on people's minds. (FutureBrand, 2014).

The concept 'Made in Italy' has been present and in used since 1980. It refers to the country of origin, in this case Italy, where products or goods are coming from. This general concept has become a brand that the manufacturing sector is using to identify them and give their own products a stamp of value. The main manufacturing fields that are using this concept are the traditional sectors of fashion, food, furniture and mechanical engineering. (Made in Italy, 2015).

There is an existing Italian law, since 2009, which states that only products totally made in Italy (planned, manufactured and packaged) are allowed to use the labels *Made in Italy*, *100% Made in Italy*, *100% Italia*, in every language, with or without the flag. This law is willing to prevent from abuses, that the Italian law will punish them. (Made in Italy, 2015).

The purpose of this certification and brand has been empowered by many manufacturers willing to take participation in this identification process. They have seen the power of the added value when the exports and distribution have increased thanks to a higher exposure. The final goal is to create a stronger relationship with the customer where trans-

parency, trust and reliability are given to them, expecting in return their customer's loyalty.

3.3 Italian gastronomic identity

Italy has been able to create one of the most powerful identities surrounding the name of the country, and is ranked number two in the food industry by a study made on country brand image (FutureBrand, 2014). This image is defined and associated very strongly to its cultural background. The long historical heritage and arts are well known around the world being the country with the highest number of sites included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. (UNESCO, 2016) However, their famous "Italian lifestyle" or so called "la dolce vita" ("the sweet/good life") point out, as well, their strong tradition in their gastronomic sector. (Squires, 2010).

This sector has known around the world and words such as 'pasta', 'pizza', 'parmesan' are in most of culture's everyday lives. (Montanari, 2010). Beyond the typical Italian products, there are values and concepts that have made this sector famous, consistent and powerful. This section intends to highlight those concepts and understanding of their permeability throughout countries and cultures.

3.3.1 Tradition

Italian food is one of the essential definers of Italian culture. Its food is linked to its regions, markets, people and lifestyle. Even though the speed of life has changed over the last decades, new technologies have entered our lives; the traditions and cultural symbols that are related to Italy and its food are still valid and alive. (Montanari, 2010).

There is a huge importance of the way the food is consumed in Italy. Families, friends and colleagues have food as a priority in their lives and schedules. Food has the power to shape the lifestyle alike any other culture. Having food means to share and enjoy it. And these factors together shape the Italian culture. (Liu, 2015).

The identity can be described as "...is not inscribed in the genes of a people or in the ancient history of their origin, but is constructed historically through the day-to-day dy-

namic exchanges between individuals, experiences and different cultures.” (Montanari, 2010, p. 14).

Several sectors and aspects may define Italian culture. Italy might be perceived as one nation or cultural identity outside its borders, however, Italy is nothing like a single unit, is comprised by a multiplicity of characterising factors. For instance, the language cannot be described as one unique Italian language. Across Italy, the Italian language takes a different shape of thousand of dialects. (Montanari, 2010).

The culinary identity of Italy is similar to its language; it is diverse and rich in each of the 23 Italian regions. However, there are common products that unify the country and have built the Italian cuisine known around the world. The supreme connector of all Italians is pasta. Everywhere along the country people eat pasta in different shapes, colours, fresh or dry, and with different sauces. Pasta was the food for the poorest, made with cheap foods and always by hand, was able to feed everybody in the families during war times. It has prevailed as the number one food product consumed along and breath the country. What once was a luxury, can be found in every supermarket at an affordable price. (Montanari, 2010).

Many big brands and marketers have learned how to explode the Italian products using the image of “family business producing authentic food in the heart of the Italian countryside”. (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 3) An example is the Italian food brand Bertolli, founded in Tuscany over 100 years ago. Nowadays, this brand is not in Italy anymore since it was taken over by British-Dutch multinational Unilever in 2004. The importance of their brand strategy relies on paying attention to every single detail from their packaging to their use of only fresh ingredients without additives or preservatives.

Moreover, targeting their customers is essential to know how to address a proper message. Bertolli’s customer can be described as “anyone, families, people who enjoy eating and cooking and for whom good food is important...For such a customer authenticity and quality are very important” (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 5).

The role of the producers, restaurants and Italian distributors is to communicate, advertise and show a high quality consistency throughout the entire food sector. The customers recognize Italian products and food service and they want to meet their expectations in order to be successful and keep the brand of ‘Made in Italy’ within a high reputation and higher standards.

3.3.2 Quality

Italy has become the European country with the largest number of products that are PDO or GPI certified.² These certifications have been created by the European Union in order to protect and promote its typical products. Marino & Nobile (2007) state that “Certification and brand provide consumers with a set of indications regarding not only the product origin, but also the relevant production processes and other aspects, including safety, environmental and ethical aspects, all of which constitute the core of the quality concept”. (Marcarello, Pinto, Parise, Crovato, & Ravarotto, 2014, p.176).

Marcarello, *ed al.* (2014) investigate the aspects that delineate the quality of food products from the perspective of Italian consumers. This particular research evaluated nine features related to quality. In their research they state that the ‘brand’ appears to contribute with ‘reliability’ to the choice of products, especially during a recession time where they seemed to trust more the Italian products. One of their findings is that “consumers appear to be extremely diffident with regard to food quality. This is especially true in Italy, where 82% of consumers say that they are concerned about food quality”. (Marcarello, Pinto, Parise, Crovato, & Ravarotto, 2014, p. 176).

In the case of Italy and as one of the factors included in this study, the ‘perception of quality’ as a concept is related to other important concepts such as ‘place of production’ and ‘cultural traditions’. The relation between quality and culture becomes one more time a reality in the food industry, where food cannot be separated from its culture and the country of origin. The result, from the study mentioned above, shows that there is a growing interest in the origin of the products, and that the certifications provide the consumer with important information about this aspect and more social aspects. (Marcarello, Pinto, Parise, Crovato, & Ravarotto, 2014).

² PDO (Protected Designation of Origin), PGI (Protected Geographical Indication)

Communication and information about the product becomes extremely important in the food sector. They provide the customers with inputs about the products that will influence strongly their choices. Not only is this crucial for the customers, but for the direct impact and influence on the markets and companies that deal with food as their primary source of business. They need to learn which factors are influencing customers and how can they make their products more valuable and competitive. (Marcarello, Pinto, Parise, Crovato, & Ravarotto, 2014).

Therefore, quality is one of the most important characteristics that define the Italian food industry and its products. This key element has been able to define its food products and has helped to strongly differentiate themselves from their competitors. The Italian food sector relies on quality as one of their crucial factors to compete in international markets and be able to face new challenges.

3.4 Italian food industry

The Italian food and beverage industry is one of the main driving forces of the country. There are several institutions that are working together with the aim of protecting their products, maintaining their quality and delivering all these values through their exporting network. According to figures of 2013, the foodstuff accounted a 5,1% of the total exports of Italy. This represents a total of 25,6 billion in the food industry exports.³

Federalimentare is the Italian food and drink industry federation representing the second manufacturing industry of Italy. Confagricoltura (the General Confederation of Italian Agriculture) is the organization that represents and protects Italian agricultural enterprises. The main aim of these organizations is to empower all the enterprises that form this industry under one big umbrella, where coherence and quality are the ethics that investors are interested in. As discussed in the previous chapter, the brand ‘Made in Italy’ helps achieving a common image and reputation within this industry.

³ OEC <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/ita/#Exports>

Around the world, the Italian cuisine and food sector has been spread and recognized thanks to their most typical and characteristic products such as pasta, pizza, wine and many more. This acknowledgement has brought recognition and empowerment of the traditional and characteristics of Italian gastronomy.

On the other hand, its popularity has brought falsification in a way that everywhere around the world Italian cuisine and food can be found, but a big percentage of this industry does not have the 'Made in Italy' stamp on it. It has become so popular that authenticity is not always recognized by the customers, neither respected by some companies.

“Many so-called Italian products are not even designed or made in Italy. America imports just \$2 billion in Italian food goods a year, but “Italian-sounding” goods in the United States are worth \$20 billion. And that’s just the food sector. Around the world, the figures are \$54 billion, against \$23 billion in exports.” (Severgnini, 2014, The New York Times).

The political and the financial situation are affecting this sector as well as many other areas. In the last years the economical crisis that has been suffered in the majority of Europe, has affected the exports of Italian food and beverages sector deteriorating the profit margin, whereas the general demand has remained stable. Moreover, the Italian food industry also benefits from a generally non-cyclical nature and the 'Made in Italy' cachet that boosts export growth. (Atradius, 2014).

Despite the fact that this sector is deep-rooted into traditional trends and behaviours, the last trends that have been seen in the market are a change towards sustainability and a growth for organic products. It seems to be a moment where “the focus on country of origin products has increased, particularly those associated with a specific region, as seen as a hallmark of quality and authenticity. This is not so much due to an aggressive desire to reject foreign products, but rather stems from the high quality of fresh and processed food (cheese, ham, wine, etc.) produced in Italy and from the central role that Italian cuisine occupies in the national culture. It appeals to a deep-seated desire to connect with traditional roots – regional produce is seen as more culturally authentic, 'natu-

ral', and better tasting. Whilst this is particularly true of traditional specialities such as *Parma* ham and buffalo mozzarella (which are frequently protected by geographical indications), the force of this preference extends, to some degree, to most products on the supermarket shelves. As Italy's system of food safety controls is perceived by consumers as very comprehensive, Italian food is also often seen as being 'safer' than imported alternatives.” (New Zealand Trade & Enterprise, 2014, www.nzte.govt.nz).

3.5 Future prospective

One of the trends inside this sector that is still growing is the online selling of Italian food and beverage products with the brand 'Made in Italy'. According to a study made in 2014 by the Observatory of e-commerce in Milan⁴, the figures about the e-commerce presence in Italy were showing an important fact, this business model has been increasing exponentially in the last years and it will continue growing. Moreover, the gastronomic Italian products have experienced a growth of 23% respect to 2013. (Leonardis, 2014).

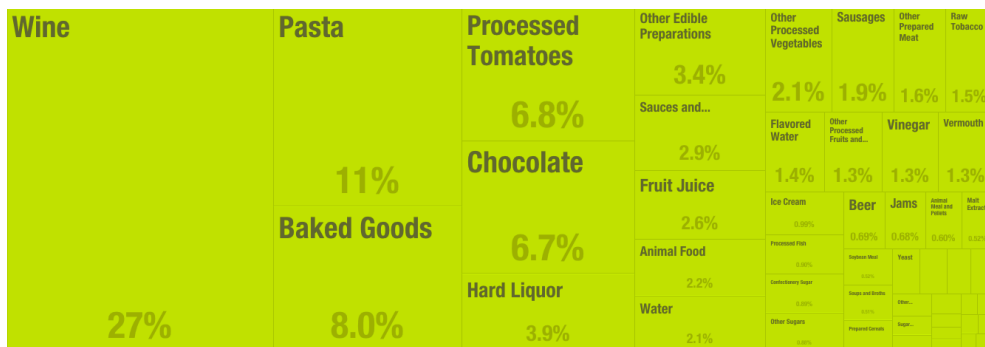


Figure 5 The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC, 2015, <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/ita/>)

The future of Italian food sector and gastronomy has a good prospect for the future referring to their past decades successful growth and establishment. However, it will be interesting to see if their main values such as tradition, culture and high quality continue being the values that attract customers or if they will lead a new change that will reshape the Italian food culture and the answer its market.

⁴ L'Osservatorio eCommerce B2c http://www.osservatori.net/e-commerce_b2c

4 EMPIRICAL PART

This section starts with the contextualization of the empirical study, which takes place in the Finnish gastronomic scene. Followed by this introduction, this chapter is divided into two main sections; the description of the method used to collect the data and the analysis realized of this data.

In order to have a clear understanding, a short introduction is preceding the two main sources of empirical data: Casa Italia and the Finnish-Italian Chamber of Commerce. This introduction aims to establish a clear background before the description of the data collected from the field.

4.1 The context for the empirical study: Finnish gastronomic scene

The focus of this section is on the location and where the Italian gastronomic sector is studied in another environment and context. The empirical part of this thesis focuses on an Italian restaurant located in Helsinki, Finland. Therefore, an introduction and contextualization is needed for the understanding of the next phases of this study.

The Finnish gastronomic scene has been going through a profound change in the last decades. Due to economical changes and the increase of immigration into Finland, its landscape has changed into a new society where many nationalities are learning how to coexist. The food sector is one of the cultural aspects of a country that changes over time, especially when socio segmentation changes are occurring. (Vesikansa, 2008; Suomi Finland 100, 2015).

The landscape of Finnish gastronomy has change from its variety in the hospitality area, where many ethnical restaurant and grocery shops have flourished within the last decades. As were as many new products are occupying the shelves of Finnish grocery stores and becoming common for Finnish people. Nowadays, the region of Helsinki counts with 1475 restaurants (Tilastokeskus, 2016) which approximately 42 of them are Italian restaurants. (Fonecta, 2016).

Finland has done its job trying to create its own image and identity in the gastronomic sector. Nowadays websites such as “Ruokatieto.fi” (Ruokatieto, 2016) work with the only purpose to inform, create and present a Finnish food culture. They have also promoted a Finnish brand label *Hyvää Suomesta*. Which is a designation of origin of Finnish packaged foods. (Hyvää Suomesta, 2016).

In the next section, the empirical study is described and contextualized in the Finnish food scene focusing on an Italian restaurant located in Helsinki. Therefore, the study focuses on the Italian brand through the gastronomic lense.

4.2 Empirical data collection

4.2.1 Interview data

The main method chosen to compile primary data is the research interview. Interviews are often used when conducting qualitative research. This data collection technique offers a way to get the interviewee’s point of view and opinion in a more flexible way and highlight and focus on the phenomena for deeper understanding. “Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind, to gather stories”. (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

There are different types of interviews and in this particular case the semi-structured interview is chosen due to its consistency with the factors of adaptability and flexibility that are needed to collect the data. The semi-structured interview is conducted with the help of an interview guide that helps the researcher to track the main topics that are being covered. One of the advantages of the interview guide is that it makes sure the interviewer has time to approach the main topics and areas within a limited time. (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

However, in this type of interview it is important the fact that the order of the questions can be modified and the interview itself gives space for new questions and discussion that might come up during the interview time with questions that are not included in the interview guide. (Patton, 2002) The reason behind this choice is that this thesis tries to understand social phenomenon that takes place between individuals, their vision and values related to the identity and creation of a country brand.

For this research two semi-structured in depth interviews were realized. One is conducted with one of the owners of the gastronomic business of Casa Italia and the second one with one representative from the Finnish-Italian Chamber of Commerce. Both were realized face-to-face. Moreover, face-to-face interviews create a setting where non-verbal communication was believed to be of great interest for the researcher.

The two people interviewed are chosen because they can give good insight into the phenomenon of the research conducted. The owner of the restaurant is directly involved with the experience of having a gastronomic business in Finland. Therefore, this interview aims to collect rich data and complement the answer of one of the research questions of this thesis from the empirical point of view: ‘What is the Italian country brand and its gastronomic sector?’

On the other hand, the second interview is realized with a representative from the Finnish-Italian Chamber of Commerce. He is involved with the Italian businesses importing Italian goods in Finland. The interview aims to collect valuable data about the gastronomic Italian sector and its presence and relationship within Finland as guidance and help when wanting to understand the country brand.

Considering the two different approaches and backgrounds of both interviews, two different interview guides are created (see Appendix 1 and 2). Even though there are customized to each interviewee, they also have some common ground with the aim of collecting different views on the same topic.

In order to get the raw and primary data from both interviews the method of collection has been reinforced by audio recording both interviews, with the previous written consent of the interviewees. The purpose is to record as fairly as possible the interviewee’s perspective. (Patton, 2002).

4.2.1.1 Casa Italia

The Italian gastronomy is represented in Finland by the presence of a great vast of gastronomic products in the supermarkets and many Italian restaurants and bars offering an Italian cuisine. This research has not focused on a study of all products present in the Finnish market. Neither has focused on the overall research of all Italian restaurants or businesses offering Italian products or food. This research has a more micro level approach and data comes from one particular restaurant/shop named Casa Italia located in Helsinki.

Casa Italia is an Italian restaurant/shop located in the centre of Helsinki, Finland. They opened up this store in Helsinki the 1st of October of 2014, followed by another opening in Turku two months later and they opened their third establishment in Manchester (United Kingdom) by middle February 2016. They are being successful expanding their business idea. Being located in one of the main central streets of Helsinki, in Bulevardi, they have been able to create themselves a brand and reputation that differs them greatly from their competitors.

Four partners, who own the business at the same level, form their organizational structure. Themselves in addition to several other employees are the ones in charge to run the business at a daily basis. One of the most important trades that they all share and have in common is their nationality: they all are Italians. This specific factor creates and forms the trademark of Casa Italia.

Casa Italia is a particular business concept where a mix of a restaurant and delicatessen shop coexist under the same roof. Within their supply, more than 150 Italian products are offered, which many of them are carrying the DOP (“Protected Designation of Origin in Italian: *Denominazione di Origine Protetta*) certification.

However, their offer is not just the gastronomic products that customers can consume there or buy from their small delicatessen shop, but they offer what they call a ‘real Italian experience’. Therefore, the atmosphere that is created inside their establishment has a unique value. They have managed to “import” and connect the Italian lifestyle and

feeling to their brand. In that sense, the restaurant can be thought of an insight into the country branding.

4.2.1.1.1 The interview with Casa Italia

The interview with the owner of Casa Italia is structured in four different sections where each of them has a different purpose. In general the interview aims to start from gathering more general information and going deeper into the most important information from the researcher's point of view.

The first part of the interview guide identifies what are the concept, context and description of the business of Casa Italia. This first set of questions is meant to be an introduction to gather basic information about Casa Italia. The background information, its history and purpose are being discussed as well as its presence in the Finnish market.

The second part of the interview guide investigates the main topic of this research. The role of Casa Italia in relation with Italy as a brand is being discussed in this section opening a further discussion and connection towards the next section of the interview.

The third part of the interview examines the relationship with their customers and the business strategy in order to create a business concept such as Casa Italia.

The last part of the interview intends to understand the future of the business. It aims to conclude the interview with the interviewee's point of view about the main topic discussed during the interview.

The interview is conducted in English. Even though the native language of both the interviewee and the researcher is not English, this is the language selected to have a common understanding. The length of the interview is approximately one-hour time.

4.2.1.2 The interview with the Finnish-Italian Chamber of Commerce

The Finnish-Italian Chamber of commerce is an institution responsible for announcing cooperation between Italian companies and entities and Finnish companies. The interview gives a wider understanding of Italy and country branding seen through the gastronomic lens.

The interview guide is divided into three different sections in order to get a better approach to the topic of research.

The first part of the interview is presented as a short introduction in order to gather basic information and background about the interviewee and the Finnish-Italian Chamber of Commerce.

The second part of the interview investigates more in depth the relationship of Italian gastronomic presence in Finland. It aims to understand what is the picture of this sector and what is the role of the Chamber of commerce in promoting this area.

The last part of the interview explores a particular view of the interviewee about Italy as a brand and its gastronomic sector.

The interview is, as well as the previous one, conducted and performed in English in order to have a common understanding. The length of the interview is approximately twenty minutes time.

4.2.2 Customer Questionnaires

In order to gather data from the customer's side of Casa Italia a social survey design is selected. The questionnaire (see Appendix 3) as a method of gathering data is used with the purpose of compiling a better idea of the gastronomic Italian business in Finland from the consumer's point of view. Therefore, the target of this questionnaire was the customer of Casa Italia.

The self-questionnaire is a method that requires the person to answer the questionnaire by him or herself, without the need of the researcher being present or explaining the questions. (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

The questionnaire was delivered to the customer's, who were answering in a voluntary way. The questionnaires were in the establishment, and distributed by the restaurant staff, for a period of ten days and a voluntarily of a total of 40 respondents filled them in, creating a small-scale sample of questionnaires. The purpose of gathering this data is to complement and create the overall view on the phenomena studied in this research.

The complete questionnaire consists of 11 questions. The questions selected for the questionnaire are based on the researcher's own literature review previously done before the collection of empirical data.

The questionnaire structure is divided into two main sections. In order to gather basic information about the customers of Casa Italia, the first part of the questionnaire consists of three questions, two of them with closed answers and the third with open answer format.

The second part of the questionnaire aims to gather information about the main topic of this thesis. The respondents are presented with open and closed questions about Italy, and what Casa Italia represents in relation to Italy and its brand and values.

4.3 Data analysis

“Data interpretation and analysis involve making sense out of what people have said, looking for patterns, putting together what is said in one place with what is said in another place and integrating what different people have said” (Patton, 2015, p. 471).

The most important point in interpreting the data is to be able to connect the relevant points, see the possible matches and use the important and relevant information. It is equally important being able to dispose of the unnecessary data that has been collected.

In order to be able to move into data analysis, the collection of the data recorded for the interviews needs to be transcript into a written document format. To analyse the data collected by the interviews and the questionnaires, first of all the procedure is to gather

the data, organize it and summarize it. The study, comprehension and analysis of the results will be by extracting the most important references and conclusions to answer the research questions.

The content analysis of the three primary data sources, described in the above section, is now approached individually. The analysis of the material has been done following the process of thematic analysis by Boyatzis (1998) consisting on: transcriptions, familiarization with the information, searching and defining themes and organizing the data under those themes.

At this phase of decontextualization of the information from the three different sources is being analysed with the purpose of finding themes. The themes are found first individually and followed by a second review; the themes that are selected are those that are common in the three sources of data collection (two interviews and questionnaires).

In this section, these common themes are presented and described per each of the data sources. In order to follow this procedure, the following table illustrates the decontextualization process of finding categories in each of the sources and the relation to the main themes. The researcher's model offers a structured understanding of the gathered data in order to proceed with the following analysis.

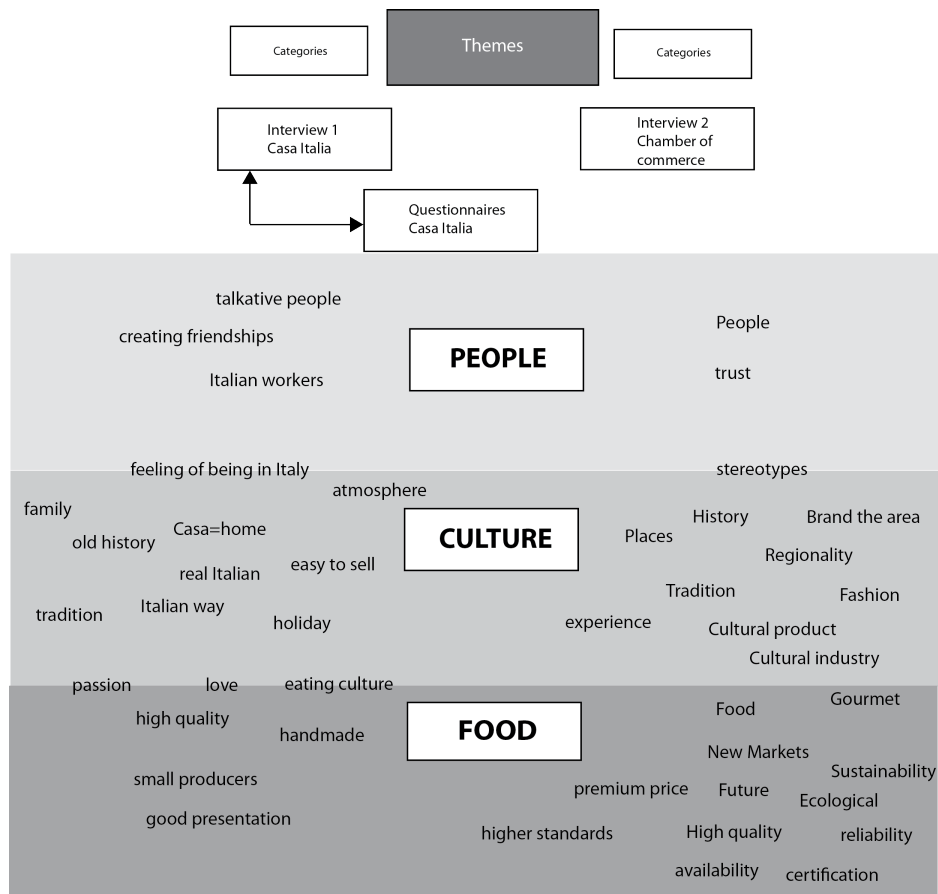


Figure 6 Data analysis and decontextualization. Model created by researcher (2016)

The next step is the interpretation and definition of the themes that are presented above. The identity of these themes is being connected to the literature and theoretical background presented along this research. According to Anholt (2003), these three themes are matched to three of the six dimensions that form a national brand and identity (refer to Figure 2 *The National brand hexagon*, p. 11).

- **People:** defined as the identity of the people connected to a country. It represents their behaviours, attitudes and culture.
- **Culture:** defined as the image of a country, its tradition, cultural background and brand.
- **Food:** treated as part of the exports (according to Anholt's model), referring to the gastronomic sector and the description and presentation of the food itself.

In the following chapter, these themes are being presented as the results of the data empirical sources interpretation.

5 RESULTS

In this chapter the results from the data analysis are presented. This section represents the final stage of the empirical part's data management process. At this stage, the results are framing the path for the final discussion in the next chapter.

5.1 The interviews and questionnaires

In this section the results from both the interviews are being described and framed through the themes and categories found during the data analysis and researcher's model presented above. The results from the questionnaires are being connected with the interview from Casa Italia in order to support and complement this interview. All the material and data analysed are presented under the categories described in the previous section. The results are treated with a holistic approach on the overall topic researched in this thesis. Therefore, questionnaires and both interviews offer an overall vision from both sides of the sector. This is thought to increase the trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn.

5.1.1 People (behaviour, culture)

People's identity is one part of a country brand that is essential to it. In any business where people are interacting to each other, the culture, behaviour and traditions are being exposed and can be crucial in the business itself. In the gastronomic sector the service provided by people is certainly interconnected to the customer's experience. In the case of Casa Italia the theme of "people" is affecting several aspects of their business strategy.

In this interview, the relationship with the customer is highlighted. It emphasizes the importance of creating a relationship with them. As the interviewee recognizes, they accentuate this factor as part of their business strategy. The workers behave as themselves, being as natural as possible, although purposely trying to establish a closer relationship with the customers.

“We are all people that like to be with people, speak with people, enjoy the others and the customer is not only a customer, is not only a person that you sell stuff to... We try to start a conversation, involve everybody and create new friendships inside the place.”

Interviewee #1

The relationship between people and culture is being proved within the context of this interview. Italian behaviour such as being talkative, open minded and closer to people has an impact on the emotional side of the customers, who perceive these aspects as related to their business and intrinsic to their business character.

This different relationship that is created with the customer makes Casa Italia’ strategy stand out, and it is proved to be important for the customers as well, since the results from the questionnaires point in this direction. (See Appendix 4).

Another important factor that results from the interview and is confirmed by the customer’s responses is the fact that all workers have Italian nationality. This is part of their business strategy that by the customers review is ought to be an important and determinant factor for Casa Italia. (See Appendix 4).

As a result from analysing the interview with the Chamber of Commerce, the theme of “people” has an evident presence. The behaviour and tradition of Italian people is been pointed out. The most important factor resulting from this dimension is the clear relation between the three themes that come across the interview analysis. Nevertheless, the emphasis throughout this second interview is being brought towards the third theme of “food”.

5.1.2 Culture (essence of the country-brand)

The image and identity of the country itself belongs to another important factor of country branding. Italian culture has a strong character due to its tradition and history. In this section culture as the image of the country is identified by the interviewee 1 in the form of stereotypes, personal opinion and a strong representative of this business.

The results from the interview (Casa Italia) and the customer's questionnaires show that Casa Italia is identified by its owners and customers as a place where food is sold, furthermore, one of the most important aspects defining Casa Italia is the atmosphere and environment. The purpose of the owners is "to keep the feeling of being in Italy" and they defined themselves as "Casa Italia is a piece of Italy in the centre of Helsinki". Their future strategy is having this value in the core of their business since it has been proved to be the distinguishing factor towards its competitors. The results from the customer's reviews validate the importance of this 'Italian atmosphere' created in the establishment. (See Appendix 4).

"When they get the feeling, they come in, they are still in Finland basically with Finnish system, but when they are here, they change also themselves, they feel on holiday" Interviewee #1

In the opinion of the interviewee the concept of Italy as a brand is related to high quality products that are easy to sell. Especially talking about the food where the sector is related to a process of handmade manufacturing where passion, love and tradition take place.

As a result from the second interview (Chamber of Commerce), the image of Italy as a brand is being described from the business perspective. It is undeniable the interviewee's professional background has a clear influence on the cultural perspective.

The relationship between the Italian businesses and Finnish partners has a strong bond since they are maintaining business relationship for years. Italy is a country that has a solid presence in the Finnish gastronomic market and is easily recognized by Finnish customers.

"Italian companies have done such a good job in marketing their products, they have been able to find themselves a niche as a gourmet product that is very well respected and known in Finland" Interviewee #2

They are relating the image of the country with high quality products and its culture. The fact that this image is familiar in the Finnish markets it is mainly due to their knowledge and awareness of the country itself. It is worth mentioning the fact that Finnish people travel very often to Italy and their insight and knowledge only comes with their experiences. Italy is a familiar country to Finnish people, therefore, their image and connection to the country's culture and image is authentic.

5.1.3 Food (exports, business strategy, quality)

Food as a theme is understood in this section as part of the gastronomic sector of the brand Italy and part as well as the exportation of this sector from Italy into Finland.

As a result from the first interview, food is considered as a high quality product that carries on with the tradition and history of the Italian culture. Food *per se* is the main business and offer of Casa Italia, however, not the only valuable core of its business, as described in the section above.

Food itself has a bigger purpose in their business strategy. With food, they want to create a bigger understanding and relationship with their customers. Showing and sharing how to prepare the food, the right combinations of their products, becomes a routine service that is being offered on a daily basis. It is important to highlight for them, the history and origin of the products. They emphasize the figure of the small producer that has passion about what they grow, and sell. Moreover, the presence of certified products and particular products that are not easily find in supermarkets is part of their food supply.

The main emphasis on the second interview (Chamber of Commerce), is the relevance of the Italian food sector in Finland. Moreover, the interconnection and importance of these areas are present and highlighted throughout the interview.

“The Italian food sector is been able to present itself as a long history behind the product, the product talks about the places it comes from and the people, and that is what has

been great and has made the product be so successful around the world.” Interviewee #2

Analysing this interview (Chamber of commerce) reveals a new concept related to Italian food products and is being defined in the category of “gourmet” products. The high quality related to it and the marketing done by the actors involved in this sector has been able to create this new category and reputation for the Italian food brand abroad and in Finland.

The most important strategy and value of the Italian food sector is the interconnection of important aspects mentioned and discussed along and throughout this research.

“All around the world, not just in Finland, the strategy is to bring with the food the culture, with the food the location, with the food the touristic opportunity and with the food the culture of the area” Interviewee #2

The success of the Italian food sector, in the opinion of the interviewee (Chamber of Commerce), is the ability of showing the product as a brand itself. In order to achieve this, the strong tradition and culture of the country need to be present in the marketing strategy as well.

The situation of the Finnish gastronomic scene, in relation to the Italian food market, is defined by the interviewee (Chamber of Commerce), as being strong and in good status. Finnish people have a good knowledge about Italy as a country and a brand. They appreciate and define their products with high standards and attributes such as culture, availability and reliability. This has translated in the export relationships as a success for Italian producers and distributors that have been able “to ask premium price for their products.”

6 DISCUSSION

In this section of the research, the results that have been found in the previous chapter and carefully discussed are being put in perspective connecting the empirical and theoretical part of this thesis. This section aims to be the associating point where the concepts and discussion gives the answers to the research question presented at the beginning of the thesis. This section also includes a discussion on validity and trustworthiness of the research. The final section concludes with a reflection about the conducted study and recommendations for future research.

6.1 Connecting results and theory

Taking into consideration the complex theoretical background and research about country branding, this thesis has been able to explore in detail some of the factors affecting a country brand and exploring its concreteness with the country of Italy. The importance of the theoretical background in this thesis has been to create the basis for later on create a connection with the empirical results.

The study of country branding reflects the importance and connection throughout many different areas and sectors such as tourism, investments, politics and culture. Many actors are involved in the development of a country brand and the success in creating a coherent country brand goes through the communication and agreement between all actors committed.

The theory studied in the first part of this thesis, mostly presented in chapter two, states that authors such as Berg&Sevón (2014), Anholt (2003) and Tellström (2011) affirm the relation between food and culture. The empirical part of this thesis has helped to confirm and validate the theories presented above. The connection between food, culture and people is visible and that helps creating the brand of a country. As showed in the previous section of results, the interviews and questionnaires confirmed the importance of this relationship for the customers and for the businesses involved. The culture of Italy and its traditions affect directly the perception of the country brand throughout the gastronomy sector that has been explored in this thesis.

Hofstede's cultural descriptions about Italy, make clear the relation between the country and the configuration of these dimensions. They are defined and influenced in a very characteristic way, where each of them has an impact on the other. The cultural dimension of Italy defines their people, lifestyle and their food culture. Their food traditions affect their personal interactions, their professional schedules and the organization and management of their lives. Food affects and configures one big part of Italian culture, and this is visible and translated into its country brand. Both secondary and primary data show this.

The permeability of the Italian gastronomic scene has been confirmed thanks to the empirical study of this thesis. Throughout chapter three, the description of the Italian gastronomic sector highlighted tradition, high quality and country of origin as the main characteristics describing this sector. These values have been confirmed to be important for B2B relations in the case study between Finland and Italy, and also in the case of Casa Italia, where the owners as well as the customers have pointed out these same characteristics as being important. They affect, as well, on the Italian country brand. The overall image that people (customers and businessmen) have about the country are interconnected and affected by all these dimensions: culture, people and food.

The biggest connection along the research is the presence of the model by Anholt (2003) throughout the theoretical background and the empirical part. The dimensions that he describes as most important in the creation of a country brand have been actively recognized throughout the path of this thesis. The dimensions that have been focused on throughout this research are: People, Culture and Investments. Nevertheless, the three main categories studied by Anholt (2003), have been recognized and categorized as "people", "culture" and "food" throughout the empirical phase of this thesis. These categories have been encountered as most important in the case of Italy and its gastronomic sector. These three main categories are interrelated and depending on each other. The categories of "culture" and "people" feed back the "food" category, the Italian gastronomic scene. Traditions and behaviour are of great influence on this sector. As the results from the empirical part of this thesis show, the culture of Italian people is reflected on their businesses and appreciated by Finnish customers. They have pointed out cultural factors, such as atmosphere, behaviour and language, as differentiating components in

the success of Casa Italia. This serves to confirm the theory presented in early chapters, where Tellström (2011) refers to the character of a place being formed and affected by its gastronomy and vice versa. The empirical research helps to understand this relation perceived by customers. Moreover, in this specific case, the character and brand of Italy is perceived and transmitted within another context and environment, in Helsinki.

Furthermore, in the B2B side of this sector, cultural aspects as tradition, quality and passion, have shaped the reputation of Italian producers and have added an extra value to Italian products. They have been able to categorize Italian food products in the “gourmet” niche of the food market. The traditional structure of this sector, family owned and small size enterprises have a great influence on the relationships created between producers and exporters. These closer relationships create a greater bond and cultural aspects are easier to go through the personal connections.

Italian country brand has a vast of dimensions and categories creating the image of this country. Throughout this thesis, the focus has been on few of these dimensions: culture, people, and gastronomy. Based on the theoretical background where the ‘Made in Italy’ concept has been presented, this has been explored and connected along the empirical research through the themes pointed out: people, culture and food. The importance of the Italian country brand relies on all the actors involved in the promotion and diffusion of this brand. This thesis has explored the perception of Italian businessmen and representatives in another context, in Helsinki, complemented by the perception of local customers.

Consequently, the results and analysis using this categorization have helped into the understanding of the phenomena of Italian country brand through the gastronomic lens. Moreover, these themes spotted through the empirical results help to understand that they exert an influence on the recognition of Italian food products and brand connected to quality, tradition and passion.

6.2 Concluding remarks

This thesis has been able to spot and prove the importance of the model presented by Anholt (2003). This statement relies on the fact that has been the main connector in order to being able to create the bridge between theory and practice. Thanks to the disclosure and understanding of this model the theoretical background and empirical have found some common ground.

Consequently, this thesis has been able to spotlight the most important brand dimensions in the Italian gastronomic sector related to its country brand: people, culture and food. The empirical part has helped to confirm the theoretical background and creates a common ground of knowledge for the gastronomic sector.

On a personal level for the researcher, this thesis provides with an unquestionable rich experience, exploring the relationship between a country and its brand, and the importance of the gastronomic sector in this association. Moreover, learning about the factors that attribute importance to a specific sector and how this shapes the image of a country.

The validity of this research relies upon the aim of this thesis in understanding the phenomena of country branding and the point of view from the gastronomic lens about the Italian brand. The reliability therefore, can be associated with the methods that have been used in this research. In order to have a wider approach both theoretical and empirical research have been conducted, gathering data from different sources and points of view. The use of semi-structured interviews can offer validity to this research thanks to the approach and collection of primary data that this method offers and has been described in a previous chapter. The results carefully drawn by the researcher, examines in detail both the empirical and theoretical background about the phenomena in focus. Therefore, the trustworthiness of this thesis relies on the overall study, presentation and discussion that have been developed throughout this thesis.

On a final remark, the limitation of this research is the coverage and study of only one Italian restaurant in Helsinki. The research does not take into consideration other Italian

gastronomic businesses either and explores one single example in order to gather a better understanding of the relationships researched.

6.3 Future research

In the light of future research is recommended to explore the new theories and positioning about country branding, since it has been a topic with many connotations and uncovered methodologies in order to analyse the brand of a country.

It is highly recommended to investigate and explore further the relationship between food, food sector, gastronomy and country brand, since is a topic that has not been greatly researched or investigated.

It could be interesting to make a deeper analysis into the whole gastronomic Italian sector and its presence and relation to each of the countries they are in. This could be a total and overall understanding for academic purpose and business understanding as well.

Further research could lead to more answers on how the business actors should take advantage and responsibility at the same time in relating their business to any factor of country branding.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview guide for Casa Italia

Personal introduction (short answers)

1. What is your name?
2. How long have you been in Finland?
3. Do you have previous experience in the gastronomic field?

Introducing the business Casa Italia and some background information

4. Could you tell me what your company does?
5. What are the responsibilities that you have in your company?
6. How did you choose, create your team?
7. How did the concept of Casa Italia appear?
8. How should people refer to it? Restaurant, shop...
9. How long did it take to put it into practice?
10. Did you take the idea from other place?
11. What is Casa Italia offering to the customer?

Casa Italia in the Finnish market

12. Is there any other place similar to this in Finland?
13. Why did you choose this name? Is it important to mention the country?
14. Was it strategic to decide to set up the restaurant in this street? Why?
15. Was it difficult to enter the Finnish market? Is there a lot of competence in this field?
16. What is the difference between Casa Italia and other Italian restaurants?
17. Is Italy popular in Finland, explain...(For what, why, how?)

Italy as a brand

18. What is Italy for you as a brand?
19. What means to have an Italian restaurant in Finland?
20. What kind of a picture of Italy does Casa Italia give the customers?
21. Have you actively thought of the fact that you help in branding Italy as a country? Explain, discuss

Talking about customers

22. What type of customers do you receive? Where are they from?
23. How are customers answering to this type of business?
24. How important is for you and the customer the fact you are all Italians?
25. Is this restaurant more authentic than others because you are all Italians?
26. What type of compliments have you received?
27. What types of complaints have you receive?
28. Which values are you trying to communicate to your customers?
29. Why do you think they are coming here?
30. How are you branding the Italian gastronomic sector through your business? Is there any marketing strategy behind it?
31. How intentionally have you planned the atmosphere that is created in Casa Italia?
32. How would you describe Italy in few words from your point of view?

How is the future looking like?

33. What is the next step? Are you expanding to other cities/countries?
34. What does the future look like? Will the customers need a change or this concept is strong enough?
35. Which is the secret of the success of your business?

End:

36. How would you describe me Casa Italia in few words from your point of view?
37. How would you describe me Finland in few words from your point of view?

Appendix 2: Interview guide for Chamber of Commerce

Some background information

1. Could you please introduce yourself and your tasks at the Chamber of commerce?
2. What is this institution responsible for?

Introducing the topic of research

3. What is the traditional Italian food sector recognized for in your opinion?
4. Talking in detail about the Italian gastronomic sector, how would you describe the presence of the Italian food sector in Finland?
 - a. How many actors are involved? (How many restaurants, establishments, importers and distributors) Could you provide me with some figures from the last years (2014, 2015)?
5. What is the role of the Chamber of Commerce in the gastronomic sector?
 - a. How are they promoting the Italian food industry in Finland?
6. How is the response for this market? Is there a high demand for Italian gastronomic products in Finland?
7. Which is the competence in Finland in the gastronomic sector for the Italian one? Who are the leaders and why?
8. Which percentage are the exports of Italian food and drinks in Europe and in Finland? Has the recent crisis affected this sector and how?
9. What are the most popular products that are exported from Italy to Finland?
10. Which are the Italian organizations that are involved in the exports of food and Italian drinks? (Federalimentare...)

Personal perspective about Italian food sector and Finland

11. Do you think the Italian culture is affecting this sector?
 - a. Which characteristics are affecting the gastronomy?
 - b. Are these factors influencing the consumer's choices?
12. What are the main differences between the Italian gastronomic sector and the Finnish one?
13. How is the future of this sector looking like? What are the trends that can be seen? (More organic food, sustainable...)

14. From your position at the Chamber of Commerce, how is the brand Italy being branded and marketed? Which values and characteristics are being exposed?

How is the brand Italy perceived in Finland? And more specifically how is the brand Italy perceived in the Finnish gastronomic market?

Appendix 3: Questionnaire for customers of Casa Italia

Casa Italia : Customers

1. What is your gender?

Mark only one oval.

Female

Male

2. What is your age?

Mark only one oval.

18-25

26-34

35-54

55-64

65 or over

3. Where are you from?

.....

4. What is Italy to you?

Which words do you connect to Italy as a brand?

Tick all that apply.

Fashion, Food, Furniture...

Family, good weather, holidays...

High quality products

Other:

5. Is it relevant that the workers at Casa Italia are Italians?

Mark only one oval.

yes

no

6. What is most important for you, the products or the service?

Mark only one oval.

Products (food and drinks)

Service

7. What is different from Casa Italia than other Italian restaurants in Helsinki?

.....
.....
.....
.....

8. How would you describe Casa Italia in 3-5 words?

.....
.....
.....
.....

9. How often do you come to Casa Italia?

Mark only one oval.

- First time
- Few times a year
- Once per month
- Once per week
- Almost every day

10. What do you often consume here?

Tick all that apply.

- Coffee/Tea/Drinks
- Food
- Buy from the products they offer

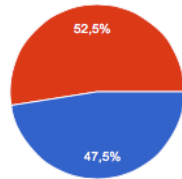
11. Why do you come here?

Tick all that apply.

- Because of their food/drinks/food products
- Because of their atmosphere and welcoming
- Because of the feeling of "being in Italy"
- Other:

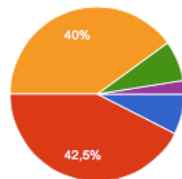
Appendix 4. Questionnaires results (closed questions)

What is your gender?



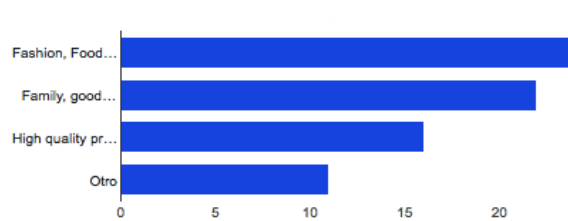
Female	19	47.5%
Male	21	52.5%

What is your age?



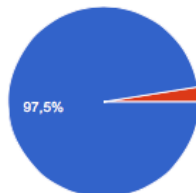
18-25	3	7.5%
26-34	17	42.5%
35-54	16	40%
55-64	3	7.5%
65 or over	1	2.5%

What is Italy to you?



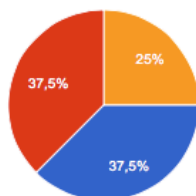
Fashion, Food, Furniture...	24	60%
Family, good weather, holidays...	22	55%
High quality products	16	40%
Otro	11	27.5%

Is it relevant that the workers at Casa Italia are Italians?



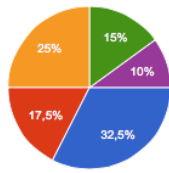
yes	39	97.5%
no	1	2.5%

What is most important for you, the products or the service?



Products (food and drinks)	15	37.5%
Service	15	37.5%
Both	10	25%

How often do you come to Casa Italia?



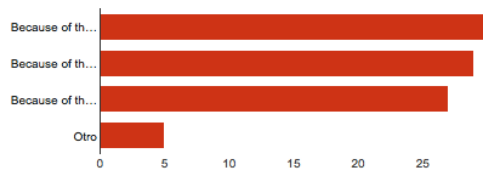
First time	13	32.5%
Few times a year	7	17.5%
Once per month	10	25%
Once per week	6	15%
Almost every day	4	10%

What do you often consume here?



Coffee/Tea/Drinks	22	57.9%
Food	32	84.2%
Buy from the products they offer	13	34.2%

Why do you come here?



Because of their food/drinks/food products	30	76.9%
Because of their atmosphere and welcoming	29	74.4%
Because of the feeling of "being in Italy"	27	69.2%
Otro	5	12.8%