

THESIS

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REBUILDING KOSOVO'S GLOBAL IDENTITY: THE ROLE OF PUBLIC AND CULTURAL
DIPLOMACY IN NATION BRANDING

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1. INTRODUCTION

Kosovo is a young and small country located in the Balkans. Having declared independence in 2008, the country has faced many issues related to international recognition and the stereotypes connected with its recent history of conflict and instability (Kaneva, 2018). To this day, Kosovo remains unrecognized as an independent country by 117 nations around the world (Kosovo Government, 2018). Therefore, pushing away the stigma and negative perceptions of Kosovo is crucial, as the country's national identity and mission for global support are essential for it to achieve political and economic stability and strengthening its international status.

When declaring its independence, Kosovo came across many significant challenges. First, securing political recognition from other nations, second, promoting ethnic harmony among its people, and third, promoting economic development after the conflict, including the devastating war between ethnic Albanians and Serbs in 1999, which destroyed much of the country's infrastructure and economy (Kaneva, 2018). Given its relatively recent founding as an independent nation, Kosovo had a great need for nation branding efforts to solidify its place among other countries.

Nation branding focuses on a nation's overall representation on the international arena (Fan, 2010). It encompasses communication strategies intended at promoting and building a country's values, culture, and achievements to boost its image, reputation, and influence globally. (Anholt, 2007, p.38-39). According to Anholt (2007, p.21-23), nation branding encompasses the strategic processes a country undertakes to shape how it is perceived, domestically as well as internationally. This thesis will focus on two dimensions of Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon model, governance and culture, since they are the most relevant areas where Kosovo can gain from when attempting nation branding efforts.

The governance dimension will focus on Kosovo's international diplomacy. Public diplomacy will be integrated here, as it plays an important role in shaping Kosovo's international reputation. Through public diplomacy, Kosovo communicates its government's values and political commitments, encouraging good relationships with other nations and showing its governance model in a favorable light. This helps fight any negative stereotypes and aims to position Kosovo as a trustworthy partner on the international stage.

The culture dimension will examine how Kosovo's art, music and sports can play a big role in creating a more relatable and stable national identity. This dimension is key to Kosovo's nation branding, as it not only celebrates the country's values but also highlights its contributions to European and global culture. By emphasizing cultural diplomacy, Kosovo can create a more authentic and lasting brand that resonates with international audiences and distinguishes it apart from other nations.

As a part of its nation branding strategy, one of Kosovo's most visible efforts in nation branding was the "Young Europeans" campaign, launched in 2008, shortly after its declaration of independence. The main goal of this campaign was to show Kosovo as a youthful, dynamic nation committed to European values and integration, while distancing itself from the war-torn image of the past (Xharra and Waehlich 2011). The campaign focused on promoting Kosovo's integration into Europe and its progressive governance, but it faced many challenges. Scholars argue that the campaign lacked cultural depth and failed to effectively highlight Kosovo's rich cultural heritage, which could have made its brand more distinctive and relatable (Kaneva, 2018).

I will then provide the campaigns limitations offering insights into what aspects fell short and how they could be improved. At the same time, Anholt (2007 p.38-39)'s model will be applied, guiding Kosovo toward a more effective branding strategy that includes public and cultural diplomacy. By the use of these models, the study aims to provide an analysis that highlights not only the issues of existing initiatives but also strategies for future branding efforts.

As Kosovo continues to navigate its path toward international recognition, it is essential for the country to reassess and rethink its branding strategies. By focusing on the governance and cultural heritage dimensions, which are elements that were said to be missing in the "Young Europeans" campaign, Kosovo can develop a more cohesive and authentic narrative. This narrative should not only promote its political aspirations but also celebrate its cultural identity, by crafting an image that resonates with both domestic and international audiences.

1.1. Research purposes, specific aims, and objectives

Having lived in both Kosovo and Hungary, I have had the opportunity to interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. While abroad, I was faced with many questions and misconceptions about Kosovo. Some individuals were unfamiliar with Kosovo as an independent nation, while others had questions

about the political tensions and conflicts associated with the country. These experiences made me aware of the stereotypes and misunderstandings that are still ongoing about Kosovo and its people. This has pushed my desire to challenge these narratives and explore how they can be transformed through effective nation branding efforts.

Although existing research has examined Kosovo's country branding initiatives, with a particular focus on the "Young Europeans" campaign, as it is Kosovo's most significant nation branding effort to date, there remains room for deeper analysis. Many scholars have claimed that the main limitations of the "Young Europeans" campaign was its lack of including public and cultural diplomacy. A more effective nation branding strategy for Kosovo would combine these two, to create a cohesive narrative. Public diplomacy is crucial for positive international relations and promoting Kosovo's values and political goals on the global stage. At the same time, integrating cultural elements, would present a more authentic image.

Through the evaluation of previous campaigns and interviews with experts, this study aims to provide insights into how Kosovo can refine its global image and position itself as a recognized and respected member in the international stage.

Aim of the study: To critically examine Kosovo's nation branding efforts, identifying its challenges, strengths, and limitations within the context of public diplomacy and cultural identity.

Research questions:

1. What are the challenges Kosovo faces in improving its international reputation through nation branding?
2. In what ways did the "Young Europeans" campaign address these challenges, and what were its strengths and limitations?
3. How can Kosovo enhance its nation branding efforts through public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy?

1.2. Thesis Structure

This research paper is structured into several key sections. It begins with a literature review (Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework) that explores existing research on nation branding and the specific models that will be applied. The chapter will define key concepts of nation branding. Furthermore, the literature

review will introduce Anholt's (2007 p.38-39) nation brand hexagon, focusing on the culture and governance factors

In Chapter 3, through an in-depth case study of the "Young Europeans" campaign, I will assess its strengths and weaknesses. This will provide an analysis of how well the campaign addressed Kosovo's branding challenges and its weaknesses.

Finally, Chapter 4 will present the findings from semi-structured interviews with Kosovo's ambassadors, branding professionals, and leaders from the cultural sector. These insights will help identify and conceptualize the role of public and cultural diplomacy in Kosovo's nation branding efforts, aiming to strengthen Kosovo's international reputation, making its brand more enduring and globally resonant.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter consists of 4 sections. First, I will provide a historical background of nation branding, Then, I will be defining the terms, notions, and definitions related to country branding, as well as providing a framework for understanding the topic.

Following the foundational definitions and frameworks, this literature review will delve into a Simon Anholt's (2007 p.38-39) Nation Brand Hexagon, which elaborates on the dimensions of a country's brand including culture and public diplomacy, two key areas that I investigate through interviews with branding experts, ambassadors, and cultural leaders of Kosovo.

2.1. Brief history of Nation Branding

What is a brand in the contemporary world? The American Marketing Association explains a brand as distinct features that help identify and define a good or service, whether it be its name, design, logo or anything else that differentiates it from competitor sellers (AMA). This definition helps to understand how branding principles originally applied to products and services can be extended to entire countries.

Transitioning from products to nations, in the last fifteen years, many nations have engaged in some form of nation branding, which now endows nation brands with significant policy value (Viktorin et al., 2018, p.

6-7). These efforts are designed to establish and communicate the reputations and images that become ingrained in the minds of international audiences and customers. For instance, the United States is frequently branded and associated with democracy, illustrating its commitment to certain values and governance styles (Aliu, 2024).

In 1998, the term Nation branding was coined by British marketer Simon Anholt, with the aim to measure and enhance a nation's reputation through the emphasis on unique characteristics. The goal of branding nations, according to Anholt is a strategic approach to increase and maintain a country's competitiveness (Anholt, 2007). Wally Olins and Simon Anholt, two great figures in the field, have also significantly shaped the concept and practice of nation branding. Both British marketers have helped in coining the term "nation branding" itself (Viktorin et al., 2018 p.9).

Even though nation branding is a relatively new subject of study, its roots can be found in four different sources: country of origin (Papadoplous and Heslop, 2002), national identity, place or destination branding, and, more recently, public diplomacy. Scholars such as Smith (1991) have explored national identity; Kotler and Gertner (2002) have developed frameworks around place or destination branding; and authors like Melissen and Lee (2011) have expanded into public diplomacy. Out of these branches, in this thesis, I will be focusing mainly on the national identity of Kosovo, while integrating public diplomacy as a key tool for the nation branding of Kosovo.

2.2. Nation Branding

The term 'nation branding' has been in use for almost two decades, giving room for one to consider it as a new field of knowledge. (Anholt 2007).

Nation branding has become a significantly important communication strategy for countries worldwide, seeking to influence their global perception. This complex concept goes beyond traditional marketing techniques, focusing on improving a nation's global image (Fan, 2006). According to Fan (2006), nation branding is the use of different and complex marketing communications strategies to make a country's image better. This highlights how branding can be used to promote a more favorable international identity.

Further, Gudjonsson (2005) suggests that nation branding involves reshaping a nation's image through strategic branding efforts by governments or private entities. He suggests that nation branding aims to positively alter the country's identity and public perception.

Keith Dinnie (2022, p.15) defines nation branding as a distinctive, multidimensional set of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded identity and significance for all of its target consumers.

Essentially, the image and reputation that a country has globally is what nation branding is all about.

People abroad define a country's image; stereotypes, media representation, and firsthand experience all have an impact on these people's opinions. A country's image may be professionally reshaped, reframed, and communicated, just like commercial brands. (Fan, 2006)

What we need to draw out from these theories is what we can utilize nation branding for, Fan (2006) explains it in a simple way. To advance political and economic objectives both domestically and internationally (Rendon, 2003; Szondi, 2007), to increase the competitiveness of the country (Anholt, 2007; Lee, 2009). To change, strengthen, or elevate the reputation or image of a country (Gudjonsson, 2005), in order to rebrand national identities (Olins, 1999), and, to promote and enhance business, politics, culture, and sports (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2001).

2.3. Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon

Among the several frameworks developed to understand and apply nation branding, Simon Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon (2007) stands out due to its comprehensive approach to evaluating, improving and enhancing a country's reputation internationally.

This framework provides countries looking to raise and better their international profile with practical advice in addition to capturing the complex idea of nation branding. In the following, I explore the significance of Anholt's Hexagon, highlighting the relevance and applicability of the tool to modern nation branding initiatives as noted by Anholt (2007, p.25-27), to my own research.

Anholt (2007, p.25-27) suggests that a nation's effective national brand is formed when its primary institutions, initiatives, and investments are intentionally or unintentionally aligned with a coherent and collective vision. Additionally, this brand is enhanced when its lines of contact with the international community—tourism, export and promotion of investments, cultural relations, and public diplomacy—

are coordinated (Anholt, 2007, p.25-27). According to Anholt (2007, p.25-27), these factors serve as natural channels of communication and are represented within his hexagon model.

In this research, I will be focusing and relying on some aspects of the hexagon for Kosovo's nation branding strategy: the governance, its culture and heritage, since those were deemed as missing from previous nation branding campaigns in Kosovo.



Figure 1- Simon Anholt's Nation Branding Hexagon (2007)

Government: Anholt's governance dimension assesses how a country's government's perceived in terms of competence, fairness, and dedication to global issues such as democracy, and justice. It represents opinions about the effectiveness, openness, and integrity of the government on a national and worldwide level. Positive perceptions of governance have the potential to greatly strengthen a country's brand by emphasizing ethical and responsible leadership as well as a dedication to tackling global issues. This can help to improve a nation's attractiveness and worldwide position.

Culture and heritage: The culture and heritage dimension explains how the world views and values a country's historical heritage and contemporary cultural landscape. This aspect includes a broad range of cultural expressions, such as literature, art, sports, music, and film, and it illustrates how these components influence a country's reputation abroad. It appreciates the preservation of historic sites and traditions and treats them with reverence, and it also recognizes the influence modern cultural outputs on how a nation's identity is shaped internationally. A nation's appeal can be increased by having a strong, favorable perception in this area, which promotes foreign travel, cross-cultural interactions, and international acknowledgment of its cultural contributions.

2.4. Public Diplomacy in Nation Branding

Edmund Gullion was the first to coin the concept of public diplomacy in 1965. It aims to describe a modern state's efforts to manage and communicate its reputation abroad (Anholt, 2007). The phrase at the time covered the influence of public opinion on foreign policy development and execution. Aspects of international relations that go beyond traditional diplomacy are covered in public diplomacy, including the use of government initiatives to influence public opinion in other nations, interactions between private organizations and national interests, reporting on foreign affairs and how it affects policy, professional communication between diplomats and foreign correspondents, and cross-cultural communication processes (US Information Agency). With its emphasis on cross-border communication and cross-cultural interactions, public diplomacy involves the deliberate construction of a nation's foreign image and touches on various aspects of Anholt's Hexagon, especially in governance, culture and heritage, and people.

Public diplomacy serves a broad range of functions, which includes the promotion of political, economic, and security policy goals, in addition to place and nation branding. (Potapovs, 2024). While place and nation branding often overlap with public diplomacy, they maintain distinct objectives. Nation branding emphasizes the creation of a favorable country image, whereas public diplomacy represents direct governmental communication aimed at influencing foreign audiences' perceptions regarding policies and strategic goals (Potapovs, 2024), or, as Szondi (2008) explains, public diplomacy aims to achieve changes in the "hearts and minds" of international audiences. Public diplomacy includes the management of images and symbols, relationship building, and the strategic use of mass media. However, it differs from nation branding regarding its objectives, communication methods, management practices, and language approaches. (Gilboa, 2008).

Public diplomacy and NB also share similarities, including the need for collaboration with foreign representatives and cultural institutions to strengthen a nation's image internationally. Both disciplines prioritize listening to and understanding both domestic and foreign perspectives and encourage mutual exchanges that shape perceptions and practices (Kaefer, 2020). Diplomacy networks are essential in these efforts to establish a reputation abroad (Tecmen, 2018).

Scholars have categorized public diplomacy efforts into three key functions (Leonard, 2002; Nye, 2004; Melissen, 2005; Gilboa, 2008; Zaharna, 2011):

- Daily news management: Providing information to foreign audiences, usually on a daily basis through various media.
- Strategic communication: Coordinated campaigns that occur periodically to communicate key messages and values.
- Cultural diplomacy: Establishing long-term relationships to build goodwill, often through cultural exchanges and events that display national identity.

According to Henrikson (2005), public diplomacy tools allow states to adopt "policy positions" that can be communicated both within their domestic public sphere and internationally, helping to stabilize or reposition states within the global system. Gregory (2011) also highlights the role of public diplomacy in understanding foreign cultures and establishing relationships that mobilize actions advancing national interests. This comprehensive engagement often includes younger audiences via technology, internet-based networking, student exchanges, and cultural events like art, sports, and science exchanges (Leonard, 2002).

Scholars like Melissen (2005) and Cull (2009) describe this shift beyond government-to-government communication as "the diplomacy of public opinion," which emphasizes projecting popular ideals and values into the global arena. This evolution points to a need for states to engage international audiences not only through formal diplomatic channels but also by promoting a nation's image through cross-cultural and cross-border communication.

Cultural diplomacy, as part of public diplomacy, is seen as the most crucial dimension in establishing long-term positive relations with foreign publics (Saliu, 2020). The definition of "culture" has evolved significantly over time. It affects the political, economic, and social spheres and is associated with significant historical, democratic, and industrial transformations (Williams, 1960). While literature, music, theater and more, are all considered forms of art, culture refers to our perception of ourselves, the overall state of mind connected to the idea and perfection, and our intellectual and spiritual way of life (Williams, 1960). Dinnie (2008, p.186), states that the real "brand essence" of a country is its culture and sense of national identity.

An effective form of cultural diplomacy is the integration of art, music, sports, which serve as powerful tools for building and projecting a nation's identity abroad (Williams, 1960). Music, for example, offers a universal language that conveys cultural values and traditions, and when shared through international

platforms, it strengthens a nation's cultural presence and connection with foreign audiences (Carey, 2009, p. 2-6). Festivals, as a part of the art and music scene, also play a crucial role in cultural diplomacy, (Dines, 2021) allowing communities to showcase their values and aspirations, thereby strengthening both national identity and international ties (Merkel, 2013). By promoting these forms of cultural expression, nations create opportunities for social interaction and mutual understanding, which support long-term public diplomacy efforts (Quinn, 2005).

Festivals serve as a vehicle for promoting national identity on an international scale (Dines 2021), therefore, they can boost a city's economy because they serve as a bridge between the media, recreation, tourism, and culture and the arts (van Aalst and van Melik 2012). Events like film or music festivals operate at the intersection of cultural diplomacy and tourism, helping to enhance a nation's visibility and appeal by bringing diverse audiences into contact with its artistic and cultural offerings supply (Richards and Wilson 2004, 1931). Additionally, festivals serve as spaces for local knowledge, offering chances to introduce shared cultural practices and histories, as well as providing venues for social interactions, cultural and social structure changes, and recreations that encourage local continuity (Quinn 2005).

A great example of this is Novi Sad's Exit music festival, which has grown to be a signature event that helps Serbia and the regional administration of Vojvodina (Xharra and Waehlich 2011).

Public diplomacy also leverages the influence of public figures such as athletes and artists who represent their home countries internationally, especially when official diplomatic representatives are absent. These figures not only symbolize national pride but also serve as informal ambassadors, conveying their country's values, interests, and cultural heritage through their work and interactions. (Saliu, 2022) A great example of this is Rwanda's efforts in public diplomacy. The key component of Rwanda's public diplomacy strategy has been to target friends who are successful, influential, and popular since they have the potential to boost the nation's economy and maintain its history. They include leaders, corporate executives, importers and investors, celebrities, and goodwill ambassadors (Xharra and Waehlich 2011).

Moreover, Serbia has put its efforts in sports activities to target its audiences abroad. Big names such as Novak Djokovic, Dejan Stankovic, Jelena Jankovic and Ana Ivanovic represent Serbia without any country funding. By bringing in major tournaments, promoting their country's flag, culture and values on the

international stage, these stars are doing way more than any branding firm ever could (Xharra and Waehlich 2011).

In conclusion, creating a positive perception of a nation on the international scene is the common goal of nation branding, public and cultural diplomacy, and some of the previous examples help us understand exactly how important these two disciplines are. While public diplomacy uses government-sponsored communication to promote understanding and change perceptions overseas, country branding aims to create a unique identity that appeals to a global audience. Cultural diplomacy is a long-term strategy that leverages common cultural manifestations, such as music, art, sports, and festivals, to encourage goodwill and fortify cross-border ties. It stands out amongst public diplomacy. When combined, these components offer a coherent framework for enhancing a country's image that appeals to both internal and international stakeholders.

Building its international image presents special challenges for Kosovo, as it does for many other countries. Because of its complex past and evolving character, the nation has a unique opportunity to improve its reputation internationally by using cultural and public diplomacy strategically. By coordinating these efforts with a solid and genuine brand story, Kosovo can strive to establish a strong and favorable reputation globally.

This study will use a qualitative methodology to examine how Kosovo can strengthen its nation branding efforts, particularly through public and cultural diplomacy. Through a case study analysis of relevant campaigns, interviews with key stakeholders, and an exploration of cultural events and prominent public figures, this research aims to provide strategic insights that could support Kosovo in advancing its nation brand. This approach will highlight practical applications and identify opportunities to maximize Kosovo's appeal, particularly by promoting cultural and public diplomacy initiatives that resonate both locally and internationally.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method that I have decided to use for this study is semi-structured interviews. These interviews provided qualitative data for me to test my hypothesis. This chapter aims to provide more

information on Kosovo branding through the interviews conducted with six individuals that I have picked based on their background in nation branding and that have been actively involved in or knowledgeable about Kosovo's branding initiatives. A total of six interviews were carried out, from a mix of individuals from the public sector including two diplomats, a Kosovo Ambassador in Panama, and a diplomat of the US in many countries in the Balkans. A private sector expert from the field of branding, a former minister of Foreign Affairs in Kosovo, and lastly, two CEO's of two big festivals in Kosovo. The selection process was guided by the criteria of direct involvement or significant expertise in nation branding efforts. These interviews were conducted over a period of two months, predominantly through virtual meetings, adhering to ethical guidelines.

3.1. Research strategy

Research strategy explains how the research will be conducted (Biggam, 2015). Based on the literature reviewed and the aim to explore general perceptions, qualitative research is the most suitable choice. It allows for in-depth exploration of individual perceptions, experiences, and attitudes, capturing the nuances of how nation branding efforts are perceived by different stakeholders in Kosovo.

Taylor (2005) states that interviews are the most prominent data-gathering method in qualitative research, with semi-structured interviews being the most widely used (DiCicco Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). While interviews aim to learn more about the subject, their goal may differ based on the research question. The semi-structured format provides a targeted framework while allowing flexibility for participants to discuss relevant topics (Gill et al., 2008).

The goal of qualitative research interviews is to contribute to conceptual and theoretical knowledge by exploring meanings participants associate with their experiences (DiCicco Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). According to Rabinet (2011), qualitative interviewing is a flexible technique for recording people's voices and their interpretations of their experiences.

I chose semi-structured interviews as my methodology to stay focused while exploring valuable insights. Unstructured interviews risked losing focus, but I wanted to allow participants to freely expand on topics I aimed to explore, making semi-structured interviews the most suitable choice.

4. CASE STUDY OF THE PRIMARY NATION BRANDING CAMPAIGN IN KOSOVO

Nations compete with one another to define themselves among others by means of values, beliefs and traits they embraced. They thereby utilize advertising campaigns given that they become more and more crucial to re-establishing and communicating their actual cultural, social, and historical identity while establishing a favorable and beneficial position for themselves in the international community. (Abdellatif, Abboud and Azim, 2019)

The reason why I have chosen the “Kosovo: The Young Europeans campaign” as my case study is because it is the first nation branding campaign utilized by Kosovo, and, until now it is the only campaign that Kosovo produced in a bigger more far-reaching context. I will rely on Wahlisch and Xharra’s (2011) study for this section since it is the most prominent case study of this campaign and further research on it is scarce. While I outline Wahlisch and Xharra’s (2011) output on the campaign, I compare it to other studies conducted on the campaign as well as further provide comments on it basing it on other country branding best practices, by other scholars.

4.1. Kosovo: The Young Europeans

When we analyze the case of Kosovo in terms of its past efforts in country branding, the first branding campaign and simultaneously the most known and talked about campaign is the Kosovo the Young Europeans campaign. (Xharra and Waehlich 2011; Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Hapciu and Sparks, 2012).

The campaign, which was developed by the government in 2008, is a very crucial campaign to attempt to gain a name for itself abroad and try to overcome the negative image of a post-war nation (Xharra and Waehlich 2011).

The campaign, which came out in October 2009, was a two-year long contract, that aimed to develop a national brand for Kosovo and position it well in international media. The Tel Aviv office of Saatchi & Saatchi won the tender and began coordinating with the Inter-ministerial Committee (Xharra and Waehlich 2011).

Logo and slogan

The campaign’s logo was designed to represent Kosovo’s nature, the colors used are green, to represent the countryside and its beautiful fields. The color burnt red is used to symbolize the color of the bricks that are used there, especially for the roofs of the houses, and lastly, the blue color stands for the sky and the water, the lakes, and the many rivers of Kosovo. The blue is also meant to represent the primary color of the flag. (Xharra and Waehlich 2011 ; Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Hapciu and Sparks, 2012).

The campaign's slogan, Kosovo: The Young Europeans was meant to bring forth the country's young demographic as well as bring forth and promote the country as the youngest country in the world. According to statistics, The youngest population in Europe is found in Kosovo, where the average age is just 25.9 years, which underscores their potential and the sense of optimism, attempting to brand the country as hip, young, cool, and full of life, with a lot of fresh perspectives (Xharra and Waehlich 2011; Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Hapciu and Sparks, 2012).



Figure 2- "Kosovo- The Young Europeans" official logo

According to Hapciu and Sparks (2012), Kosovo's nation branding strategy stands out from those of other nations since it emphasizes its creation of a new country instead of its natural resources, scenery, or history, rather, focusing on its youth, who are considered to have the most potential (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Hapciu and Sparks, 2012).

The campaign's strategy included a multidimensional approach. The mediums that were targeted and covered for this campaign were the Television, the billboards, and the Internet (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Hapciu and Sparks, 2012).

TV

The Television advertisement, a one-minute video which showcases a group of young Kosovars carrying out big yellow pieces to a big open green area where they begin assembling them. (Kaneva, 2018). The advertisement was placed on many different local televisions like Klan Kosova, RTK, KTV, and RTV21. It

was also aired on international TVs that include CNN, BBC, Euro Sport, Euro News, Bloomberg and more. (Xharra and Waehlich 2011; Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Hapciu and Sparks, 2012).

Billboards

In addition to the TV ad, the campaign also included a series of pictures that were placed on billboards around Kosovo as well as placed in different magazines internally, and world known international magazines such as the Newsweek and the Economist (Xharra and Waehlich 2011). The pictures included 10 young Kosovars that had different aspirations and interests such as a DJ, a guitar player, an actor, a soccer player and more. The campaign was meant to show the faces of the new country (Imeri, 2022).

Internet

On the Internet, that campaign was featured in different social media platform such as Youtube, Twitter, Facebook (Xharra and Waehlich 2011).

Objectives

The primary objective of the “Kosovo—The Young Europeans” campaign was to raise awareness about Kosovo and portray the nation in a more favorable light, asserting its presence on the global stage. According to Xharra and Waehlich (2011), the goal was to inform the world that Kosovo exists and who its citizens truly are. The government’s intention was to establish Kosovo as an integral part of the international community, aiming to align the country with European values and aspirations. According to the Kosovar government: The main objective of the campaign is to securely integrate Kosovo into the family of nations, both in Europe and globally. (RKS Gov)

The unique approach of this campaign was to emphasize the vibrancy of Kosovo’s youth, distinguishing it from other nation-branding initiatives. By highlighting the “natural fountain of youth” and the energetic spirit that flows through the streets and landscapes of Kosovo, the campaign aimed to create an emotional connection with the global audience. The government highlighted this focus, stressing that underlying the solid fact: Kosovo currently has the youngest age average of any other European country, at only 25.9 years, explains Xharra and Waehlich (2011). In showing youthfulness and vitality, the campaign attempted to develop a distinctive image for Kosovo on the world stage.

However, the objectives of the campaign became somewhat ambiguous, as many Kosovars, including political figures, struggled to understand its primary purpose. Xharra and Waehlich (2011) note that it was unclear whether the campaign aimed to make Kosovo known abroad, secure recognition of its

independence, forge a new national identity, or attract investment. This ambiguity ultimately clouded the campaign's intended goals and created mixed interpretations of its purpose.

In essence, the "Kosovo—The Young Europeans" campaign marked a first attempt at positioning Kosovo on the world stage through the lens of youthful energy and resilience. Yet, a lack of clarity in objectives and a misalignment with socio-economic realities limited the campaign's effectiveness, leaving room for further refinement and strategic targeting in future nation-branding efforts.

Target audience

Stakeholder requirements and competencies should be taken into consideration while developing national brands. Furthermore, the strategy should coincide with the target audience's values. Nonetheless, it is vital to consider the concerns of citizens as well as external audiences in order to develop a great national brand. A campaign's target audience must be identified before it can begin, and its message must be highly targeted and relevant rather than general (Dinnie and Sevin, 2020).

The "Kosovo—The Young Europeans" campaign initially targeted high-impact, international media platforms to capture the attention of influential audiences abroad. Print ads appeared in prominent publications like *The Economist* and *Newsweek*, as well as select in-flight airline magazines, including *Austria Airlines* (Xharra and Waehlich 2011). With its primary geographical focus on Europe, the campaign sought to reach European policymakers, such as Members of the European Parliament, and also U.S. policymakers on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. Xharra and Waehlich (2011) refers to the Kosovo Government.

The campaign focused on a "360°" approach, which aimed not only to attract foreign audiences but also to inspire national pride among Kosovars themselves (Xharra and Waehlich 2011). By targeting local audiences with billboards, posters, and media, the campaign hoped to encourage Kosovars to take pride in their country and share that enthusiasm internationally (Xharra and Waehlich 2011; Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Hapciu and Sparks, 2012). The Kosovo government underlined this dual goal, noting that when the citizens of Kosovo view the campaign, they will be able to share its values and excitement with their friends and relatives in other nations. This is how the message spreads in today's globally connected society (RKS Gov).

However, questions arose about the effectiveness and appropriateness of the target audience choices. While a substantial portion of the campaign's efforts focused on European countries that had already

recognized Kosovo, including Germany, Austria, and the UK, opposition party representatives and interviewees suggested this approach was misdirected (Xharra and Waehlich 2011). According to civil society and political figures, resources would have been more effectively allocated to the five European Union countries that had not yet recognized Kosovo's independence, as well as member states of the Arab League (Xharra and Waehlich 2011).

Criticism also extended to the extensive promotion of the campaign within Kosovo. Many viewed the domestic focus as unnecessary or even counterproductive, with local citizens wondering if it was simply a cost-cutting measure to avoid the expenses of international promotion (Xharra and Waehlich 2011). This concern, expressed by both civil society representatives and citizens, suggested that the campaign may have focused too much on the "Western gaze" and not enough on impactful international outreach to unrecognized or strategically important nations (Kaneva, 2018).

While the campaign's 360° approach reflected an ambitious vision, critiques surrounding its targeting strategies indicate that Kosovo's nation-branding efforts may have missed opportunities to maximize international impact. The next section will delve into the campaign's messaging and approach, analyzing how effectively it aligned with the needs and perceptions of the various audiences it sought to engage.

4.2. Limitations of the campaign

Domestic opinion and unity

Of course, we can establish policies or guidelines that include the key elements of national branding. This does not imply that nation branding efforts can be standardized or modeled into a universal template. (Dinnie, 2008, p.219). There is no secret formula that works for all countries because they are all different. (Papp-Vary, 2019). However, it is still important to identify guides and identity manuals, and steps, that have to be used and applied carefully to the specific country.

In developing the "Young Europeans" campaign, Saatchi & Saatchi primarily relied on international surveys, which revealed that Kosovo was barely recognized as a nation and was largely associated with negative connotations such as war, crime, and corruption (Xharra and Waehlich, 2011; Imeri, 2022). These findings led to a campaign focused on portraying the country's youth as a vibrant and dynamic population in an effort to counteract negative stereotypes and highlight Kosovo's potential (Xharra and Waehlich, 2011). However, this approach prioritized reshaping international perceptions of Kosovo

(Imeri, 2022) while neglecting the importance of understanding and engaging with domestic public opinion (Aronczyk, 2013, p.86).

The success of a nation brand ultimately depends on its people, including citizens, the diaspora, and those abroad who might find cause to connect with the country's image (Aronczyk, 2013, p.93). Moilanen and Rainisto (2009) emphasize that a nation brand must first establish itself domestically, promoting a cohesive national identity before launching into the international arena. By involving citizens in the brand-building process and fostering internal pride, a brand can appear more authentic and robust.

However, as Papp-Váry (2019) draws from Hankiss (2000), creating a unified national message in a democratic society is full of challenges. While guidance can be provided, expecting citizens to uniformly align with the presented message is idealistic. In democratic societies, people have diverse viewpoints and experiences, making it difficult for a single, top-down narrative to capture the full complexity of a nation's identity (Papp-Váry, 2019).

Papp-Váry (2019) further explains that people within a country are not "parrots" who will merely echo the messaging put forth in a branding campaign. This critique applies to Kosovo's "Young Europeans" campaign, which attempted to project an image of optimism and youthfulness but may have lacked resonance with Kosovars themselves. Some felt the campaign did not accurately reflect the country's realities, as socio-economic conditions continued to limit opportunities for young Kosovars (Kaneva, 2018). By 2016, unemployment among the 15- to 24-year-old age group—a key demographic featured in the campaign—was alarmingly high at 57.7 percent (UNDP, undated). The government's optimistic portrayal of Kosovo as a "fountain of youth" clashed with the harsh realities of high youth unemployment, economic struggles, and limited welfare provisions.

By relying predominantly on international surveys (Xharra and Waehlich, 2011), the "Young Europeans" campaign may have overlooked the diverse perspectives of Kosovo's citizens. As Rowe and Frewer (2005) explain, using surveys alone often fail to provide opportunities for meaningful dialogue or to capture the full scope of public sentiment. This limited domestic engagement ultimately undermined the campaign's ability to present an authentic and unified message that resonated with both internal and external audiences.

While the integration of domestic opinion is necessary and essential in a nation branding campaign, Anholt (2007) also underscores the importance of honesty, cautioning nations to "be true to ourselves instead of lying to others". Without addressing internal issues and securing alignment among citizens, a

nation risks projecting an idealized but ultimately ineffective image. This also speaks to the governance component of Anholt's NB hexagon. Achieving unity and resonance among citizens is a key aspect of governance in nation branding because it reflects the country's efforts to address public sentiment and build an image that resonates with its people. When governance fails to engage all voices, the campaign risks being seen as inauthentic or propagandistic, as noted in Anholt's (2007) hexagon.

Critics underscored this discrepancy between the campaign's message and everyday life. *Gazeta Express*, a local daily, produced a parody of the campaign, dressing staff in stereotypical representations such as "the Housewife" and "the Manual Laborer," highlighting facets of Kosovo's reality that the campaign overlooked (Xharra and Waehlich 2011). This critique echoes Papp-Vary's (2019) assertion that brand narratives cannot simply be imposed on people like "parrots", if the story being told does not resonate authentically with their experiences, it risks coming across as propaganda rather than genuine representation.

Single entity focused

According to Papp-Vary (2019), successful nation branding must encompass a spectrum of institutional bodies, as expecting a single entity to represent all voices within a nation is unrealistic. Assembling key figures, such as the head of state or government, the foreign affairs minister, ministers of culture, tourism, and education, CEOs of private sector, and respected civil society figures like athletes, pop stars or religious leaders, each bringing unique insights into the national image and broadcast the same thought, idea, or image (Aronczyk, p.90, 2013; Hankiss, 2000). This collaborative approach aims to align the goals of varied institutions, making the brand message more cohesive and adaptable to the needs of each sector.

However, Kosovo's "Young Europeans" campaign, led by Saatchi & Saatchi, involved government ministries such as the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Education, and Culture (Xharra and Waehlich 2011), without broader private sector involvement. Aronczyk (2013 p, 90-91) points out that while governments may initiate a brand, long-term success requires private sector investment to sustain it, given that government election cycles often disrupt long-term goals, therefore, limiting the campaigns ability in conveying a unified message

Ultimately, the Young Europeans campaign illustrates both the promise and limitations of nation branding when not fully grounded in an honest, internally cohesive identity. While the campaign inspired pride and optimism in some, it failed to achieve universal resonance, highlighting Anholt's (2009) insight that a

nation brand must be anchored in truthfulness to succeed. Addressing the internal self-image of a nation, especially one with a complex history like Kosovo, requires more than messaging; it demands a deliberate effort to integrate citizens' lived realities into the brand. A campaign that only reaches a portion of the population or omits critical societal challenges risks undermining its own message, pointing to the need for future efforts to align both the internal and external narratives of Kosovo's brand.

5. CHALLENGES IN KOSOVO'S NATION BRANDING

There are three main challenges that Kosovo faced, and still faces, in its nation branding attempts. These challenges are:

1. Political and diplomatic barriers
2. Limited resources
3. International perception

5.1. Political and diplomatic barriers

Kosovo's nation branding efforts face significant political and diplomatic barriers, stemming from a lack of long-term strategic alignment and consistency. Despite the initial success of the "Kosovo: The Young Europeans" campaign, Kosovo has struggled to establish a cohesive brand that resonates both internationally and domestically. According to Heroína (2024), Kosovo's ambassador in Panama, the Young Europeans campaign was "a great campaign to put the word out there," aimed at introducing Kosovo as an independent nation, and letting the world know that Kosovo exists. However, Telaku (2024) points out a critical issue: "Truth be told, we do not have a brand in place as a country. A brand is consistency, a brand is coherent." She notes that Kosovo's diplomatic representation lacks a unified identity.

Interviewee Petrit Selimi (2024), former Minister of Foreign Affairs, echoes Telaku's (2024) concerns regarding Kosovo's lack of consistency in its nation branding and its diplomatic efforts. This strengthens Xharra and Waehlich (2011) view that in the 1990s, Kosovo's leaders and diaspora actively lobbied for international recognition, meanwhile current efforts seem fragmented and less impactful. "Kosovo's diplomacy is weak, the country should focus on the education of its diplomats in order to ensure a positive outcome of its diplomatic efforts" states Bix Aliu (2024), a US diplomat who served in many countries around the Balkans. Aliu (2024) strengthens Telaku's (2024) statement on the lack of unity and

strategy of Kosovo's diplomacy. Aliu (2024) believes that without a robust diplomatic framework, Kosovo will continue to face challenges in aligning its branding initiatives with international recognition efforts.

This lack of strategic alignment also extends to Kosovo's branding campaigns. Leart Zogjani (2024), a branding expert, explains that while the "Young Europeans" campaign was a promising start, it lacked a clear value proposition and target audience. "Yes, we managed to get the message out that we are young and there's a lot of workforce here," he says, "but what exactly did we want to convey with that?" Zogjani (2024) believes the campaign missed an opportunity to leverage Kosovo's historical and cultural narrative. Xharra and Waehlich (2011) also agree with Zogjani (2024) that Kosovo branding could have portrayed its challenges and what its people have gone through, while still managing to resurface and survive, such as the most recent war and to emphasize that the country did not just appear out of nothing, and its people did not just bloom out of nowhere. The popularization or modernization of cultural values contributes to the uniqueness of a nation; hence, the incorporation of historical or folkloric aspects in national promotional campaigns is not an uncommon occurrence (Miazhevich, 2012, Vujaçiq 2013). This, however, brings us to our next point. Due to the delicate nature of Kosovo's political situation and the need to avoid ethnic symbolism, as noted by scholars like Saliu (2017), the campaign could not overtly reference ethnic or historical symbols, restricting the narrative it could portray on the global stage. "Kosovo's diplomatic efforts have been plagued by continuous antagonism with Serbia" states Selimi (2024). Grasping from this, we can clarify that because of Kosovo's political situation, the branding campaign had to avoid the use of historical storytelling or its cultural part, which resonates with Telaku's (2024) views that Kosovo has many political barriers that should be addressed in future branding campaigns.

Discussing the operational challenges of nation branding, Telaku (2024) echoes Arpad Papp-Vary's (2019) concerns about coordinating multiple institutional bodies. On nation branding campaigns in Kosovo, the execution across various ministries underscored the difficulty of ensuring a unified message. She states that in order to make sure the message stays consistent, all of the stakeholders should be in line with the messaging, and that includes all ministries and embassies abroad. That makes it very difficult to brand a nation, especially a brand new nation that is still figuring its internal policies out (Telaku, 2024). This points to the need for a more centralized and cohesive approach to nation branding, where strategic alignment and consistency across all levels of government and public communication are paramount.

A significant observation from Zogjani's (2024) insights is the shift towards the private sector in driving Kosovo's branding initiatives forward. Companies and organizations have taken it upon themselves to

craft new narratives for the country. One example is the collaboration between Speeex, an IT and business process optimization company, and Zero Positive, an advertising firm in Kosovo, which launched the "Made in Kosovo" campaign. This campaign aimed to reposition Kosovo as an attractive destination for business and investment, showcasing the proactive role of private entities in nation branding. The "Made in Kosovo" campaign, targets the Kosovan diaspora, encouraging them to reconnect and invest in their homeland, and their slogan, Back to Your Roots depicts just that. (MAK, 2024)

These efforts are in line with Aronczyk's suggestion that a country must utilize both its public and private sector for its nation branding efforts in order to ensure the campaign is successful (Aronczyk, 2013, p.89-90). Moreover, as Zogjani (2024) explains, "branding campaigns on countries take years to be able to tell if it actually worked or not." He attributes the lack of follow-through on the campaign to Kosovo's political turnover, with new governments frequently altering priorities as well as being constrained by election cycles, which inhibits long-term nation branding consistency (Aronczyk, 2013, p.90; Papp-Vary 2019). This view aligns with Papp-Vary's (2019) theory that nation branding can take 10 to 20 years to yield measurable results, a timeline often at odds with political cycles that demand quick outcomes.

In conclusion, Kosovo's political and diplomatic barriers are defined by a lack of long-term strategic alignment. While Kosovo's initial branding campaigns have made strides in putting the country on the international stage, the absence of a unified approach, coupled with inconsistent political backing, continues to hinder the development of a strong, recognizable nation brand.

5.2. Limited resources

Kosovo's financial limitations present a significant barrier to nation branding efforts, as the country's resources are often stretched to cover urgent socioeconomic priorities such as unemployment reduction, healthcare improvements, and educational reform (Xharra and Waehlich 2011). With these pressing domestic needs, nation branding initiatives may sometimes be seen as secondary concerns. Many Kosovars have voiced frustration over the allocation of public funds toward branding efforts, arguing that these resources could have been redirected toward more immediate, developmental projects that directly benefit the population and strengthen the nation's infrastructure (Xharra and Waehlich 2011).

The "Kosovo: The Young Europeans" campaign serves as an example of how these financial constraints impact Kosovo's branding initiatives. Launched with the goal of introducing Kosovo to the global stage, the campaign was allocated a substantial budget of €5.7 million over two years (Xharra and Waehlich

2011). This expenditure raised concerns among the public, as some questioned whether such a significant investment in branding was feasible for a country with Kosovo's limited resources. By comparison, other nations with modest budgets have spent considerably less on their campaigns. Bulgaria, for example, allocated around €3.8 million in 2004 across multiple initiatives focused on tourism, foreign direct investment, and EU accession efforts (Kaneva, 2009). Similarly, Kenya, which has been working on a nation branding campaign since 2003, committed approximately \$385,000 to its project in 2007 (Waithaka, 2007). Despite Kosovo's smaller population and geographic size, its budget for a single campaign exceeded those of many other financially constrained nations.

Nonetheless, successful nation branding can rely on more than financial resources. There are untapped resources among Kosovo's citizens and diaspora, as well as within the government, private sector, and civil society. Harnessing the potential of these groups as brand ambassadors could provide a cost-effective, sustainable way to promote Kosovo's image abroad (Xharra and Waehlich 2011). This approach would allow Kosovo to maximize its limited resources while establishing a collective effort in shaping the country's identity on the international arena.

5.3. International perception

Since declaring independence in 2008, Kosovo has faced considerable challenges in reshaping its international image. Decades of association with conflict and political instability have left lasting impressions, and Kosovo remains perceived as a troubled region rather than an emerging nation with its own cultural and economic potential. For many, Kosovo was not even seen as a distinct entity but as part of a larger geographical notion within the former Yugoslav federation. The 1999 NATO intervention and subsequent UN administration, while bringing attention to Kosovo, portrayed it as a vulnerable area in need of external oversight and intervention rather than an independent, thriving nation (Saliu, 2017).

These early perceptions were difficult to overcome, as Kosovo's identity was defined by its war-torn history, ethnic divisions, and political instability. Interviewee Eroll Bilibani, Head of Dokufest, a film festival in Kosovo, points out that Kosovo's association with conflict and insecurity often casts it in a negative light. This perception still lingers, making it challenging to convince foreign audiences to see Kosovo as a safe and dynamic country with much to offer. Changing these stereotypes requires consistent and long-term efforts, as international guests often find it difficult to look beyond Kosovo's troubled past (Bilibani, 2024).

According to Simon Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon, a country's positive perception relies on multiple factors that need to satisfy both domestic and international audiences. These factors, or "pillars," include governance, tourism, people, exports, culture and heritage, and investment and immigration. For a country to be considered "good", these pillars have to resonate positively.

For example, Anholt's (2007) model suggests that successful country branding requires strong governance, which is essential to establish trust both within the nation and internationally. Professor Gëzim Visoka (2021) highlights that Kosovo's reputation for governance challenges, including corruption and policy instability, impedes its ability to present a positive image. These governance issues undermine efforts to build a cohesive, trustworthy identity, ultimately impacting Kosovo's ability to attract investment and instill confidence in its governance on the global stage (KAS, 2021). Bix Aliu (2024) emphasizes that Kosovo needs to address internal governance issues to effectively shift its reputation. With a government often viewed as corrupt, Kosovo's reputation abroad cannot improve without tackling these core issues. According to Aliu (2024), Kosovo's leaders must prioritize transparency, alignment with Western democratic values, and strong governance to encourage a foundation that allows for authentic nation branding. By focusing on policy reforms and social stability, Kosovo can create a more trustworthy and positive reputation, both internationally and domestically (Aliu, 2024).

But as Papp Vary (2019) notes, "There is no country branding without a country strategy." Politics, actual government, and strategy cannot be replaced by an advertising effort, logo, or slogan. Bad, unclear politics result in a bad, unclear reputation. In each instance, the national image is a component of the national strategy, acting as a face, expression or communication tool. Since there is no national strategy, the nation's image is likewise on the loose and can be overwritten at any time by anyone who lacks reason, understanding, comprehension, and connection. (BÍRÓ, 2009)

Simon Anholt, supports this approach by warning against the superficial application of commercial marketing techniques to nation branding. Anholt argues that nation branding is only sustainable when it is built on a country's authentic identity (Anholt, 2010). Or, as he says (2010), we must first figure out how to be truthful with ourselves rather than deceiving others. Without internal security, self-assurance, values, and identity, a nation brand cannot be developed.

Therefore, this strengthens Anholt's (2007) Nation Branding Hexagon, that in order for a country to be deemed as "good" there needs to be satisfaction in all pillars of the hexagon, internally and externally.

In summary, Kosovo's path to overcoming international perception barriers requires a comprehensive strategy that addresses its internal issues alongside external branding. This approach not only promotes a sustainable reputation but also lays the foundation for Kosovo to present itself as a secure, reliable, and culturally rich nation on the global stage.

6. FINDINGS

Due to a combination of factors, primary amongst them resulting from interviews with nation branding experts, as well as recommendations from other scholars such as Limani (2018), Saliu (2022), Xharra (2011), Kaneva (2018), Imeri (2022), I have chosen to concentrate on Public Diplomacy and the Cultural Diplomacy dimension.

6.1. Public diplomacy and diaspora

Public diplomacy, a concept developed during the Cold War, empowers governments and the people of a nation to influence global audiences and governments. This influence extends to areas such as trade, security, consumer relations, and diplomatic decisions. Public diplomacy, theoretically, can be wielded by any member of society to advance national interests, educate global audiences, and shape public opinion worldwide, expediting mutual benefits for both the nation and its citizens. For smaller nations, public diplomacy is especially critical as it significantly expands their influence (Xharra and Waehlich, 2012).

Diasporas serve as important actors in public diplomacy. According to Xharra and Waehlich (2012), "living links" such as friendships, commercial ties, cultural diversity, and information exchange emerge from migration. Mark Leonard elaborates on this by noting that diasporas provide essential political insight, cultural understanding, and human intelligence vital for effective foreign policy (Leonard, 2022).

Distance often heightens nostalgia among diasporas, promoting a strong emotional connection to their homeland. Ralf Gjoni, in his study of the Albanian diaspora as a foreign policy actor, observes that diasporas express their emotional commitment through political activism, often with greater passion and efficacy than state politics in the home country (Gjoni, 2006).

Kosovo has taken concrete steps to engage its diaspora. In 2011, the Ministry for Diaspora was established to assist, support, and strengthen the linguistic, cultural, and educational ties between Kosovo and its diaspora (UN Migration, 2013). Diplomat Bix Aliu (2024) emphasizes the importance of leveraging the diaspora to improve Kosovo's image abroad by creating additional diaspora ministries in

key locations. This strategy strengthens Kosovo's statehood and contributes to its nation-branding efforts (Aliu, 2024). As Aliu notes, many Kosovars abroad are eager to promote Kosovo's reputation, further supporting Xharra and Waehlich's assertion that remittances are no longer the sole function of the diaspora; instead, they now play an active role in enhancing Kosovo's international standing (Xharra and Waehlich, 2012).

Telaku (2024) highlights the unique role citizens play in branding Kosovo internationally, purely out of pride for their nation: "Every resident feels obligated to take action in this area." Branding expert Zogjani (2024) adds to this by discussing the private sector's efforts in nation branding through the diaspora, citing initiatives like the Made in Kosovo campaign by Speeex and Zero Positive. This campaign targeted the diaspora with the slogan Back to Your Roots, encouraging investment in Kosovo while showcasing the power of clear value propositions and targeted messaging. Zogjani (2024) underscores how such efforts can inspire similar private-public collaborations in Kosovo's nation-branding strategies.

Beyond these initiatives, cultural exchanges and study abroad programs play a crucial role in Kosovo's public diplomacy. As Telaku (2024) explains, programs like sending young judo players from Panama to Kosovo help strengthen Kosovo's image as a "place of Judo." Such exchanges cultivate cross-cultural communication and enrich Kosovo's international reputation. Similarly, Eroll Bilibani (2024) of Dokufest film festival highlights how cultural exchanges lead to collaborations that enhance Kosovo's global image. Bilibani (2024), along with Aliu (2024), advocates for greater investment in educational exchange programs, citing examples like the YES and Fulbright scholarships, which bring international knowledge to Kosovo while shaping perceptions abroad. As highlighted in the literature review, Gregory (2011) also emphasizes the value of public diplomacy in gaining insight into foreign cultures and building connections that spur actions that further national objectives. According to Leonard (2002), this all-encompassing engagement frequently involves younger audiences through technology, online networking, student exchanges, and cultural events such as scientific, art, and sports exchanges.

Based on the literature review and the insights from interviews, it is clear that cultural exchanges hold significant value for a country's public diplomacy efforts. Kosovo has made advancements in promoting and maintaining such exchanges, yet it is evident that more can be done, particularly in terms of securing consistent funding and strategic investments. While initiatives like the YES and Fulbright scholarships and cultural events have had a positive impact, the full potential of these programs can only be realized with stronger financial support and long-term commitment. Unfortunately, despite the promise of these initiatives, Kosovo's efforts are often delayed and set back by a lack of consistent funding and strategic

direction. The growing gap between ambitious plans and tangible outcomes leaves Kosovo's international image precariously dependent on isolated successes rather than a cohesive and sustainable strategy. Without these necessary investments, Kosovo risks losing momentum in its international engagement and missing the opportunity to fully leverage its cultural assets for global recognition.

6.2. Sports as a branch of cultural diplomacy

Kosovo's cultural diplomacy is strengthened by its "diplomatic wealth", the talent of its citizens both at home and abroad (Brovina, Arifi and Nuhiu, 2020). Ambassador Telaku (2024) explains, "We are a very small nation with a lot of talent, so many people have no idea where Kosovo even is. They have no idea that Saint Mother Teresa for example was an Albanian from Kosovo, or that stars like Dua Lipa and Rita Ora are from Kosovo. On the other hand, we have won several Olympic golden medals in Judo, athletes like Majlinda Kelmendi, Distria Krasniqi and Nora Gjakova represent Kosovo and embodies both the spirit and resilience of its people."

As my literature review explains, integrating art, music, and sports, all of which are potent instruments for creating and presenting a country's identity overseas, is a successful strategy for cultural diplomacy (Williams, 1960). The image of Kosovo, according to researcher Imeri (2021), who cites Ymeri and academics Merovci and Krasniqi, should begin in some fields such as cultural, which includes values from music, sports, and movies, and Ambassador Telaku (2024) reflects just that. According to Imeri (2021) sociologists that study culture and sports focus particularly on the peaks of success achieved by athletes, like Distria Krasniqi, Nora Gjakova as well as Majlinda Kelmendi, who have won gold medals in Judo at the Olympics, elevating Kosovo to the status of one of the world's most developed judo nations.

At the Kazan, Russia, European Judo Championships, Majlinda Kelmendi won a gold medal. On the other hand, Majlinda's win announcement in Russia is the most significant development for Kosovo's sports diplomacy. This is a unique occasion since Kosovo competed in events held in a nation that strongly opposes Kosovo's subjectivity and independence (Rexhepi and Sahiti, 2021). This goes on to explain truly powerful sports diplomacy can be. With this triumph, Kosovo was able to establish its identity on a global stage, demonstrating not only their athletic ability but also the unifying power of sports in transcending political and diplomatic barriers. This accomplishment shows that sports can, in fact, act as a bridge between nations at odds and means more than simply a medal.

Authors such as Brencis and Ikkala (2013) examined the relationship between nation branding and sports by analyzing Latvia's case on ice hockey. In a small nation like Latvia, which is still struggling with nation branding, its development of ice hockey initiated a lot of popularity that is now used for the country's international promotion (Brencis and Ikkala, 2013). Limani (2018) suggests that Kosovo can leverage the same idea with judo in Kosovo and utilize its power to positively promote its image in the global stage. Telaku (2024) further goes on with the idea that Kosovo can become a hub and a training school for judo, and it seems the Kosovo government together with its respected embassies around the globe are doing just that.

These athletes and pop stars not only showcase Kosovo's talents on the international stage but also serve as ambassadors of the nation's identity and values. Their successes and their stories of perseverance and determination resonate with a narrative of overcoming adversity, a theme that is central to Kosovo's recent history and its efforts to establish itself as a sovereign nation. By highlighting these achievements, Kosovo can further cultivate its image as a country of vibrant culture, spirited youth, and remarkable talent, gaining greater awareness and appreciation of its identity and heritage globally." adds ambassador Heroina Telaku (2024).

Combining the diaspora and sports diplomacy, Xherdan Shaqiri, a Kosovo football player who now resides in Switzerland, is well-known to Kosovars worldwide. Born in Gjilan, Kosovo, Xherdan Shaqiri currently plays football for both the Swiss national team and FC Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga (Xharra and Waehlich, 2012). When questioned about his origins and upbringing, Shaqiri frequently brings up Kosovo and his heritage in interviews. In an interview for talkSPORT (2023), Shaqiri shares his family's migration story and his pride in his background. Additionally, he received the Diaspora Award, which is granted annually to a person who has improved Kosovo's image, improved peace and development there, promoted cultural values, and helped Kosovars integrate into Switzerland. (Xharra and Waehlich, 2012).

Global television networks centered on Xherdan Shaqiri during the European Champions Cup finals on May 25, 2013, as he raised the cup that Bayern had won, draped in a flag that featured the flags of Switzerland and Kosovo stitched together. Immediately following the game, he took the pitch at London's Wembley Stadium, where the final match was played, carrying the flags of Kosovo and Switzerland (Blick, 2013). This gesture meant a lot for Kosovars all over the world, and drew global attention, strengthening Kosovo's image abroad.

6.3. Music as a branch of cultural diplomacy

When artists achieve global success, they significantly shape perceptions of their country or place of origin. In Kosovo's case, international pop icons like Dua Lipa and Rita Ora play an important role in enhancing the country's image. Both artists are part of the Kosovar diaspora, a fact that underscores the potential of engaging this community in Kosovo's nation branding efforts. Their achievements highlight the vital role the diaspora can play in promoting Kosovo's culture and identity globally.

Dua Lipa: A global star with Kosovar roots

Dua Lipa, a globally renowned singer, was born in Kosovo and now resides in Great Britain. With her record-breaking albums and viral hits that topped charts such as the Billboard Hot 100, Lipa has amassed numerous accolades, including many Brit Awards, three Grammy Awards, and two Guinness World Records (Avdiu et al., 2022). Dua Lipa's success has brought significant attention to Kosovo, especially through her active promotion of her heritage.

In 2018, she performed at the Sunny Hill Charity Festival in Prishtina alongside other international artists, an event that introduced Kosovo to the global cultural stage. The festival aimed to promote a sense of belonging and emphasize Kosovo's European identity (Walker 2018). Lipa also expressed her pride in being Kosovar in various interviews, stating, "We always tell others that we are from Kosovo; we are very proud of where we come from" (RKS, Gov, 2021). Her influence is amplified by coverage from major outlets like Fox News and The Independent, which highlighted her appointment as Kosovo's honorary cultural ambassador. In interviews, Dua Lipa frequently references Kosovo's culture, people, cuisine, and immense potential. (Lewis, 2022; Messier, 2022)

Rita Ora: Shining a light on Kosovo

Rita Ora, another internationally recognized artist, was born in Kosovo and moved to Britain at the age of one. Known for her strong ties to her homeland, she often discusses her Kosovar origins in interviews. Media outlets such as the BBC and the Daily Mail have highlighted her background, further cementing her role as a cultural ambassador (Saliu, 2022). Ora's music video for Shine Ya Light, filmed in Prishtina, showcased various parts of Kosovo, introducing the country to a broader audience (Cooper, 2012).

Ora stated in 2012 that, because Kosovo is so patriotic, I am proud to have my birthplace, a small city named Pristina, on a map. (Xharra and Waehlich, 2012). Her influence extends beyond music. For Kosovo's 10th independence anniversary in 2018, Ora organized a free concert in Prishtina, attracting

over 300,000 attendees and drawing significant global media attention (Acres 2018). Her contributions earned her the title of honorary ambassador of Kosovo, with President Atifete Jahjaga describing her as the nation's "most successful artist" for her role in enhancing Kosovo's global reputation (Powell 2015).

The success stories of Dua Lipa and Rita Ora underscore the immense potential of Kosovo's diaspora in nation branding. Both artists use their platforms to celebrate their Kosovar roots, inspiring pride within the local population and fostering a positive global image of the country. Their achievements highlight the strategic importance of involving the diaspora in cultural diplomacy initiatives, as they serve as effective ambassadors for Kosovo's culture, values, and identity on the global stage. By leveraging such influential figures and the broader diaspora, Kosovo can further its nation branding goals, showcasing itself as a vibrant and culturally rich nation.

6.4. Festivals

Festivals, as part of the music and art scene, are essential for cultural diplomacy (Dines, 2021) because they provide communities with a platform to express their values and goals, which strengthens international relations and national identity (Merkel, 2013). A country's visibility and attractiveness can be heightened by bringing diverse audiences into contact with its creative and cultural scenes through events such as music or film festivals, which function at the intersection of cultural diplomacy and tourism (Richards and Wilson, 2004). In the context of Kosovo's nation branding, events like the Sunny Hill Festival and Dokufest Film Festival play an important role in reshaping the country's international image by showing its vibrant cultural offerings.

Moreover, this further strengthens Papp-Váry's (2019), point that successful nation branding must encompass a spectrum of institutional bodies and not only the government. The involvement of the private sector (in addition to other bodies like the government, athletes, pop stars and famous leaders) is key to bring unique insights into the national image (Aronczyk, 2013 p.89-90; Hankiss, 2000). This collaborative approach aims to align the goals of varied institutions, making the brand message more cohesive and adaptable to the needs of each sector.

Sunnyhill festival

From a broader international artistic perspective, Kosovo's nation branding benefits directly from cultural diplomacy efforts like these, similar to how the Madonna concert in Montenegro helped promote the nation's rebranding after its socialist past (Vujaçiq, 2013). The Sunny Hill Festival exemplifies this process

in Kosovo, where it is not just a musical event but a vibrant cultural spectacle that connects international artists and audiences, promoting a progressive perception of Kosovo as a dynamic and welcoming nation.

The Sunny Hill Festival has become an important factor of Kosovo's nation branding strategy under Dukagjin Lipa's leadership. It serves as a platform to change outdated prejudices and present Kosovo as a hub of world-class entertainment and cultural diversity. By attracting international musicians and foreign spectators, the festival uses media and social media to reinforce Kosovo's emerging image as a progressive and lively nation. This media coverage aligns with Kosovo's broader nation branding objectives of breaking negative stereotypes and building a new narrative about the country.

Dua Lipa, in an interview with The Graham Norton Show (2024), said, "One thing that I really wanted to do when my career started taking off is going back to Kosovo and putting on a show. Bringing in artists from all over the world and changing the rhetoric around what people's idea about Kosovo is, and it being a war-torn country, to coming to see it for what an amazing country it now is." This statement underscores the transformative role that cultural diplomacy, through initiatives like the Sunny Hill Festival, plays in shifting global perceptions of Kosovo's national brand.

Dukagjin Lipa (2024) further explains, "Sunny Hill Festival has truly transformed the way the world sees Kosovo." The festival has proven to be a powerful tool for nation branding, challenging outdated narratives and presenting Kosovo as a country rich in culture and hospitality. By hosting international superstars like Miley Cyrus and Calvin Harris alongside local talent, the festival highlights Kosovo's vibrant culture and contributes to reshaping its global identity.

The #SETMEFREE movement, which emerged alongside the Sunny Hill Festival, has been central to Kosovo's branding efforts. Initially launched as a call for Kosovo's visa liberalization, the movement symbolized a broader push for freedom of movement and inclusion within Europe. The #SETMEFREE campaign gained significant attention as a powerful symbol of the restrictions faced by Kosovars, advocating for equal treatment and rights within the global community. Dukagjin Lipa (2024) reflects on the movement's evolution, explaining how it became a force in advocating for Kosovo's freedom of movement: "When we started #SETMEFREE at Sunny Hill Festival, it was a hopeful call against a very real restriction our people faced. For years, this movement was about bringing down barriers that kept Kosovars from experiencing the same freedoms as our neighbors. It was a straightforward demand for a #VisaFreeKosovo."



Figure 3 - Sunnyhill Festival "Set me free" campaign (2022)

The #SETMEFREE movement, led by the Lipa family, garnered wide support and played a crucial role in achieving visa-free travel for Kosovars within the European Union. As Dukagjin Lipa (2024) proudly states, "Now, after so much advocacy and so many voices coming together, we've made significant progress. From January, Kosovars have been traveling freely across Europe. It's a profound change and a testament to the years of campaigning by many dedicated individuals." This achievement not only marked a major milestone in Kosovo's development but also became an important component of its nation branding, signaling Kosovo's progress and growing international integration.

With its widespread recognition, the Sunny Hill Festival has brought attention to Kosovo's developing cultural landscape. Reputable magazines have acknowledged the festival's importance. ABC News (2018), for example, has detailed Dua Lipa's rise to fame and the festival's part in it. MTV UK (2018) has acknowledged her achievement of being given the first key to her hometown of Kosovo. The festival's contribution to advancing a "peace-loving" Kosovo is highlighted by The Guardian (2018), mirroring a larger narrative change that acknowledges the country's vitality and promise. BBC news (2024) highlights how Lipa's family festival is helping change Kosovo's international perception. According to Lipa's most recent data, approximately 40% of visitors were from outside of Kosovo; the country's diaspora will have a significant impact on this number, as those who have family here often bring friends with them. In an interview with the BBC, Lipa claims that SunnyHill festival is very effective at promoting a favorable picture of Kosovo. Earlier this year, Dua clarified, "I want to change the rhetoric of what people think about Kosovo and it being war-torn." Festival Squad (2018) highlights Dua Lipa's father's effort in starting the festival, highlighting a family enthusiasm for improving the country's standing abroad and confirming

the festival's cultural relevance. Collectively, these pieces create a fresh picture of Kosovo, presenting it as a nation full of artistic talent, music, and community spirit.

Lipa also notes that the festival's media coverage has been entirely organic “we did not need to pay for any of the newspapers to talk about the festival and Kosovo.” This free coverage is a significant benefit for Kosovo, especially given the country’s limited resources, making the festival an invaluable asset to its nation branding efforts.

As Kosovo continues to develop its nation branding efforts, the Sunny Hill Festival remains a key vehicle for promoting the country’s cultural dynamism, contributing to a positive and evolving narrative about Kosovo on the global stage. With the festival's growing international reach, it helps to create a new image of Kosovo as a young, innovative, and resilient nation, ready to embrace its place in the global community.

Dokufest festival

Dokufest, Kosovo's premier international documentary and short film festival, has emerged as a transformative force in reshaping the country's international image through its cultural and creative output. As the festival’s director, Eroll Bilibani (2024), explains, “Dokufest has been instrumental in changing how people see Kosovo, from a place known for conflict to one recognized for creativity and cultural richness.” The festival’s contributions extend far beyond its film screenings; it embodies Kosovo’s broader nation-branding strategy, linking culture, tourism, and economic development.

One of Dokufest's most significant achievements is its ability to shift the narrative around Kosovo. For years, the country was associated primarily with conflict, overshadowing its cultural potential. As Kim Willis writes for Hyphen Magazine (2023), “Kosovo is known more for conflict than culture, but at a film festival in the country’s prettiest town, Prizren, Dokufest makes a point of tackling tough issues.” By offering a platform for films that address global social issues and universal themes, the festival has redefined Kosovo’s image, showcasing the country’s depth, diversity, and resilience. This effort aligns with academic perspectives on festivals as spaces for cultural exchange and nation branding, which help enhance a country’s international reputation by providing opportunities to connect with diverse global audiences (Richards and Wilson, 2004).

The festival also plays a crucial role in connecting Kosovo to international cultural networks. As Bilibani observes, “These interactions lead to joint projects and collaborations that continue to reshape Kosovo’s

image on the international stage.” By attracting filmmakers, critics, and artists from around the world, Dokufest promotes networking and cooperation that extends Kosovo’s cultural reach. The festival has become a hub for creative professionals, strengthening Kosovo’s position in global cultural circuits and reinforcing its image as a vibrant center for the arts. This concept echoes the idea that festivals, by drawing diverse audiences, act as a bridge between the media, tourism, and cultural exchange (van Aalst and van Melik, 2012).

The festival’s impact also extends to Prizren’s local economy. According to a 2023 independent study, the influx of visitors during the festival significantly boosts the local economy, particularly for businesses in the hospitality and retail sectors. Bilibani adds, “Prizren has become a must-visit destination, attracting attention not only for its natural beauty but also for its cultural vibrancy.” The Guardian (2014) highlights this dynamic, noting that “this isn’t your standard summer tourist haunt. It’s Kosovo – a place that has experienced more conflict in the past 15 years than most of Europe has seen in generations. But this is the point of Dokufest.” The festival’s economic benefits align with broader theories that position festivals as key drivers of both cultural tourism and local development (Quinn, 2005).

Dokufest also plays an essential role in promoting national pride and unity. Through initiatives like youth workshops and volunteer programs, the festival empowers Kosovo’s next generation of cultural leaders. Bilibani states, “When people in Kosovo see their city and their stories celebrated on an international stage, it fosters pride and a shared sense of identity.” The festival showcases local talent, bringing Kosovo’s stories to a global audience and enhancing national pride. This sense of ownership over cultural production is vital in nation branding, as it promotes a positive, self-affirming national identity.

Prominent media coverage has further amplified the festival’s role in reshaping Kosovo’s image. As Hyphen Magazine points out, Dokufest “mixes partying and arts to great effect,” positioning the festival as not only a cultural event but also a celebration of Kosovo’s new identity. By generating such valuable, unpaid media coverage, Dokufest significantly contributes to Kosovo’s cultural diplomacy. These external recognitions help increase Kosovo’s visibility on the global stage, inviting international tourists and cultural enthusiasts to explore the country beyond its historical conflicts.

In conclusion, Dokufest exemplifies the power of cultural events in nation branding. By blending cultural diplomacy, local engagement, and international outreach, the festival helps shift Kosovo’s narrative from one defined by conflict to one defined by creativity, resilience, and cultural richness. As Bilibani

emphasizes, “Through our stories, Kosovo is proving not only headlines, it is also a place of growth and positive change, and Dokufest is proud to be part of that story.”

7. DISCUSSION

The insights from interviews conducted for this thesis collectively highlight a strong consensus among stakeholders: Kosovo possesses many cultural assets that can serve as an important factor for nation branding. These cultural assets include music, sports, festivals, and public figures which offer Kosovo a unique opportunity to present itself as a vibrant, creative, and dynamic nation. All interviewees emphasized that cultural heritage should outweigh narratives tied to pre-independence history, including the war, as these associations continue to reinforce negative perceptions abroad.

This perspective aligns with the critique by Xharra and Waehlich (2011), who notes that Kosovo's branding efforts were constrained by external pressures. The Kosovo: The Young Europeans campaign, for instance, was prohibited from incorporating elements of national history or pre-independence heritage, forcing the country to construct a fresh identity. While this restriction presented challenges, it also provided Kosovo the opportunity to focus on aspects of its identity that emphasize progress, modernity, and alignment with European values.

Cultural diplomacy emerged as a recurring theme in the interviews, with respondents agreeing that Kosovo's contemporary cultural expressions offer a powerful asset for reshaping its international image. Events like the Sunny Hill Festival and Dokufest demonstrate how cultural initiatives can generate international attention while maintaining national pride. By expanding these efforts, Kosovo can position itself as a hub for cultural exchange, leveraging its artistic and musical heritage to build bridges with international audiences.

Moreover, cultural diplomacy provides a platform for Kosovo to tell its story in a way that resonates globally. By emphasizing universal themes such as creativity, resilience, and cultural diversity, Kosovo can transcend the limitations of its geopolitical challenges and present a narrative that appeals to both domestic and foreign audiences.

Public diplomacy has a big role in strengthening Kosovo's international reputation and fostering meaningful connections with global audiences. The interviews highlighted the importance of a multifaceted approach to public diplomacy, incorporating education, diaspora engagement, and cultural exchanges.

Bix Aliu (2024) emphasized that education must form the foundation of Kosovo's public diplomacy strategy not only in preparing citizens to represent the nation globally but also in building a reliable and truthful government. According to Aliu (2024), no branding campaign can achieve the transformative impact of strong governance led by ethical, competent leaders. In his view, Kosovo must address its governance challenges first, as a well-functioning state naturally enhances its global reputation, making nation-branding efforts more effective and credible.

Beyond education, Kosovo's large and active diaspora offers significant opportunities for public diplomacy. The diaspora serves as informal ambassadors, capable of sharing Kosovo's culture, values, and aspirations with their host communities. By creating programs that strengthen connections with the diaspora such as cultural festivals, networking events, and diaspora investment initiatives, Kosovo can expand its reach and influence.

Public diplomacy also requires a focus on strategic communication and targeted messaging. Engaging with international media, leveraging social media platforms, and fostering relationships with foreign governments and cultural institutions are critical for amplifying Kosovo's voice on the global stage.

The discussions reveal a clear path forward for Kosovo: an integrated approach that combines public and cultural diplomacy. Public diplomacy can provide the framework for engaging with foreign governments and institutions, empowering the diaspora, and facilitating cultural exchanges. Cultural diplomacy can humanize Kosovo's narrative and create emotional connections with global audiences. Together, these strategies can help Kosovo craft a cohesive and impactful nation brand that reflects both its aspirations and its cultural richness.

In conclusion, the collective insights from interviews underline that Kosovo's future nation branding efforts should prioritize cultural and public diplomacy. By educating its citizens, investing in cultural initiatives, engaging its diaspora, and fostering international cultural exchanges, Kosovo can overcome its branding challenges and position itself as a culturally rich, modern European nation with a compelling and authentic story to tell.

8. CONCLUSION

Research Aim and Questions Answered

This thesis explored Kosovo's nation branding efforts, focusing on the challenges and opportunities in shaping its international image through the strategic use of public and cultural diplomacy. Using the

Kosovo: The Young Europeans campaign as a case study, the research examined how these two dimensions can work together to create a cohesive and compelling narrative for Kosovo.

The research aimed to answer the following questions:

1.) What are the primary challenges Kosovo faces in improving its international reputation through nation branding?

Kosovo faces several intertwined challenges. Political and diplomatic barriers, including the lack of recognition from key nations and fragmented diplomatic strategies, limit its global visibility. Limited financial and institutional resources hinder the sustainability and reach of branding efforts. Moreover, entrenched international perceptions tied to Kosovo's post-conflict history overshadow its attempts to project a modern and progressive identity.

2.) In what ways did the Kosovo: The Young Europeans campaign address these challenges, and what were its notable strengths and limitations?

As Kosovo's first nation branding initiative, the campaign introduced the country as youthful, dynamic, and aligned with European values. Its strengths included raising awareness and offering an optimistic narrative for a nation emerging from conflict. However, the campaign also highlighted critical limitations in Kosovo's nation branding approach: a lack of cultural depth, insufficient engagement with domestic audiences, and unclear objectives. These limitations illustrate the need for more inclusive, strategic, and authentic branding initiatives.

3.) How can Kosovo enhance its nation branding efforts, particularly through public diplomacy and the integration of cultural identity?

Kosovo's future branding efforts must adopt an integrated approach that combines public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy. Public diplomacy should prioritize fostering relationships with international stakeholders, engaging the diaspora, and fostering cultural exchanges while aiming to address governance challenges to build trust and credibility. Cultural diplomacy should emphasize Kosovo's unique cultural assets, its music, festivals and sports diplomacy as powerful tools to humanize its narrative and resonate with global audiences. A focus on strengthening governance, aligning domestic realities with international aspirations, and fostering citizen participation will ensure these efforts are both sustainable and impactful.

8.1. Implications and future research

While this research has provided valuable insights into Kosovo's nation branding efforts, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The reliance on a small group of interviewees, primarily from government, branding experts, and cultural leaders, introduces potential biases. The perspectives gathered reflect the views of individuals with direct involvement in or strong connections to Kosovo's nation branding initiatives. This focus, while offering depth, may not fully capture the broader range of opinions, particularly those of ordinary citizens, diaspora members, or international audiences.

Future research should aim to address these limitations by including a larger and more diverse group of respondents. Incorporating viewpoints from varied professional backgrounds, such as educators, entrepreneurs, artists, and community leaders, could provide a more holistic understanding of Kosovo's nation branding challenges and opportunities. Additionally, exploring perspectives from the diaspora and foreign stakeholders would enrich the analysis and highlight how Kosovo's branding efforts are perceived externally.

Another limitation lies in the focus on qualitative methods. While interviews provided detailed insights, a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative data could offer a more comprehensive picture. Surveys, for example, could capture broader trends in public perception and supplement the nuanced views provided by interviews.

Finally, longer studies that track the impact of nation branding efforts over time would provide valuable insights into their effectiveness. Comparative research examining similar nations with post-conflict branding challenges, or those leveraging cultural diplomacy successfully, could yield actionable strategies for Kosovo. By addressing these limitations and pursuing wider research, future studies can contribute to a stronger understanding of Kosovo's nation branding efforts.

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Appendix

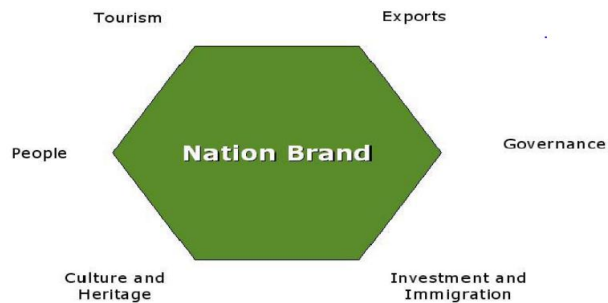


Figure 1: Nation Branding Hexagon by Anholt, S. (2007). *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780230627727>



Figure 2: Kosovo: The Young Europeans logo. Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Hapciu, A. and Sparks, R. (2012). *Annea Hapciu The Internal Effects of Kosovo the Young Europeans Nation Branding Campaign*. [online] Research Gate. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342814447_AnneaHapciu_TheInternalEffectsofKosovotheYoungEuropeansNationBrandingCampaign.



Figure 3: Set Me Free Campaign. Sunnyhill Festival (2022). Available at: Official Instagram Page of Sunnyhill Festival.