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# Explaining conative destination image through cognitive and affective destination image and emotional solidarity with residents

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## ABSTRACT

It is nearly impossible to consider a destination without also acknowledging its people as well as the relationship visitors have with such residents. Employing a hierarchical structure of destination image, this study examined how emotional solidarity along with cognitive and affective image explain conative image of Greece among Serbian visitors who had recently visited. Targeting Serbians living in Novi Sad, survey data were collected on-site as well as through online means, resulting in 401 completed questionnaires for analysis. Structural equation modeling revealed that five of the six proposed hypotheses were supported from the developed theoretical model. Overall, emotional solidarity, cognitive image and affective image were able to predict 70% ( $R^2 = 0.70$ ) of the variance in conative image. Implications for theory and practice along with limitations and future research opportunities are discussed at the close of the paper.

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## Introduction

Few lines of research within the travel and tourism literature are as ubiquitous as the work pertaining to destination image. This is evidenced by a continued steady stream of research spanning roughly four decades. Both academic researchers and practitioners have championed destination image since the early efforts put forth by Hunt (1971) within the travel and tourism literature, offering various, yet similar definitions of the construct (Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014). As Lawson and Bond-Bovy (1977) advanced, destination image is, “the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations and emotional thoughts an individual or group might have of a particular place” (p.10). Some of the main reasons behind the popularity of measuring destination image is based on its practical application in marketing and management of destinations (Sun, Ryan, & Pan, 2015; Tan, 2017) and the fact that image is a dominant pull factor (Kim, 2018; Zhang et al., 2014) drawing many to visit and even return to the destination.

A preponderance of the destination image research has focused exclusively on the tourists’ perspective (see Chen & Tsai, 2007; Pike, 2002; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Zhang et al., 2014, to name

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a few). Such a focus is evidenced through a large portion of the research on destination image used to explain tourists' loyalty to a destination, highlighted through the recent meta-analysis on the topic conducted by Zhang et al. (2014). Recent research (Agapito, Mendes, & Valle, 2010; Ryan & Aicken, 2010; Styliadis, 2018; Styliadis, Shani, & Belhassen, 2017; Styliadis & Cherifi, 2018) has noted the value of considering residents' perspectives of the place they live in as a tourist destination (i.e., residents' destination image). Implicit in such work is the importance placed on the relationship that exists between residents and tourists in shaping the image of a destination. In other words, it is difficult to divorce a place from its people when constructing an image of the destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Trauer & Ryan, 2005). In support of that, Walker and Moscardo (2016) reported that resident-tourist interactions lead to sustainable tourism development through enhanced image attributed to increased levels of understanding of local people, of traditional culture and way of life. However, the absence of local input in the planning, development and marketing of tourism, and especially a lack of consideration of the relationships that typically develop between locals and tourists, has gradually led to image disparities between the two parties that challenge sustainable tourism development, as residents' emotions and image were recently found to dictate their behavioral intentions toward tourism (Styliadis, 2018; Zheng, Ritchie, Benckendorff, & Bao, 2019). Such disparity and emotional distance further lead to the phenomena such as anti-tourism currently being experienced in many destinations worldwide including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Paris, Santorini and Venice, challenging not only residents' quality of life but also tourists' levels of satisfaction with their trip. Activities that provide further insights into the destination and encourage tourists to develop a sense of responsibility for that destination and its residents are key elements of sustainable tourism (Walker & Moscardo, 2016).

Though it has not been considered in tandem with destination image, one means through which the relationship between visitors to a destination and its residents can be surmised is emotional solidarity. As Hammarstrom (2005) contends, emotional solidarity is the affective bonds individuals experience with one another, often characterized by degree of closeness. Such perceived closeness is expressed as the sentiment of togetherness, according to Jacobs and Allen (2005). Though visitors' emotional solidarity with residents was found to significantly explain intentional behaviors (i.e., revisit intentions per Ribeiro, Woosnam, Pinto, & Silva, 2018) and behaviors (i.e., on-site expenditures per Woosnam, Dudensing, & Walker, 2015), neither work has explicitly explored its relationship with destination image. Ribeiro et al. (2018), for example, provides empirical support for the link between emotional solidarity and loyalty, neglecting however the imperative role cognitive and affective image play in this process. The current study fills this gap by exploring the relationship between tourists' destination image and emotional solidarity, contributing to the process of developing sustainable communities and enhancing visitors' experiences. By focusing on tourist segments, in particular, that develop emotional closeness, feelings of sympathy and understanding for the destination population and who at the same time appreciate its image centered on rich cultural heritage preservation, local tourism marketers and planners can achieve the aims of sustainable tourism development (Woosnam & Aleshinloye, 2013) which minimizes threats to the cultural integrity of the place (UNESCO, 2019).

While the lion's share of research concerning destination image has focused on the cognitive-affective link (Agapito, Valle, & Mendes, 2013; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Li, Cai, Lehto, & Huang, 2010; Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, & Hou, 2007), the emphasis on conative image of destination is somewhat underplayed. As Gartner (1994) advocated for, however, a hierarchical structure of the relationship between cognitive, affective, and conative destination image exists. This notion was confirmed through the research conducted by Agapito et al. (2013) which indicated that affective image mediates the relationship between cognitive and conative destination image. As such, the purpose of this work is to fill the gap of considering tourists' emotional solidarity with residents of a visited destination in explaining cognitive and affective destination image and how such forms of destination image ultimately explain visitors' conative image of a particular destination they had previously visited. The theoretical contributions this study aims to make build on the

work of Ribeiro et al. (2018) to extend the burgeoning frameworks involving both emotional solidarity and destination image by further understanding their interplays that contribute to conative image. Potential practical contributions of the work are to assist local destination marketing organizations in not only gauging the relationship that exists between previous visitors to and residents of their destination, but also how that relationship translates to the likelihood of visitors returning and/or recommending the destination to others (Figure 1).

## Literature review

### *Destination image*

Destination image is a highly subjective concept, encompassing an amalgam of peoples' beliefs, ideas, impressions and feelings of a country, city or area as a tourist destination (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Crompton, 1979; Pike, 2017). Destination image as such has become the core of place branding, which commonly refers to "the development of a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish "place" through positive image building" (Cai, 2002, p.722). Building on the work of Boulding (1956) and Scott (1965), Gartner (1994) first introduced destination image to tourism, arguing that the construct comprises three distinctly different but hierarchically interrelated components: cognitive, affective and conative (see also Dann, 1996; Styliadis et al., 2017; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007). Such distinction is a conceptual and methodological tool that facilitates examination of the complex concept of image (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Stylos, Bellou, Andronikidis, & Vassiliadis, 2017; Wang & Hsu, 2010). The cognitive image component reflects an evaluation of the perceived attributes of the destination with or without prior visitation (Martín & del Bosque, 2008; Papadimitriou, Kaplanidou, & Apostolopoulou, 2018). This set of attributes corresponds to the resources of a tourist destination (Stabler, 1988). The affective image component denotes peoples' emotional responses and feelings toward the destination (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Hallmann, Zehrer, & Müller, 2015; Kim, Styliadis, & Oh, 2019). For some researchers like Gartner (1994) these feelings become operational during the evaluation stage of the destination selection, while for others like Russell and Snodgrass (1987), they develop constantly across the time span of a trip. The notion that researchers should also examine the affective component of image to better understand the way people assess their environment was also supported by a number of scholars in environmental psychology (see Holbrook, 1981; Walmsley & Young, 1998; Ward & Russel, 1981).

Not all researchers agree with the practical value of the affective component of image. Chen (2001), for instance, argues that the affective evaluations are rather abstract and vague, and of far less use in the design of marketing strategies. In Chen's (2001) view, cognitive attributes provide more concrete and interpretive information regarding the uniqueness of a destination and thus help marketers to develop actionable positioning strategies. However, the study of Yuksel, Yuksel, and Bilim (2010) and Styliadis et al. (2017), among others, has exemplified the need to incorporate both cognitive and affective evaluations when examining destination image.

Cognitive and affective images are known to interact, with most researchers suggesting that cognitive influences the affective, while a few others claim the opposite. For some researchers, the first level of response to a destination is affective and this governs subsequent actions toward that destination (Ittelson, 1973; Walmsley & Young, 1998). There is also empirical evidence that higher levels of affection lead to more positive cognitive evaluations of a place's attributes (e.g., Billig, 2006; Rollero & Piccoli, 2010). Most researchers though counter-argue that peoples' affective evaluation of a destination largely depends on their knowledge of that destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Boo & Busser, 2005; Russel & Pratt, 1980). A number of studies in particular have established the sequence cognitive image → affective image (e.g., Beerli & Martin, 2004; Li et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2007). For example, Lin et al. (2007) confirmed that tourists first cognitively assess a destination and then develop feelings toward that destination. Despite their merits, the vast majority of previous studies have verified the relationship between cognitive and affective image using non-visitors,

first-time visitors or a combination of first-time and repeat visitors; as a result, little is known about the direction of the relationship between the two constructs in the context of tourists who have previously visited the destination. Potential repeat visitors have been reported having different, usually more positive overall images and intentional behaviors as compared to first-time visitors (Iordanova & Styliadis, 2017; Tasci, 2006) due to their higher levels of familiarity with the destination; actual visitation seems to produce a more positive modified image (Richards, 2002). Researchers who further investigated the effect of actual visitation on the components of image found that visitation positively modifies both the cognitive and the affective component (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Kim et al., 2019). As tourists directly experience the destination, they become aware of and are exposed to places and activities they did not know about further developing their knowledge and feelings about the place.

Finally, the conative image component is the action element, analogous to behavior. For Gartner (1994), a direct relationship exists between conative and the other two components; behavior depends on the image developed during the cognitive stage and evaluated during the affective stage. This approach has been criticized by recent studies conducted by Stylos, Vassiliadis, Bellou, and Andronikidis (2016) and Stylos et al. (2017), who claim that conative lies at the same level of conceptualization with cognitive and affective images. The aforementioned studies reported that all three components directly or indirectly affected intention to revisit a tourist destination, without though testing for components' interrelationships. Following Gartner's approach, Agapito et al. (2013) argued that researchers in the tourism literature have largely related the conative component to loyalty (see Bigne, Sanchez, & Andreu, 2009; Cai, Feng, & Breiter, 2004; Chi & Qu, 2008; Li et al., 2010). Further examining the relationship between destination image and tourists' future behavioral intentions (conceptualized as loyalty or conative image) in a meta-analysis of 66 studies on this subject, Zhang et al. (2014) concluded that both the cognitive and affective image have a positive impact on loyalty/conative image. Chew and Jahari (2014), Wang and Hsu (2010) and Qu, Kim, and Im (2011), for example, reported that the cognitive and affective components influence tourists' behavioral intentions in relation to the destination (e.g., recommend the destination to others, revisit in the future). Following this line of logic in previous research, it is hypothesized that the cognitive component will exert a positive effect on the affective component, and each of these will have a positive impact on the conative component.

H<sub>1</sub>: Cognitive image is positively related to conative image.

H<sub>2</sub>: Cognitive image is positively related to affective image.

H<sub>3</sub>: Affective image is positively related to conative image.

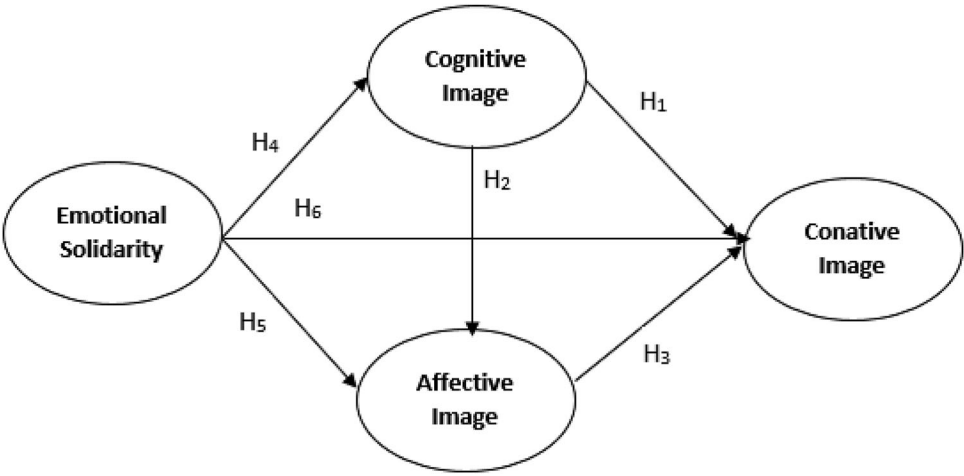


Figure 1. Proposed model.

Despite the popularity of the topic and a wealth of studies exploring the various antecedents of destination image such as tourists' level of familiarity, distance from the destination, socio-demographic characteristics and variety of information sources used (Iordanova & Styliadis, 2017; Smith, Li, Pan, Witte, & Doherty, 2015), little attention has been given to the relationship between emotional solidarity and destination image, as discussed in the next section.

### ***Emotional solidarity***

Though the roots of emotional solidarity come from preliminary macro-sociological work undertaken by Durkheim (1912/1995) (and made more accessible by work in micro-sociology, see Bahr, Mitchell, Li, Walker, & Sucher, 2004; Clements, 2013), most recently, research has been well documented within the travel and tourism literature surrounding the construct (Hasani, Moghavvemi, & Hamzah, 2016; Joo et al., 2018; Li & Wan, 2017; Ribeiro et al., 2018; Simpson & Simpson, 2017; Woosnam et al., 2018). Emotional solidarity, in an elementary sense, is considered the feeling of togetherness (Jacobs & Allen, 2005), marked by levels of trust and degree of emotional closeness (Gronvold, 1988), ultimately taking the form of one individual identifying with another (Bahr et al., 2004). This is not to be confused with how an individual identifies with or depends on a particular place, commonly known as place attachment within the literature (Styliadis, 2018). Since the initial model testing that demonstrated support for antecedents (i.e., shared beliefs, shared behavior, and interaction with others) of emotional solidarity (through items comprising the Emotional Solidarity Scale developed by Woosnam, 2011), numerous amendments have been made to the initial model and key observations can be highlighted. Much of the work to date involving emotional solidarity in a tourism context has focused on resident populations in assessing the relationship such individuals have with tourists. Few works have centered on tourists' perspectives of the phenomena (Joo, Woosnam, Shafer, Scott, & An, 2017; Simpson & Simpson, 2017; Woosnam & Aleshinloye, 2013). Even fewer studies have examined outcomes of the visitors' emotional solidarity with residents (see Ribeiro et al., 2018; Woosnam, Dudensing, et al., 2015; Woosnam, Shafer, Scott, & Timothy, 2015). Only two of these works have considered visitors' behavior (i.e., on-site expenditures) (Woosnam, Dudensing, et al., 2015) or intentional behavior (i.e., destination loyalty) (Ribeiro et al., 2018). Future research is needed considering visitors' emotional solidarity with residents and how that translates to the former's image of a destination. Some peripheral work on this matter has been noted within the travel and tourism literature.

Though much work has treated emotional solidarity as a precursor to numerous outcomes, no work has explicitly connected solidarity (i.e., using items from the Emotional Solidarity Scale) to destination image. Some works have implied the connection between resident/tourist relationships and destination image development. As Baloglu and McCleary (1999) and Echtner and Ritchie (1991) contend, the overall image one develops of a destination encompasses a holistic impression of the place. Arguably, one would have a difficult time comprehending a place and the overall image that results without acknowledging the role residents play in image development based on interactions and relationships that ensue. Additionally, Baloglu (2001) found that the more familiar one is with a destination, the more favorable an individual's perceived image of the destination. Implicit in such familiarity are the connections a visitor may have with destination residents and the relationships that develop with such locals. Most recently, the work of Styliadis et al. (2017) has implicitly demonstrated the importance of resident and tourist relationships in forging the image of a destination by considering each group in assessing overall image.

It is difficult to divorce tourists' image of a destination without considering its habitants. This is most evident by the fact that few places exist that do not have individuals residing either within or adjacent to the destination. In fact, many times, individuals will select a destination to

visit given the opportunities to potentially interact with residents and learn more about customs, traditions, heritage, and culture overall (Babb, 2011; Wearing, Stevenson, & Young, 2010). Some work has connected tourists' motivations for interacting with locals and the image individuals have of the destination. Phillips and Jang (2007) found that both affective and cognitive destination image were explained by motivations for novelty and excitement (comprised of social interaction items such as "meeting new and different people" and "experiencing new and different lifestyles"). Somewhat similarly, Li et al. (2010) found that motivations for gaining intellect (through items concerning experiencing others and their culture) and experiencing a sense of belonging (through items involving interaction with destination residents) each uniquely explained tourists' cognitive destination image. Tang (2014) also found that tourists' motivations involving the desire to meet and interact with local residents significantly explained positive [cognitive] destination image among visitors. Though interaction does not always equate to a deeper relationship forged with locals (Aramberri, 2010; Weaver, 2014) (especially when considered in relation to alternative forms of sustainable tourism that embrace resident/tourist relationships), the aforementioned work begs the question of how degree of closeness (i.e., emotional solidarity) factors into destination image formation and travelers' intentions to visit, especially among those individuals who had previously visited. As such, while no work has explicitly connected tourists' emotional solidarity with residents and dimensions of destination image, this work explores the relationships between this solidarity and the three forms of destination image through the following hypotheses:

H<sub>4</sub>: Emotional solidarity is positively related to cognitive image.

H<sub>5</sub>: Emotional solidarity is positively related to affective image.

H<sub>6</sub>: Emotional solidarity is positively related to conative image.

## Research methods

### Study context

The Republic of Serbia, with an estimated population of 7,020,858 inhabitants (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2017), is a country situated at the crossroads of central and southeast Europe, bordering countries like Hungary, Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania. Serbia co-founded Yugoslavia with other Slavic populations, which ceased to exist after the Yugoslav Wars in 1990s (Judah, 2002). Serbia declared its independence in 1992 forming a union with Montenegro that was dissolved in 2006. Located nearby in southeast Europe—Greece has a population of 10,816,286 inhabitants (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2017). The two countries share some similarities including religion (Eastern Orthodox Christians: 98% of the population in Greece, 85% of the population in Serbia), culture, history and lifestyle. Strong relations always existed between the two nations in modern history in events such as the revolutions against the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), and the World Wars I and II (1914–1918 and 1939–1945). When NATO bombed Serbia in 1999, Greece was its only member to openly express disapproval and did not participate in the military operations.

Nowadays, plenty of Greek-Serbian bilateral agreements exist in areas such as judicial relations, scientific and educational cooperation, tourism development, air transport, and economy. For instance, there are more than 13 sister cities between the two countries with notable ones including Belgrade-Athens and Nis-Sparta. Greece is the third largest investor to Serbia and has remained since 2008. About 850,000 Serbians visited Greece in 2017, making Greece the most preferred destination among Serbians, with the majority of them visiting Northern Greece and Greek islands (SETE, 2017). Anecdotal data also suggest that Serbians have visited Greece three times, on average, over the last 10 years.



Serbians' perception of Greece and Greeks was selected as the case of this study for three main reasons. First, Greece has a high level of repeat visitation among Serbian tourists; Greece is the first choice of Serbian tourists when going abroad, visited annually by an estimated 10% of the country's population. As such, the two countries provide an excellent context for studying the attitude of visitors who have well-established emotional connections with the destination country and its residents, suggesting some level of attachment and emotional solidarity (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Second, Greece is a country traditionally dependent on tourism, with the tourism industry sustaining 1 million jobs and contributing 20% of the country's GDP in 2017 (WTTC, 2018). Greece ranked 14th in the world in terms of tourist numbers, with 27.2 million tourists visiting the country in 2017. The results of this study should therefore also benefit the planning and marketing of tourism in Greece, assisting authorities to more efficiently allocate scarce resources to achieve repeat visits (Pike & Ryan, 2004). Third, Greece has recently suffered from a severe economic crisis reflected in a 25% decrease in GDP between 2008 and 2016 along with a high unemployment rate (i.e., approximately 25%). Given the strong relationships between the two countries, it would be useful to explore whether Serbians' perceptions of Greece have been affected by the wider socio-economic environment. The location where the data were collected is Novi Sad, the second largest city in Serbia with a population of 341,625 inhabitants (Census of Population & Households & Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia 2011, 2011, 2014). The next section explains the data collection process.

### ***Sampling and data collection***

The target population for this study was Serbians, 18 years and older, who permanently reside in the city of Novi Sad and who have visited Greece at least once in the past. A filtering question was included in the survey and respondents were invited to state the number of times they have been to Greece. Print copies of the questionnaire in Serbian were distributed in the city center of Novi Sad by two experienced researchers from July 2017 to Spring 2018. The researchers randomly approached every 5th person passing by and asked them to participate in the study. Numerous studies on destination image have used a similar method for sampling tourists (e.g., Chen & Tsai, 2007; Stepchenkova & Li, 2012), mainly due to a lack of accurate data regarding the size of the tourist population and the absence of a sampling frame (Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Stepchenkova & Li, 2012). Respondents were assured that the survey was anonymous and their responses were confidential. Simultaneously, the same survey was distributed online to all faculties at the University of Novi Sad via email (with accompanying instructions and a statement of the study's purpose). The questionnaire was available to all academic staff, employees, and students. A web link to the survey was also posted in many Novi Sad University and community Facebook groups and webpages. About 60% of the surveys were collected online and the rest 40% were completed in the city center, with a response rate of 69%. Of these, 27 questionnaires had to be discarded, leading to a completion rate of 94%. Overall, 401 completed questionnaires were utilized in data analysis.

### ***Survey instrument***

The questionnaire was comprised of three sections. The first measured respondents' cognitive, affective and conative image of Greece as a tourist destination. Cognitive image was measured using the 17-item multifaceted scale developed by Styliadis et al. (2017) based on Beerli and Martin (2004), Chen and Tsai (2007) and Chi and Qu (2008). The scale comprised five dimensions: natural characteristics (e.g., scenic beauty, pleasant weather, nice beaches), amenities (e.g., quality hotels, appealing cuisine, service quality, variety of shops), attractions (e.g., good nightlife, interesting historic sites, interesting festivals, variety of tourist activities), accessibility (e.g.,



convenient transportation, easily accessible) and social environment (e.g., friendly local people, good value for money, a clean environment, personal safety and security). These items represented the core image of Greece as a tourist destination as also confirmed in the pilot study discussed later. In line with past research, participants were asked to provide their responses on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1-7 (where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree) (Chi & Qu, 2008; Lee, 2009). All five cognitive image dimensions (natural characteristics: 0.85; amenities: 0.86; attractions: 0.84; accessibility: 0.86; social environment: 0.87) exhibited sound reliability, with Cronbach alpha values exceeding the recommended benchmark of 0.7 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014).

Affective image was evaluated using four affective image attributes on a 7-point semantic differential scale, based on previous studies (see Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Martin & del Bosque, 2008; Wang & Hsu, 2010). The four attributes were: distressing-relaxing, unpleasant-pleasant, boring-exciting, and sleepy-lively. Following Agapito et al. (2013), conative image was captured using three items: planned intention to revisit (i.e., "How likely are you to visit Greece in the next 2 years?"); open intention to revisit (i.e., "How likely are you to visit Greece at some point in the future?"); and intention to recommend (i.e., "How likely are you to recommend Greece to your friends and relatives?"). The respondents were invited to answer using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1-7 (where 1 = very unlikely and 7 = very likely). Cronbach alpha values for the affective image (0.87) and conative image (0.86) unidimensional constructs also surpassed the 0.70 standard.

The second section aimed to measure emotional solidarity following the studies of Woosnam and colleagues (see Woosnam & Norman, 2010; Woosnam & Aleshinloye, 2013; Woosnam, Shafer, et al., 2015). The construct was measured using the 9-item, Emotional Solidarity Scale, which includes three unique factors: emotional closeness (e.g., I feel close to Greek people; I feel Greeks are my friends; I feel affection toward Greeks), sympathetic understanding (e.g., I "understand" Greek people; I identify with Greek people; I have a lot in common with Greek people), and feeling welcomed (e.g., I feel people in Greece welcome visitors; I would be proud to visit Greece; I feel Greeks would appreciate the benefits associated with me coming to visit them) (Woosnam & Norman, 2010). Items were presented to respondents using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1-7 (where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). Each of the dimensions was high in reliability, with Cronbach alpha in excess of 0.70 (emotional closeness: 0.91; sympathetic understanding: 0.93; feeling welcomed: 0.89).

The last section of the survey included questions about respondents' socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, etc.). The questionnaire was originally designed in English and translated into Serbian by one of the researchers who is a native speaker and resident of Novi Sad. Prior to data collection, a pilot test was conducted with 50 international tourists who have visited Greece in the past, which ensured the suitability of the research instrument to capture the image of Greece as a tourist destination and the soundness of the items included in the Emotional Solidarity Scale.

## Findings

### *Respondents' profile*

The sample was comprised of more female respondents (68%) than male (32%) (see Appendix). Sixty-five percent of respondents were up to 35 years old, with half of the sample population claiming to be single. Roughly one in five individuals (18%) had visited Greece in the past once or twice, 38% had been to Greece 3-5 times, 26% between six and nine times, and the remainder (18%) had visited Greece 10 or more times. Among the respondents, 65% reported living in the city of Novi Sad, with the remainder residing in the city's suburbs or other cities.

### Measurement model

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to verify the soundness of emotional solidarity (ES) and cognitive image measures prior to testing the measurement model. CFA rather than EFA was deemed appropriate at this stage as both scales have been established in prior studies (see Woosnam et al., 2015 for the Emotional Solidarity Scale and Styliadis et al., 2017 for the Destination Image Scale). The initial CFA results including the three factors of ES (with three items each) indicated some issues with model fit: Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 161.9,  $\chi^2/df$  = 6.7, CFI = 0.96, GFI = 0.92, AGFI = 0.85, RMSEA = 0.12 and TLI = 0.94. Two items ("I identify with Greek people" and "I feel affection toward Greeks") had to be removed (one from ES1 and one from ES2) to increase model fit. Following the elimination of those two items, the revised fit indices (Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 22.4,  $\chi^2/df$  = 2.0, CFI = 0.99, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.05, and TLI = 0.99) suggested that the model fit the data very well. The three-factor structure for the emotional solidarity scale is similar to previous studies (Woosnam et al., 2013).

Composite reliability for all the three constructs (ES1 = 0.91, ES2 = 0.93, ES3 = 0.90) exceeded the 0.70 threshold. Furthermore, all AVE values surpassed the 0.50 critical value (ES1 = 0.84, ES2 = 0.88, ES3 = 0.75). Next, the square root of each of the AVE values was compared to inter-construct correlations, and all correlations were lower than the square root of each AVE, providing evidence for discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2014). A similar procedure was followed for the cognitive image scale and its 17 items assigned to five dimensions. The five-factor structure was confirmed, but the initial model fit results indicated that the model needed further refinement: Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 594.7,  $\chi^2/df$  = 5.5, CFI = 0.9, GFI = 0.86, AGFI = 0.8, RMSEA = 0.10, and TLI = 0.87. After removing few items (e.g., beach, historic sites, safety and variety shops) as they displayed poor discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2014), the model fit drastically improved: Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 250.4,  $\chi^2/df$  = 4.5, CFI = 0.94, GFI = 0.91, AGFI = 0.86, RMSEA = 0.09, TLI = 0.92. All composite reliabilities for the five constructs (CI1 = 0.79, CI2 = 0.85, CI3 = 0.83, CI4 = 0.86, CI5 = 0.87) exceeded the 0.70 threshold and AVE values (CI1 = 0.65, CI2 = 0.65, CI3 = 0.62, CI4 = 0.76, CI5 = 0.69) surpassed the 0.50 critical value (See Table 1).

Lastly, square roots of each of the AVE values were higher than inter-construct correlations. CFA was undertaken next (including all latent constructs and their items, with emotional solidarity and cognitive image as second order constructs) to establish the measurement model (see Table 1). The resulting Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) for the model had a value of 1299.5, with a  $\chi^2/df$  value of 4.19. Various model fit indices (e.g., CFI = 0.89; TLI = 0.88; GFI = 0.81; AGFI = 0.76; RMSEA = 0.09) were examined and indicated a mediocre model fit. After the elimination of few items the model fit indices improved: Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 908.5,  $\chi^2/df$  value of 3.82, CFI = 0.92; TLI = 0.91; GFI = 0.85; RMSEA = 0.08.

Construct validity was demonstrated as all factor loadings exceeded a threshold of 0.70 and the *t*-values for each item were significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), in excess of the 3.29 critical value as suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013). Composite reliabilities ranged from 0.78 (CI3) to 0.92 (ES2), indicating sound internal consistency in the factor structure. AVE values were greater than 0.50, ranging from 0.63 (CI3) to 0.85 (ES2). Discriminant validity was established as the square root of AVE values were greater than any factor correlation value (Table 2), and in the HTMT analysis values (see Appendix) were lower than 0.90 (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015).

### Structural path model

Following the establishment of the measurement model, SEM was undertaken to test the hypothesized relationships among the constructs (maximum likelihood estimation method). The results indicate a good fit of the structural model with Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 908.5,  $\chi^2/df$  = 3.81, CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.08, TLI = 0.91, GFI = 0.85 (Hair et al., 2014). As seen in Table 3, five out of six hypothesized relationships (paths) constituting the structural model were significant in the expected direction. Table 3 also reports the direct and indirect effects of all the constructs.

Table 1. Measurement model CFA results.

Constructs/ indicators	Item loadings	t-values	Composite reliability	AVE
<b>Emotional Solidarity (ES)</b>			0.94	0.84
<i>ES1</i>	0.92	21.24	0.91	0.84
Greek Friends	0.94	–		
Close to Greek People	0.89	27.98		
<i>ES2</i>	0.88	20.51	0.92	0.85
In Common with Greeks	0.96	–		
Understand Greeks	0.91	30.40		
<i>ES3</i>	0.95	19.99	0.90	0.75
Greeks Appreciate Benefits	0.88	–		
Greeks Welcome Visitors	0.89	24.83		
Proud To Visit	0.82	21.45		
<b>Cognitive Image (CI)</b>			0.93	0.73
<i>CI1</i>	0.86	15.99	0.79	0.65
Scenic Beauty	0.78	15.63		
Pleasant Weather	0.83	–		
<i>CI2</i>	0.89	18.29	0.88	0.71
Quality Hotels	0.75	17.79		
Appealing Cuisine/Food	0.88	–		
Excellent Quality of Service	0.78	17.99		
<i>CI3</i>	0.85	14.33	0.78	0.63
Good Nightlife	0.77	–		
Interesting Festivals	0.82	14.90		
<i>CI4</i>	0.82	16.17	0.86	0.76
Easily Accessible	0.88	–		
Convenient Transport	0.86	19.54		
<i>CI5</i>	0.84	15.57	0.85	0.73
Clean Environment	0.83	–		
Good Value for Money	0.88	18.50		
<b>Affective Image (AI)</b>			0.87	0.70
Boring—Exciting	0.73	16.49		
Unpleasant—Pleasant	0.87	21.45		
Distressing—Relaxing	0.89	22.22		
<b>Conative Image (CONI)</b>			0.91	0.77
CONI1	0.84	–		
CONI2	0.82	20.69		
CONI3	0.97	26.13		

Table 2. Discriminant validity.

Constructs/indicators	ES	CI	AI	CONI
Emotional Solidarity (ES)	<b>.92</b>	.73	.70	.65
Cognitive Image (CI)	.73	<b>.86</b>	.82	.71
Affective Image (AI)	.70	.82	<b>.84</b>	.82
Conative Image (CONI)	.65	.71	.82	<b>.88</b>

Cognitive image has a direct effect on affective image, and both direct and indirect effects on conative image. Affective image has a direct effect on conative image. Lastly, emotional solidarity has a direct effect on cognitive image and both direct and indirect effects on affective image and conative image. Notable is also that cognitive image has a greater direct effect on affective image (0.69) as compared to emotional solidarity (0.19), but emotional solidarity has the greatest total effect on affective image (0.70). Overall, emotional solidarity, cognitive image and affective image were able to predict 70% ( $R^2$ ) of the variance in conative image. Implications of the findings to tourism theory and practice are discussed in the following section.

## Conclusion and discussion

This study investigated tourists' emotional solidarity with residents of a visited destination and explored the role emotional solidarity plays in explaining tourists' cognitive, affective and

Table 3. Structural equation model paths.

Hypothesized path		Direct effect			Indirect effect		Total effect	
		Effect	t-Value	p-Value	Effect	p-Value	Effect	p-Value
H <sub>1</sub>	Cognitive image → Conative image	0.01	0.06	.949	0.50	.001	0.51	.001
H <sub>2</sub>	Cognitive image → Affective image	0.69	9.99	<.001	–		0.69	.001
H <sub>3</sub>	Affective image → Conative image	0.73	8.25	<.001	–		0.73	.001
H <sub>4</sub>	Emotional solidarity → Cognitive image	0.73	13.15	<.001	–		0.73	.001
H <sub>5</sub>	Emotional solidarity → Affective image	0.19	3.13	.002	0.51	.001	0.70	.002
H <sub>6</sub>	Emotional solidarity → Conative image	0.14	2.45	.014	0.51	.001	0.65	.001

conative image of that destination. In congruence with the proposed model, the findings suggest that: a) emotional solidarity positively affects the cognitive, affective and conative image; b) cognitive image positively affects affective image; c) affective image exercises a positive effect on conative image; and finally, the impact of the cognitive image on conative image is trivial and not-significant. These findings extend the burgeoning frameworks incorporating emotional solidarity and destination image, empirically confirming that tourists' emotional solidarity with residents is a significant predictor of their destination image and behavior outcomes, thereby providing new insights in tourism marketing and planning for the sustainable development of tourism.

The study findings are largely in line with the vast majority of previous research with regards to the hierarchical nature of the relationships between the cognitive, affective and conative image (Agapito et al., 2013; Styliadis et al., 2017). Similar to past research (Li et al., 2010), the cognitive component was found in this study to positively affect the affective component (H<sub>2</sub>), which in turn affected the conative component of image (H<sub>3</sub>). Contrary to previous studies (Styliadis et al., 2017) the impact of the cognitive component on the conative one was positive but not-significant (i.e., H<sub>1</sub> not confirmed). Such finding contributes to current discussions regarding the supremacy of the cognitive or affective image in predicting the conative image. Li et al. (2010), for example, also suggest that the affective image is more influential than the cognitive image component in explaining the conative image. A novelty of this research, as such, lies in that the relationship among the three image components was tested using a sample of previous visitors, whereas the vast majority of past research has drawn conclusions based on first-time visitors or a combination of first-time and repeat visitors to a destination (Agapito et al., 2013; Li et al., 2010; Styliadis et al., 2017). That also helps explain why H<sub>1</sub>, which predicted a link between cognitive image and conative image, was not empirically supported by the data; it seems that—in the context of previous visitation—the affective image becomes more critical than the cognitive one when deciding to revisit a destination. Previous experience with a destination as a result of repeat visitation was also noted as important in explaining high levels of tourists' emotional solidarity with residents in the study of Woosnam et al. (2005), as nearly 75% of their sample had visited the destination before, potentially having made contact with residents during previous visits. It can, therefore, be concluded that previous and/or repeat visitors tend to develop strong feelings of emotional solidarity with residents, which govern subsequent actions toward that place (Walmsley & Young, 1998).

Although various factors have been examined in the past as potential antecedents of destination image including tourists' previous experience/level of familiarity with the destination, their socio-demographic characteristics and variety of information sources used (Iordanova & Styliadis, 2017; Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco, & Izquierdo-Yusta, 2015; Smith et al., 2015), none of the previous works appear to have considered emotional solidarity within the destination image context. The few studies available on tourists' emotional solidarity with residents that exist in the literature have predominantly explored its impact on visitor behavior (i.e., tourist spending, see Woosnam, Dudensing, et al., 2015), perceived safety (Woosnam, Shafer, et al. 2015) or loyalty (Ribeiro et al., 2018). This is the first research of its kind as such to validate the positive

impact emotional solidarity has upon the three components of destination image, that is, cognitive ( $H_4$ ), affective ( $H_5$ ), and conative ( $H_6$ ). These findings highlight the fundamental role human relationships and interactions between residents and tourists play in the formation of the latter's image of a destination, assisting in developing sustainable tourism communities based on mutual understanding and intercultural exchange. The perceived degree of closeness, in particular, between tourists and residents appears to influence the way in which visitors perceive a destination. This result further supports the notion that visitors often choose destinations where they feel welcome and have opportunities to interact with residents learning about their customs and traditions (Babb, 2011). Wearing et al. (2010) also suggested that the interaction visitors have with residents can greatly impact whether such tourists intend to return. All these are in line with the contact hypothesis which postulates that the more opportunities tourists have to interact with residents, the greater the chance of experiencing closeness (Ward & Berne, 2011). Reinforcing emotional closeness, feelings of sympathy and understanding for the destination population are key to achieve a sustainable approach to tourism. Although beyond the scope of this study, it can be theorized that tourists feeling closer to local people and their norms and having established positive images of the destination will most likely engage in behaviors that are considered acceptable/desirable by the locals, thereby reducing negative impacts on society and culture.

### ***Theoretical implications***

The novelty of this study, therefore, lies in extending our knowledge on destination image formation by incorporating another important determinant of destination image which has been largely overlooked thus far, that of tourists' emotional solidarity with residents. This study also expands our understanding of the way the components of destination image mediate the relationship between emotional solidarity and intentional behaviors further unpacking their interplays that contribute to loyalty (see Ribeiro et al., 2018).

In the current study, the strong bonds developed throughout history between the two nations (Serbia and Greece) have cultivated Serbians' feelings of emotional solidarity with Greeks, determining to a large extent their positive image perceptions of Greece as a tourist destination. This is notable even during the long period of economic crisis the country is facing, which has inevitably resulted in the distribution of negative images through mass media worldwide. The findings of this study are thus particularly important for destinations facing various types of crisis. Cultural distance and familiarity between the two nations might have inevitably assisted in developing strong bonds over the past years. Previous studies have enlightened our knowledge on the positive relationship between higher levels of familiarity and more positive perceptions of destination image (Baloglu, 2001; Tan & Wu, 2016; Tasci, 2006). Other studies concurrently focusing on nationality and familiarity showcased that both antecedents not only shape pre-travel destination images, but also penetrate to the next phase of image formation (in situ) and form both cognitive and affective image components (Iordanova & Styliadis, 2017). It seems that destination image is partly affected by the spatial distance between the country of origin and the destination, as individuals are more likely to have visited destinations that are closer to their country of origin or region, or to have gained information about them through mass media and friends or relatives.

The confirmation of the aforementioned relationships offers empirical support to previous works (i.e., Styliadis et al., 2017) highlighting the central role local residents play in tourists' destination choice, visitor experience, and (re)visitation intentions. Local residents, apart from serving as a primary source of information for tourists and visiting friends/relatives, and acting as ambassadors promoting their hometown's attractions to other people (Shani & Uriely, 2012), seem to shape tourists' image formulation through the levels of closeness the latter feel. Tourism

managers should, therefore, position residents at the heart of the branding and marketing strategy, as they can greatly enhance the tourists' image, experience and behavior (Campelo, Aitken, Thyne, & Gnoth, 2014), achieving the twin aim of creating sustainable development and enhancing visitors' experience.

### ***Managerial implications***

A number of practical implications exist from this research for the Greek National Tourism Organization, local DMOs, and tourism planners. All told, this research highlights the inextricable link between relationships forged between tourists and residents and the image of a destination. As mentioned prior, a place (imbued by meaning, as Tuan, 1979 would contend) and its resulting image, are difficult to conceive of without also considering its people (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). No better time exists for including destination residents into the mix of fostering destination image; tourism managers and planners need to play a crucial role in this sustainable development process.

Tourism planners should consider some specific courses of action centered on managing for sustainable tourism initiatives as a result of findings from this study. Marketing material should highlight the interactions and relationships between Serbians and Greeks that also speak to the historical link between the countries and their residents, and the potential for emotional connections. Such efforts may serve to foster initial travel to Greece and encourage greater interactions with residents while visiting. As Zhang et al. (2014) offer, "marketing communication materials may advertise how these emotions and feelings would be evoked and triggered by the destination offerings" (p. 221). This would ultimately translate to greater recommendation and revisit intentions among Serbians. However, given visitation to key destinations within Greece are on the rise, intentional considerations need to be made so that Greek destinations (known for their culturally-rich history) are proactively planning to accommodate sustainable tourism growth (e.g., ensuring adequate infrastructure and superstructure exists and potentially dispersing tourists both spatially and temporally) and allay any potential for overcrowding like in Amsterdam, Barcelona, Paris, and Venice, where resident-tourist relationships are compromised due to "overtourism" (Sampson, 2019). This is an imminent reality as Smith (2018) highlights that the UNWTO estimates for inbound tourists to Greece will hit a 32-million record by the close of 2018 (up from 15 million in 2010). It is not totally out of the question for Greece (and numerous key destinations throughout the country such as Athens, Santorini, Mykonos, Crete, Corfu, etc.) to become intentional in appealing more to visitors from countries like Serbia who value the historical and personal connections to Greece. Such efforts will not only foster greater cross-cultural understanding but also be in line with embracing a more sustainable tourism growth strategy. As such, managers should target those potential visitors who value more intimate connections with Greek residents and an appreciation of the cultural-historical importance of Greece. The challenge of course will be in fostering opportunities where DMOs are planning in unison so as not to overdevelop infrastructure with imminent growth in mind, but rather a sustainable mindset where the hospitality sector (i.e., lodging, dining, and entertainment) and transportation sector provide opportunities that cultural cultivate positive interactions with residents and cultural-historic appreciation.

Such positive on-site experiences for tourists can have a lasting impression on how one formulates an image of a particular destination. The same can be said for those visitors whose experiences are less than positive. As Blichfeldt (2005) argues, "residents and interactions with such residents are essential elements of place brands" (p. 394). This puts the power of interacting and forging relationships with tourists squarely on the shoulders of residents, in essence empowering them to support tourism planning. Tourism managers and planners can be deliberate in seeking to empower residents. As Styliadis (2018) contends, "By further deploying marketing



campaigns targeted at local residents, such developments should be further highlighted, underlining their positive contribution to the city's image, gaining greater support for it" (p. 1020). Though for this to occur, planners need to first assess how supportive residents are of being involved in the process, and it goes without saying that DMOs would need to gauge how interested managers are in including residents and their valuable insight prior to undertaking sustainable tourism planning.

### ***Limitations and future research opportunities***

It is nearly impossible to undertake research without some issues or concerns that arise. This study is no different with its limitations. Though it was our intention to select Serbian residents who had previously visited Greece for reasons mentioned (i.e., Greece is top destination among Serbians, historical relationship between countries, and economic considerations), it is unclear if similar relationships would result from model testing among residents of other countries, especially those countries sending the highest percentage of outbound tourists to Greece. For instance, it would be interesting to determine how comparable our results would be utilizing samples of residents from Germany and the United Kingdom (two countries sending the highest percentages of tourists to Greece per the Hellenic Tourist Authority, 2016). It would stand to reason that those countries with a weaker historical relationship with Greece may impact the effect residents' emotional solidarity, cognitive image, and affective image may have on conative image of Greece.

Another limitation pertaining to sampling is the fact that we focused exclusively on only one of the most populous cities in Serbia. Results may have been slightly different had we considered other large cities within the country (e.g., Belgrade, Niš, or Kragujevac). Future work may utilize a sample from numerous comparable cities within countries or even draw a national sample to examine the model. Furthermore, our sampling strategy was a hybrid of a probability form (e.g., simple-random on-site with residents at large) and non-probability form (e.g., convenience online with university personnel). As such, some caution should be paid in generalizing findings back to Novi Sad residents and Serbians overall. The best way forward would be to undertake subsequent research that not only considers multiple Serbian cities but also randomly selects participants, exclusively utilizing a probability form of sampling.

In addition to this, roughly two of three participants in the sample were women, resulting in an imbalanced gender distribution. Though prior work has not examined whether gender differences exist between individuals' emotional solidarity with others, it stands to reason women may be more inclined toward feeling a greater connection with others. Should a national sample be the latter be undertaken, it may be more advantageous to consider drawing a panel sample from numerous Serbia cities with an even gender composition using firms such as Amazon MTurk, Qualtrics, or similar companies given their reputation and cost effectiveness.

Though our study connects two established lines of research in emotional solidarity and destination image, the model put forth and tested was intentionally relatively rudimentary. This was done so as to critically consider the link between the constructs and further set the stage for future research involving solidarity and image. As such, much room is available for including additional predictor constructs into the model to increase variance explained in conative destination image. As Styliadis et al. (2017) offer, the inclusion of degree of familiarity with the destination may serve to explain visitors' conative image of the place. Similar to this, Prayag and Ryan (2012) demonstrated that place attachment served as a key predictor of visitors' loyalty (i.e., revisit intentions and recommendation intentions) to a destination. This work provides crucial support justifying the inclusion of place attachment as a predictor of conative image in subsequent models. Though Zhang et al. (2014) revealed a modest relationship between self-congruity (as one form of destination image) on various forms of loyalty (i.e., conative image), future



research should be undertaken to incorporate self-congruity into the model. Beyond these suggested future research opportunities for expanding the model, it may be advantageous to consider temporal aspects of emotional solidarity and destination image given that each construct is highly dynamic (Stylidis & Cherifi, 2018; Woosnam, Dudensing, et al., 2015) and contingent upon individual experiences. As such, longitudinal studies may be the next logical step in considering the relationship between the constructs. Last but not least, the relationships in the model could be tested in the context of repeat visitation by controlling for differences due to the number of previous visits to the destination. Within this realm, it would also be useful to explore the mediating role of affective image in the relationship between emotional solidarity and conative image.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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