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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Department of Russian and Eastern European Studies

Master Thesis

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Cinema as a Tool of Nation Branding Strategy:
A Case Study of Georgia

Master thesis

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Prague, May 2, 2023   Ekaterina Razinkova

Bibliographic Note

Abstract

In pursuit of a competitive advantage in a globalised world, the development of a credible and appealing country's image gathers momentum. In this regard, a pivotal role is assigned to nation branding, which is gradually becoming a notable constituent of both foreign and domestic policies. In praxis, this concept incorporates different tools, one of the most potent being national cinema. Within the post-Soviet space, the implementation of nation branding strategies is relatively novel yet promising in terms of reputational enhancement.

The submitted thesis examines the correlation between the concepts of nation branding and national cinema from the instrumentalist perspective applied to the case study of Georgia. Based on theoretical and methodological grounding, the study provides an analysis of selected pieces of contemporary Georgian national cinema in terms of their contribution to the development of the country's brand. It was found that in the context of nation branding Georgian national cinema revealed itself as an illustrative and accessible medium that covers and represents both Western-oriented and traditional aspects of the country's national brand. There was established a modest leaning towards the more frequent representation of the latter. However, to become a more solid instrument in terms of nation branding, Georgian national cinema requires more investments and technological advancement.

Keywords

Nation branding, country branding, national cinema, Georgia, Georgia's national brand, Georgian national cinema

Title

Cinema as a Tool of Nation Branding Strategy: A Case Study of Georgia

Abstrakt

Ve snaze získat konkurenční výhodu v globalizovaném světě se stále více pozornosti věnuje vytváření důvěryhodné a přitažlivé image země. V této souvislosti je klíčová role přisuzována nation brandingu, který se postupně stává důležitou součástí zahraniční i domácí politiky. V praxi tento koncept kombinuje různé nástroje, z nichž jedním z nejúčinnějších je národní kinematografie. V postsovětském prostoru je uplatňování strategií nation brandingu poměrně nové, avšak z hlediska posílení reputace perspektivní.

Předkládaná diplomová práce zkoumá korelaci mezi koncepty nation branding a národní kinematografie z instrumentalistické perspektivy následně aplikované na případovou studii Gruzie. Na základě teoretického a metodologického zakotvení poskytuje práce analýzu vybraných děl současné gruzínské národní kinematografie z hlediska jejich přínosu k rozvoji národního brandu země. Bylo zjištěno, že se gruzínská národní kinematografie v kontextu budování národního brandu projevila jako ilustrativní a přístupné médium, které reprezentuje jak západně orientované, tak tradiční aspekty národního brandu země. Dále byl zjištěn mírný příklon k častější reprezentaci tradičních aspektů. Aby se však gruzínská národní kinematografie stala pevnějším nástrojem v kontextu nation brandingu, vyžaduje další investice a technologický posun.

Klíčová slova

Nation branding, národní značka, národní kinematografie, Gruzie, národní značka Gruzie, gruzínská národní kinematografie

Název práce

Kinematografie jako nástroj strategie nation brandingu: případová studie Gruzie

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Vývoj tématu od zadání projektu do odevzdání práce (max. 10 řádek): **Původně se práce zaměřovala na širší tematický okruh týkající se konceptu kinematografie. Vzhledem ke specifikům teorie nation brandingu byl tento koncept zúžen. Další zásadní změna se týkala metodologického přístupu k analytické části práce. V nejranějších fázích byla navržena kombinace obsahové analýzy a neoformalistické analýzy. Ukázalo se však, že tato kombinace není funkční. Z tohoto důvodu byla vyvinuta další metodologie, která vychází z kombinace kvalitativní případové studie, polosystematického a integrativního přístupu ke zkoumání literatury a obecného modelu filmové analýzy.**
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Hlavní výsledky práce (max. 10 řádek):

Bylo zjištěno, že se gruzínská národní kinematografie v kontextu budování národního brandu projevila jako ilustrativní a přístupné médium, které reprezentuje jak západně orientované, tak tradiční aspekty národního brandu země. Dále byl zjištěn mírný příklon k častější reprezentaci tradičních aspektů. Aby se však gruzínská národní kinematografie stala pevnějším nástrojem v kontextu nation brandingu, vyžaduje další investice a technologický posun.

Prameny a literatura (výběr nejpodstatnějších):

Anholt, Simon. Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN-13: 978-0-230-50028-0, 2007.

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*   BAS – Balkánská a středoevropská studia; ES – Evropská studia; NRS – Německá a rakouská studia; RES – Ruská a eurasijská studia; SAS – Severoamerická studia; ZES – Západoevropská studia.

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Introduction

Given the conditions of the constantly accelerating pace of globalization, technological advancement and media development, the interconnectedness between states is increasing rapidly. A corollary of these processes manifests itself in a notable growing competition between the countries in the international arena. In pursuit of investments, the attraction of human resources, capital raising and salience in a global context, the development of a robust, credible, and appealing reputation of a state became equally important as in the case of commercial products, entities, and organizations. The intention to obtain a competitive edge results in the development of diverse strategies that could be implemented by states. In this regard, a pivotal role is being assigned to nation branding, which is gradually becoming a notable constituent of both foreign and domestic policies.

Being currently in a period of burgeoning development, nation branding is regarded as an interdisciplinary concept rooted in the fields of marketing, management, international relations, public diplomacy, and cultural diplomacy. Being tightly related to Nye's notion of soft power, nation branding is regarded as an instrument serving to establish and elicit a distinctive and self-promoting image of a country in order to obtain strategic benefits and advantages. Since nation branding strategy is primarily aimed at the international audience, a state can utilize diverse means and communication channels to shape and consequently transmit the constructed brand. In this respect, cinematography is perceived as one of the most potent instruments. The appeal and effectiveness of cinema as a medium stems from its capacity to transcend borders, capture the attention of diverse audiences and enhance the exchange of ideas, images, and attitudes. In the context of nation branding, the most prominent position is occupied by national cinema. By combining unique narratives, socio-cultural aspects, and specific industrial conventions, not only does national cinema appear as a mirror reflecting a respective country but it serves as a tool used in order to create, assert, and communicate a national image as well.

The purpose of the submitted thesis is to examine the correlation between the concepts of nation branding and national cinema from the instrumentalist perspective. In particular, this thesis explores the capacity of national cinema as a tool used within the context of nation branding both theoretically and empirically. Consequently, the submitted study introduces the practical methodological model for conduction of analysis that can be utilized in further scientific research related to the discussed subject matter. Finally, the

thesis examines the discussed correlation and established methodological model in praxis by applying it to the case study of modern Georgia.

A consistent and holistic national brand transmitted through appropriate and potent channels is of special interest as far as smaller states are concerned. In the context of post-Soviet space, the issue of nation branding appears crucial. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the newly emerged independent states had to strengthen their positions and visibility on the international scene and establish the course of further development. In this regard, the case of Georgia is of special interest. Having passed a way from a destabilized country torn by ethnopolitical tensions to a consolidated member-state of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) aspiring to further Euro-Atlantic integration, modern Georgia appears to be the only state in the Caucasus region that embraced the allegiance to liberal democratic values and combined them with more customary and orthodox ones. This blending of the state's pro-Western orientation and unique sensibility being ascribed to the Georgian socio-historical legacy provides a basis for the development of a distinctive national brand. The significance of the enhancement of Georgia's national image on the international scene is further bolstered by the state authorities who additionally emphasize the role played by media as far as the promotional aspect is concerned. In this regard, Georgian national cinema manifested itself as a potentially powerful, accessible, and impactful tool given its long-lasting, sophisticated history, idiosyncratic artistic sensibility and currently growing presence, visibility, and prominence within an international context. Therefore, it is of particular interest to observe the capacity and contribution provided by contemporary national cinema, which could be approached as both an instrument and a unique cultural phenomenon, to the process of modern Georgia's brand development and its consequent representation to diverse audiences.

It is to be noted that there had been conducted a sufficiently modest amount of scientific research as far as the discussed subject matter is concerned. The previously written studies the instrumental correlation between the concepts of nation branding and national cinema on a relatively superficial level. Furthermore, previously conducted research primarily focused on either Western Europe or East Asia. Therefore, within the area of post-Soviet space, the proposed approach appeared to be relatively novel but, nevertheless, potential. Taking into consideration that nation branding practices in this area — in comparison to the above-mentioned regions — are currently at the stage of development, it seems crucial to monitor this evolution since it would contribute to further cross-disciplinary

studies embracing the spheres of international relations and strategic communication. Therefore, not only does the submitted thesis contribute to the theoretical discussion of the conceptual correlation but also it introduces a new perspective for the examination of the processes in the post-Soviet space and establishes grounding for further cross-disciplinary studies.

The primary objective of the thesis is to examine the capacity of national cinema as a tool implemented within the framework of nation branding and consequently investigate its applicability in the case of Georgia. Therefore, the key research question of the thesis is the following: "*How does contemporary national cinema contribute to shaping the national brand of modern Georgia?*" The supplementary question is: "*What image of modern Georgia is created through contemporary national cinema?*"

To examine both questions raised, three hypotheses are elaborated:

Hypothesis 1: *National cinema is a flexible tool that can be instrumentalized within the context of nation branding.*

Hypothesis 2: *Contemporary Georgian national cinema reflects key attributes of the country's national brand.*

Taking into account the above-mentioned objectives and hypotheses, it is crucial to consider a set of potential limitations as far as the research is concerned. First and foremost, given the significant rise of transnational production practices in terms of the filmmaking industry, it is essential to establish clear boundaries for the concept of national cinema. Secondly, the issue of a language barrier is to be taken into consideration. Therefore, in order to be accessible to foreign audiences, the products of the national filmmaking industry are to be available in translation. Lastly, national cinema — and cinematography per se — constitutes a multidimensional object for analysis. Therefore, the potential scope of investigated material and aspects is to be narrowed by means of proper research design.

As far as methodology is concerned, this thesis is founded upon a combination of several approaches. Firstly, the theoretical framework is developed on the basis of semi-systematic and integrative approaches to the literature review of primary and secondary sources to provide a comprehensive and multi-faceted overview of the concept of nation branding and national cinema alongside the historical contextualization of Georgia's example. Secondly, in the broader sense, the proposed thesis is a qualitative case study aimed at a more profound examination of the above-mentioned concepts in praxis. Lastly, this thesis incorporates elements and strategies used in qualitative film analysis. This method

enables systemic examination and consequent interpretation of diverse aspects inherent to filmic structures. In particular, an adjusted variation of a general model of film analysis, developed by Prof. Dr. Lothar Mikos, is implemented in the thesis. The proposed model enables limiting the scope of analysis in compliance with the set objectives of the research, defining particular aspects of a filmic structure that are to be examined and establishing the relation between the studies material and theoretical contextualization of the investigated issue. The cinematic material for the analytical part of the thesis is selected on the basis of a key set in accordance with specificities of the Georgia's case.

Structurally, the proposed thesis is subdivided into four chapters. Following the introduction part, the first chapter provides the conceptual and theoretical framework for the notions of nation branding and national cinema. Furthermore, it includes the specific methodological approaches and research models used in the thesis. In this chapter, the first hypothesis is addressed as well. The second chapter provides an overview of contemporary Georgia's national brand taking into account the historical outline spanning from 1991 to the present moment. There are as well embraced the strategic narrative of contemporary Georgia which serves as a basis for the development of the national brand and the key characteristic traits of the latter. The third chapter provides examines the development of Georgian cinematography and defines the status of national cinema on the basis of the state's legislation. The fourth chapter constitutes an analytical part and provides an analysis and evaluation of the chosen material in accordance with the previously established research design and theoretical framework. Based on this analysis, the capacity of Georgian cinema as nation branding medium capable of depicting Western-oriented and traditional features is discussed and exemplified. In this chapter, the second hypothesis is addressed and tested as well. Finally, conclusion summarizes the results of the study conducted in this thesis and offers perspectives for further research.

1. Conceptual, Theoretical and Methodological Framework

1.1. Literature Review

As an object of academic studies, the concept of nation branding for the first time gained attention at the turn of the late 1990s and early 2000s. The term itself was coined by Simon Anholt, a political advisor who is considered the most prolific author in this field. In his book *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*

(2007), which is often regarded as a ground-breaking book in the corpus of nation branding literature, the concept is to a larger extent addressed from the functionalist perspective. A similar perspective is shared by Wally Olins, a practitioner of branding, communication, and identity, in the article *Branding the Nation — the Historical Context* (2002), in which he examines and advocates the concept from the historical perspective. In the context of political sciences, the concept of nation branding was approached by György Szondi, a specialist in international public relations and risk communication, who observed it in relation to Joseph Nye's theory of soft power and public diplomacy in his work *Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding: Conceptual Similarities and Differences* (2008). Additionally, the correlation between nation branding and cultural diplomacy was observed by Hlynur Gudjonsson, a strategist in the area of public relations and political campaigns, in his research paper *Nation Branding* (2005). Furthermore, the discussed concept was critically approached in the fields of cultural studies. In particular, the line of criticism was primarily introduced in the articles *Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research* (2011) by Melissa Aronczyk, who specializes in media studies and *Cashing in on Dracula: Eastern Europe's Hard Sells* (2007) by Dina Iordanova, a specialist in film studies.

Thus, within academia nation branding established itself as a multifaceted concept rooted in diverse disciplines. This circumstance sparked a critical debate between the scientists. On the one hand, Keith Dinnie, an expert in region brand management, highlights the vagueness of the boundaries and scope of nation branding from the conceptual perspective. Furthermore, in his book *Nation branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice* (2008), he touches upon the debate concerning the degree of ethics related to the implication of the marketing-based approaches towards states. On the other hand, Ying Fan, who specializes in economics and management, addresses the multidimensionality ascribed to nation branding in a more positive perspective since it enables a more flexible approach to the subject. However, in her article *Branding the Nation: Towards a Better Understanding* (2010), the importance of coherence in a nation branding strategy is highlighted.

Within the context of potential instruments utilized for communication and promotion of a country's brand a particular importance is constituted by national cinema. The upsurge of academic interest in the debate concerning the latter subject roughly dates back to the 1980s. On the one hand, it was prompted by the polemics within the context of film studies regarding the issue of binary opposites corresponding to the contraposition of omnifying Hollywood and avant-garde filmmaking loosely associated with particular states.

With the rise of critical cultural studies, the concept of national cinema captured more attention on the part of sociological research. The more profound description of historical development of the discussed concept was presented by Thomas Elsaesser, a film historian, in his article *ImpersoNations: National Cinema, Historical Imaginaries and New Cinema Europe* (2013).

However, since the 1980s, the notion of national cinema gained more attention and faced a certain interpretational shift in terms of the scope of the assigned meaning. From the historical perspective, this shift was holistically framed by Susan Hayward within the book *Cinema and Nation* (2000). As far as the scope of national cinema is concerned, the most complex approach was introduced by Andrew Higson, who specializes in film and television studies, in his prominent article *The Concept of National Cinema* (1989). While considering previous definitions of the concept related primarily to the textual level, this article transfers it to a more multidimensional level. Another of Higson's papers entitled *The Resilience of Popular National Cinemas in Europe (Part Two)* (2021) addresses the issue of transnationalism within the context of national filmmaking and significantly contributes to the clarification of the latter term. Last but not least there is to be mentioned article *Nations as Brands: Cinema's Place in the Branding Role* (2020) written by Shashwat Gupta et al., which examines the capacity of cinematography as a tool affecting the target audiences in the context of nation branding.

As far as the Georgian case is concerned, its contemporary national brand is still in the process of a positive development. The youth of modern Georgia's national brand is justified by the country's historical development since the moment of its independence regaining which was full of changes and challenges. A comprehensive overview of key milestones and hindrances in the history of contemporary Georgia is accessibly contextualized in selected chapters from the book *25 Years of Independent Georgia. Achievements and Unfinished Project* (2016) as well as in Adrian Brisku's article *Modern Georgia* (2020). As far as Georgia's national brand per se is concerned, it is crucial to mention several sources that significantly contribute to its analysis. Firstly, the current major trends in Georgia's image-building are observed in Katarzyna Skiert-Andrzejuk's article *Georgia's National Brand in the European Union – Is It Possible "to Sell the Nation"* (2017), which as well provides an overview of nation branding tendencies common to the post-Soviet countries. Another complex overview of the key aspects relevant to Georgia's case is presented in Kakhaber Djakeli's research *Country's Branding for More Attractive*

Image of Georgia (2013), which comprises the current state of the Georgian national brand alongside the desired image. Furthermore, there is to be mentioned Adrian Brisku's book *Bittersweet Europe: Albanian and Georgian Discourses on Europe, 1878-2008* (2013), which offers a profound comparative discussion of discourses embraced in Georgian society that are valuable for understanding of narratives and aspects related to national identity and subsequently transferred to the field of nation branding.

It is essential to address Georgia's strategic narrative which serves as a basis for the development of the country's brand. In this regard, there are to be mentioned several articles written by Kornely Kakachia, namely *Georgia: Identity, Foreign Policy, and the Politics of a "Euro-Atlantic Orientation* (2013) and *European, Asian, or Eurasian? Georgian Identity and the Struggle for Euro-Atlantic Integration* (2013). In both materials, the author maps the role of Georgian identarian aspects within the context of the county's foreign policy. Additionally, the analytical report on culture for development indicators for Georgia published by UNESCO (2017) is used for further description of key constituents of Georgia's national brand. The overview of the strategic narrative is further completed by the analysis of official documents — *National Security Concept of Georgia* (2018) and *Communication Strategy of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia (2021-2024)* (2021) — introduced by the Ministry of Defense of Georgia.

Lastly, as far as the usage of Georgian national cinema within the context of nation branding is concerned, there could be observed a research gap. To date, no comprehensible research was conducted in order to establish the possible link existing between the contemporary Georgian filmmaking industry and implemented course of nation branding strategy, despite the fact that Georgian cinematography constitutes a unique and promising object of study. Its exceptional historical development is contextualized in Bartosz Wieczorek's work *Faces of Georgian Cinema* (2021) which provides a holistic, chronological overview. The second article to be mentioned is *Incommensurable Distance: Georgian Cinema as a (Trans)national Cinema* (2014) written by Dusan Radunovic, which outlines the key distinctive specificities inherent in Georgian national cinema. Since in terms of country branding strategy namely national cinematography constitutes the highest interest, it is crucial to define the latter in Georgia's case. For this purpose, there is used the law *On the State Support of the National Cinematography* adopted by the Parliament of Georgia in 2000, which defines the notion itself alongside its legitimate status and key stakeholders. The research is further supported by the report published in 2012 by the

Georgian National Film Centre. This institution is one of the key actors that largely contributes to the development of domestic cinematography and functions as a mediator between the filmmaking industry and the government. A detailed analysis of the presented literature is discussed in the following subchapters of the thesis.

1.2.   Nation Branding: Defining the Concept

To better understand the notion of nation branding, it is essential to introduce the term "brand," from which the former is derived. Stemming from the Old Norse root denoting the verb "to burn," the term "brand" formally existed since the dawn of the formal trade. Being used in its literal sense, the process of branding referred to the marking of tangible objects intended for sale in order to designate the original owner or producer.[1]

The practice of branding acquired its modern connotation with the onset of the Industrial Revolution. Due to a further significant rise of substitute goods and transnational conglomerates, the notion of the brand has evolved into a complex phenomenon comprised of four key constituents. The first aspect is brand identity, which refers to the core idea behind a product, service, or organization. The second constituent is the brand image, implying the existing perception of a brand in society. The third aspect is the brand purpose, which refers to common objectives and values, associated with a brand. The fourth constituent embraces the notion of brand equity, which refers to the assets of a brand measured in dollar terms.[2] Thus, a modern meaning of a brand implies a range of attributes created intentionally in order to design a specific identity of a product, service, organization or even a whole state.[3] On the contrary, the notion of "branding" primarily refers to implementable strategic process aimed at establishment of specific identity and image with the intention to manage its reputation. The key objective of the branding process is to enhance a reliable positive reputation in order to stimulate the public's loyalty within the context of the competitive globalized environment. Thus, the development and implementation of a branding strategy is a long-term yet sequential process that is conditioned by people's perceptions and consequent feedback.[4]

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[1] Matthew Healey, *What is Branding?* (Mies: RotoVision, 2008), 6

[2] Simon Anholt, *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN-13: 978-0-230-50028-0, 2007), 4-7

[3] Tanya Sammut-Bonnic, "Brand and Branding" in *Wiley Encyclopedia of Managemen*, vol. 12, ed. Tanya Sammut Bonnici and John McGee (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd 2015), 1-2

[4] Healey, *What is Branding?*, 10.

Both concepts for a long time remained the prerogative of business and marketing studies. However, presently the usage of branding strategies has expanded to a larger number of fields including politics, international relations, diplomacy, cultural studies, and the non-profit sector. As a result, there emerged a relatively recent concept of nation branding, which is still in the process of burgeoning development. Its roots could be traced in four distinct areas including the marketing studies of the country-of-origin effect, strategic implementation of place branding, the field of public diplomacy and research regarding national identities.[5] Undoubtedly, state authorities have previously used diverse approaches and forms of persuasion in order to promote a country's distinct image to achieve specific goals and interests.[6] However, introduced in 1996 by Simon Anholt, the concept and theory of nation branding allowed to combine the formerly applied methods with strategies borrowed from the marketing field.[7] It should be noted that in academia academic literature the term "nation branding" is used interchangeably with the term "country branding."[8]

According to Simon Anholt, who is considered to be the most prolific author as far as the subject matter is concerned, the term nation branding denotes a state's strategy aimed at building a favourable image of itself by means of marketing tools and communications.[9] However, this definition faced a certain degree of criticism regarding the ethics of such approach and raised discussion concerning the extent to which a state could be treated as a product.[10] In response to the criticism Anholt introduced the model of Competitive Identity that embraced formerly introduced notion, however, significantly shifted the emphasis towards the concepts of national identity. The essence of the discussed model is twofold. On the one hand, it provides a multifaceted evaluation of a country's image. On the other hand, the model of Competitive Identity highlights specific areas for further improvements of the national brand and suggests means to modify current strategies.[11]

A sufficiently similar approach to the concept of nation branding is being proposed by Keith Dinnie, who addresses it as a multifaceted phenomenon that intermingles marketing

[5] Ying Fan, "Branding the nation: Towards a better understanding", *Place Brand Public Diplomacy 6*, (2010), 97-100.

[6] Wally Olins, "Branding the nation — the historical context", *Journal of Brand Management 9*, (2002), 241-243.

[7] Anholt, *Competitive Identity*, xi.

[8] Ying Fan, "Branding the Nation: What is Being Branded?", *Journal of Vacation Marketing 12*, no. 1 (2006), 2-3.

[9] Anholt, *Competitive Identity*, 1-3.

[10] Keith Dinnie, *Nation branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice*, (Oxford: Elsevier Ltd., 2008), 15.

[11] Anholt, *Competitive Identity*, 1-3.

branding techniques with representative identity politics. Dinnie's approach to nation branding suggests that it is a result of gradational expansion of branding practices.[12] According to György Szondi, nation branding could be perceived as a strategic self-presentation of a state on the international stage with the purpose to establish a prominent reputational capital through a strategic application of marketing techniques and communicative strategies. Szondi further observes the affinity of the nation branding theory with the field of public diplomacy.[13]

As far as the key stakeholders of nation branding are concerned, this concept is characterized by the notable yet implicit involvement of state authorities. Being seen as official representatives of particular states and nations, governments are defined as initiators and coordinators of nation branding campaigns by means of their authority and capacity. However, governmental entities could not be considered the sole source of nation branding strategy development. In many instances, there is a considerable quantity of stakeholders including non-governmental organizations, agencies, business corporations or private enterprises that contribute to the construction of a country's image and its promotion abroad. Therefore, in terms of nation branding the sphere of the government's influence and control is limited. Besides, it is suggested that intensive, uncompromising governmental interference in the process of nation branding might be misinterpreted as propaganda. Nevertheless, the predominant role in terms of nation branding coordination is primarily occupied by the government in order to eliminate the probability of the occurrence of contradictory images of a country being promoted by other stakeholders.[14]

Thus, based on the above-mentioned definitions, the phenomenon of nation branding could be conceptualized as a strategic multidisciplinary tool employing which a country's image is being created, monitored, evaluated, and proactively altered in order to enhance the country's reputation among a target international audience covering political, economic, and cultural dimensions. Stemming from the assumption that a successful nation branding strategy would provide a substantial advantage in the context of global competition between the countries, this approach possesses the capacity to lure the attention of investors, tourists and media alongside the capital raising. Being to a significant degree managed by the state

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[12] Dinnie, *Nation branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice*, 5.
[13] György Szondi, "Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding: Conceptual Similarities and Differences", *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy*, Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', ISSN 1569-2981, (2008), 4-8.
[14] Hlynur Gudjonsson, "Nation branding", *Place Branding, Public Diplomacy 1*, (2005), 284-285.

authorities, it might as well enhance a country's reputation on the international scene. However, the interdisciplinary nature of nation branding appears to be a complicated factor as far as the theoretical contextualization is concerned. On the one hand, this circumstance to a certain extent hinders the holistic theoretic systematization of the concept within academia. On the other hand, however, the observed interdisciplinarity allows to comprehensively approach the issue from a variety of perspectives. Currently, all theoretical approaches to the concept on nation branding are divided into three categories: technical-economic framework, political framework, and cultural framework[15] that are to be discussed in the following sections.

1.2.1.   Technical-Economic Framework

The amount of theoretical approaches embraced by technical-economic framework appears to be the most extensive. In general, it contains academic studies from various scientific fields including primarily marketing, management, and tourism. Among the most prolific authors could be mentioned Simon Anhlot and Wally Olins.[16] Thematically, this theoretical framework considers that specific aspects of nation branding are related to the issues of economic growth, effective capacity, and capital accumulation. Since technical-economic approaches to a large extent address the concept from the functionalist perspective, they resonate with the assumption that nation branding is to be treated as a strategic tool used in order to enhance a competitive advantage of a particular state on the international scene. The underlying argument behind this theoretical framework is based on the opinion that building and representation of a holistic national brand is to a certain extent similar to the process of branding practices related to tangible products or enterprises.[17]

Due to its apparent orientation towards the fields of marketing and management, technical-economic approaches are united by three crucial assumptions regarding the contemporary notion of nationhood. Firstly, this theoretical framework suggests the omnipresent hegemony of international conglomerates that spur global competition between states, nations and, as a consequence, nation branding strategies. Secondly, technical-economic approaches emphasize the dependence of national welfare on the sustainable economic competitive advantage that can be significantly enhanced by nation branding

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[15] Nadia Kaneva, "Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research", *International Journal of Communication 5*, no. 1 (2011), 119-120.

[16] Kaneva, "Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research", 120.

[17] Anholt, *Competitive Identity*, 15-19.

which possesses the capacity to attract capital flows. Lastly, this theoretical framework highlights the criticized similarity between approaching nation-states and commercial brands. It is to be mentioned that technical-economic approaches do not focus on the historiography of particular national identities from a diachronic perspective. Therefore, within this framework, national brands are treated as self-evident products of the historical, political, and cultural development of a state.[18]

Thus, technical-economic approaches stem from the instrumentalist assumption that nation branding is a tool employing which a sufficiently flexible image of national identity, could be strategically managed similarly to the processes observed within the field of marketing. By means of specific methodological measuring tools this framework provides a consistent context for the pragmatic implementation of the concept of nation branding. Being rather practice-oriented, technical-economic approaches consider nation branding to be a continuous strategic project that combines "communication-based" and "policy-based" methods.[19]

1.2.2. Political Framework

Political approaches to the concept of nation branding embrace academic studies which examine the degree of influence provided by national images in the context of international relations. Within this framework, the discussed concept is addressed within the fields of the above-mentioned international relations, public relations, and strategic communication.[20] In particular, political approaches gravitate towards studies centered on the intercomparison and consequent conceptualizations of nation branding with regard to public diplomacy taking into consideration convergence or divergence that could be observed with respect to both notions.[21]

Public Diplomacy and Soft Power: Brief Overview

Within the theory of international relations, the notion of public diplomacy is traditionally approached as a multidimensional concept implying the process of communication arising between the government, which occupies the role of the addressed,

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[18] Kaneva, "Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research", 122-123.

[19] Simon Anholt, "From nation branding to competitive identity – The role of brand management as a component of national policy" in *Nation branding: concepts, issues, practice*, K. Dinnie (Ed.), Elsevier Ltd., ISBN: 978-0-7506-8349-4, 2008, pp. 22–23

[20] Kaneva, "Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research", 124.

[21] Ibid., 124.

and foreign audiences, which become recipients, to positively influence the opinions of the latter regarding the government's strategic course of action and the integral image of the whole state in the political arena. Nevertheless, public diplomacy has the capacity to engage with the domestic public through the elucidation of the government's foreign policy or by direct engagement of the local community in the process related to the development of foreign policy.[22] As such, public diplomacy could be conceptualized by means of four core dimensions including time required for the achievement of set goals, current conditions, which define the context for the interaction between the government and the target public, character of the objectives that are to be reached during the process of communication and, lastly, the concept of power which could be characterized as the potential ability to affect the behavior of other actors to obtain the desired result or outcome. The notion of power has been approached in a variety of ways depending on the capabilities, utilized instruments and intentions. One of the most prominent typologies introduced by Joseph Nye subdivides the notion of power into a juxtaposition of hard power, smart power, and soft power. With respect to both concepts of public diplomacy and nation branding, it is crucial to briefly define the latter.[23]

According to Joseph Nye, soft power could be conceptualized as a specific ability to influence other actors realized through eliciting a positive, attractive image in order to achieve the desired results.[24] The crucial point of soft power consists in attractiveness that contributes to further acquiescence with communicated discourses, policies, and images. This acquiescence could be enhanced and accomplished by means of intangible assets which simultaneously are the fundamental sources of soft power: culture, political values, and policies alongside implicit moral credibility.[25] In practical terms, the implementation of soft power is partly shared between the government, non-governmental entities, and individuals. Thus, on the one hand, the authority of the government seems to be partly limited but, on the other hand, the course and nature of soft power is supported and reinforced by governmental legitimacy. This stance is justified by the fact that communicated image of a country is to be holistic to enhance the degree of attractiveness indispensable for the achievement of the objectives employing soft power. For instance, the government could establish an enabling

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[22] Szondi, "*Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding*", 6-7.
[23] Ibid., 8.
[24] Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, ISBN-13 978-1-58648-306-7, 2004), 5
[25] Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 6.

environment for the development of soft power sources and contribute to the process by means of close cooperation with institutions, enterprises and organizations thereby supporting the desired image.

Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy: Conceptual Convergence

Thus, it seems obvious that the concept of soft power serves as a liaison between public diplomacy and nation branding. Since the capacity of soft power is founded upon a positive reputation communicated by a country it is in the best interest of the latter to cultivate it in order to consolidate its place on the international scene. The observed conceptual convergence between public diplomacy and nation branding implies five possible combinations. Depending on the selected perspective, both notions might represent either two completely autonomous concepts or have a common intersection while still maintaining conceptual differences. Besides, there exist a possibility of subordinative relations between the discussed concepts. In this instance, one option considers nation branding to be subordinate to public diplomacy while in the other case, the perspective is reversed. Furthermore, there could be suggested an overlap between political and previously discussed technical-economic frameworks, which consists in the fact that public diplomacy and nation branding in their essence might be seen as identical concepts.

Nation Branding and Cultural Diplomacy

The relationship between the concept of nation branding and cultural diplomacy, which is the subordinate component of public diplomacy, deserved attention as well. Being focused on both cultural heritage and contemporary cultural artefacts, the key objective of cultural diplomacy appears to be closely related to the aim of nation branding strategies and consists in the promotion of a multicultural dialogue with foreign audiences. This objective could be fulfilled through cultural transfer and representational practices including international events and festivals, artistic or scientific exchange and educational programs.[26]

Within the context of cultural diplomacy, there exist three general perspectives towards the issue of nation branding including the stances of Absolutists, Moderates and Royalists. The Absolutists' position appears similar to the technical-economic approach since they perceive nations as products that might be branded through cultural diplomacy.

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[26] Eliška Tomalová, *Kulturní diplomacie. Francouzská zkušenost* (Prague: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, 2008), 18-19.

Therefore, nation branding is to be addressed as a tool that could be implemented by diplomats in order to enhance the nation's image on the international scene. On the other hand, the Moderates are inclined to believe that nations are too complex to be treated similarly to commercial products. However, they do not deny the potential of nation branding strategies in terms of reputational representation. Lastly, the Royalists, adopting the most skeptical position towards nation branding, refuse to embrace it as a tool since it would undermine its integrity. From this perspective, nations are holistic, complex entities that could not be altered similarly to commercial products or services.[27]

Therefore, within the political framework, nation branding is inextricably linked to governmental aspirations implemented in diverse policies on different levels including public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy. However, to some extent, the discussed concept serves as the liaison between political and technical-economic spheres leading to the conceptual overlap. In particular, one could observe the process of incorporation of marketing and managemental tools into the sphere of international relations alongside commercial branding practices being integrated into the process of national governance. Thus, an essential condition for conceptualizing nation branding lies in the fact that it is launched and managed by the government, but the representatives of the private sector are allowed to largely contribute to the accepted strategic course.

1.2.3. Cultural Framework

In contrast, the theoretical category of cultural approaches towards the issue of nation branding comprises the smallest quantity of scientific studies due to its relative novelty. Stemming from the fields related to anthropology, media, and cultural studies alongside collateral critical research, the presented framework is primarily focused on the impact provided by nation branding on national and cultural identities and specific consequences deriving from it. Dina Iordanova, Melissa Aronczyk and Nadia Kaneva to a sufficient degree embrace cultural approaches to the issue of nation branding in their studies.[28]

As previously noted, this framework is deeply rooted in critical theories regarding culture, communication, and social landscape. Therefore, in contrast to technical-economic and political approaches, further advancement of nation branding theory alongside its practical implementation is not the key objective of cultural approaches. Instead, this

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[27] Gudjonsson, "Nation branding", 283-284.
[28] Kaneva, "Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research", 127.

theoretical framework serves as a source of critical analysis of discourses associated with the subject matter of nation branding and their immediate relation to the issues of national identity, governance, and cultural sphere. From this perspective, national identity is being approached as a dynamic concept altering over the course of time and being based on a cluster of individual meanings and collective significance provided by diverse agents. Therefore, cultural approaches attribute to the concept of nation branding a specific capacity to influence identity policies since it facilitates the articulation of a particular collective national identity. In terms of this framework, historiography appears to be crucial with respect to the concept of nation branding, which is assumed to be a natural, logical continuation of the discourse concerning national identities being prospectively shaped and communicated. In this regard, cultural approaches are tightly connected to a constructivist vision of nationhood.[29]

As far as the central line of criticism is concerned, the cultural framework asserts that potential implications of nation branding campaigns might, on the one hand, limit the scope of existing and accepted narratives concerning national identity and, on the other hand, alter and re-establish them in accordance with expectations of external and non-local agents in pursuit of economic well-being and competitive advantage. Besides, as part of this approach, it is emphasized that nation branding has the capacity to enhance and reproduce familiar stereotypical notions concerning the representation of national identities. Subsequently, there might appear a risk of disparity between the externally oriented projected image of national identity and the national self-identification of a local community, resulting in a split of holistic national identity and the possibility of self-exoticization, which constitutes the opposite of the alleged purpose of nation branding.[30]

Thus, cultural approaches to nation branding represent a counterargument to both the above-mentioned technical-economic framework and political framework. The third theoretical framework calls into question the previously implied parallel between the processes of nation branding and commercial product branding under the conditions of global marketisation by approaching the subject matter of nationhood and its representation from the constructivist perspective and given the historical context. Nevertheless, it is to be admitted that cultural approaches are characterized by a significant scope of limiting factors.

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[29] Melissa Aronczyk, ""Living the Brand": Nationality, Globality and the Identity Strategies of Nation Branding Consultants", *International Journal of Communication 2*, no. 1 (2008), 41-43.

[30] Dina Iordanova, "Cashing in on Dracula: Eastern Europe's Hard Sells", *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 48, no. 1 (2007), 58-59.

In the first instance, the discussed framework is unable to provide a relatively universal theoretical basis since the prevailing part of critical cultural studies is concentrated on single states considering the need to research specific historical contexts. This hindrance, however, might be tackled by means of a collaborative examination of the issue grounded in multiple data sources. Additionally, in the majority of cases, the cultural framework addresses the concept of nation branding as a discourse practice rather than a strategic approach to national identity representation.[31]

1.3. Constituents of Nation Branding: Definition and Evaluation

In order to successfully evaluate and manage the applied nation branding strategy, a complex analytical method of its assessment known as *Nation Brand Hexagon* or *Hexagon of Competitive Identity* had been coined by Simon Anholt. Being used for measuring the degree of appeal and power of a constructed image, it proceeds from the assumption that a country's brand is constituted by six areas of national competence through which states — either intentionally or unintentionally — communicate their identity to the rest of the world. Since governments and state authorities could be identified as the key stakeholders of nation branding, it is supposed that they hold the capacity to coordinate policies and investments in all six areas to establish a certain image of the country that would promote and enhance the country's reputation in terms of economic prosperity, cultural representation, and international affairs.[32]

The evaluation method of *Nation Brand Hexagon* laid the foundation for the complex comparative measurement system which is referred to as the *Nation Brands Index* (NBI). Being a result of collaboration between Simon Anholt and Ipsos Group S.A. company, which primarily focuses on sociological and market research, the *Nation Brands Index* is based on annual surveys conducted by the above-mentioned entity. As a result, *Nation Brands Index* provides a comparative analysis of countries' nation branding strategies alongside the assessment of changes and dynamics being observed over the course of time.[33]

According to Anholt, the six key areas of national competence include tourism, export brands, foreign and domestic policy, investment, people, and culture. All six

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[31] Kaneva, "Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research", 128.
[32] Anholt, *Competitive Identity*, 25-26.
[33] "*Anholt Ipsos Nation Brands Index (NBI)*", Ipsos, Bloomberg, 2021

constituents of the *Nation Brand Hexagon* are interconnected. Therefore, modification and alteration of one area would most likely affect the other five dimensions.[34]
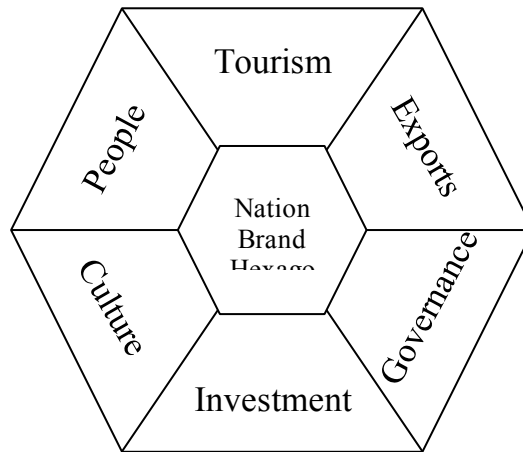
(Picture 1: Anholts's *Nation Brand Hexagon.* Source: Anholt Ipsos Nation Brands Index (NBI)", 2021)

Tourism promotion, which is the first aspect to consider, implies a direct experience with a country in the status of a traveler. Traditionally, this aspect is regarded as the most potential channel of the nation branding promotion since the tourist industry appears to be one of the most influential due to its role in product export and employment. Besides, tourism — as a component of a nation branding strategy — possesses a capacity to enhance the flow of people and capital. Being tightly related to the process of place or destination branding, a successful and consistent country's reputation as a promising and attractive tourist destination not only could directly attract new visitors or investors but increase sales of local products as well.[35]

The second aspect comprises a set of explicitly recognizable export brands that might be treated as ambassadors of the established country's image. It is suggested that a tangible product, associated with a specific country, which could be purchased is likely to contribute more to the nation branding process than solely an advertising campaign or vivid slogans. However, it is crucial to establish a specific and solid connection between a successful product or brand and the country of its origin. However, this area of nation branding policy has been complicated by the divisiveness related to the assignment of the country-of-origin status. This controversy was prompted by the fact that a plethora of products belonging to

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[34] Anholt, *Competitive Identity*, 25.
[35] Ibid, 88-90.

brands, traditionally associated with a specific country, is being manufactured using the labour forces from developing countries. Nevertheless, in the event that the established connection between a specific country and a brand is sufficiently strong, the latter would be still considered a part of a national brand of the same country notwithstanding the place of its manufacture.[36]

The third area of national competencies concerns policy decisions adopted by the state's authorities. This aspect not only includes both domestic and foreign policies but comprises its representation in the international media context as well. The key factor, therefore, is the consistency and transparency of the policies presented by state authorities. In order to support a specific image of a country, the government is supposed to reflect its stance on relevant and topical issues. However, in the event that the state appears to be involved in controversial and unpopular initiatives or campaigns within the context of its foreign policies, it might mitigate the achievements in other areas of the hexagon and consequently drastically affect the overall degree of attractiveness of the country's national brand. To level these risks the governments could either invest more in export, tertiary sector related to the tourist industry and activities aimed at the cultural exchange and relations or allow a certain degree of criticism towards the controversial policies on behalf of the citizens thereby creating a distance between these policies and core national values and the holistic image of the country.[37]

The fourth aspect traditionally applies to the flow of foreign investment and expansion of international conglomerates and smaller companies into the county's market. The key objective of this dimension of the nation branding strategy is related to the establishment and consequent promotion of business relationships to ensure the inflow of capital and direct investments. Through nation branding, a country could build a reputation as a promising business destination by creating a decent business environment with high living standards, convenient infrastructure, and advanced social and banking systems alongside transparent visa policies. Such a reputation would enable the inflow of knowledge by means of the recruitment of foreign specialists and the attraction of international students.[38]

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[36] Ibid., 91-95.
[37] Ibid., 25-27.
[38] Ibid., 25-27.

The fifth aspect is constituted by the powerful and influential people of the country including highbrow academics, political leaders, cultural intellectuals, sportsmen and media people. This area as well comprises the cumulative experience related to the interaction with the population of a specific country. In order to enhance this area of nation branding strategy, it is crucial to imply the threefold mode of communication. This implies that nation branding strategy should combine elements of the government-to-government (G2G) mode, associated primarily with the field of international relations and traditional diplomacy, the government-to-public (G2P) mode, associated primarily with the sphere of public diplomacy and public-to-public (P2P) mode, associated primarily with direct interaction with the people of a particular country.[39]

Lastly, the sixth area of national competencies comprises the cultural heritage of a country including cultural exchange and related activities alongside the export of tangible and intangible artistic artefacts. Exactly like the tourist industry, culture plays a pivotal role in terms of the reputational enhancement of a particular country. Perceived as a distinctively authentic constituent, it imbues the image of a state with recognizable traits and a sense of dignity. However, since the cultural aspect of any nation branding strategy is based on a colossal bulk of historical heritage, it is crucial to counterbalance the existing cluster of artistic artefacts with the newest cultural achievements and social agendas, especially during the process of re-establishment of a country's image. Despite the fact, that culture might be in some instances treated as the least commercialized area of nation branding, such intermingling of centuries-old cultural legacy and contemporary artistic and social realia has an enormous capacity to spark interest on the part of both tourists and investors.[40]

Thus, by means of a consistent development of all six areas of the *Nation Brand Hexagon*, a country's image alongside its reputation could be significantly altered in diverse directions. As far as the cultural aspect is concerned, the phenomenon of national cinema has the potential to largely contribute to promoting and enhancing an intended image on the international scene. Cinematography per se appears to be a highly effective medium and, therefore, is proactively incorporated as a tool into the general course of nation branding strategies implemented by diverse states.[41]

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[39] Ibid, 105-107.
[40] Ibid. 97-101.
[41] Nevena Brašanac, "Nation Branding through Cinema: Serbian Candidates for the Oscars", Зборник радова Факултета драмских уметности, no. 42(5) (2022), 76-77.

Beyond any doubt, in this context, the crucial role is played by the notion of national cinema. the discussion around the nature of national cinema re-gained its momentum during the last two decades of the XXth century given the rise of globalization, transnational production and the simultaneous development of nation branding practices.[42] Therefore, prior to defining national cinematography as a tool embraced by nation branding, it is essential to briefly address the concept itself given the fact that it stems from the notion of national culture.

1.4. National Culture as a Generic Term for National Cinema

As a starting point, it is crucial to make a brief commentary regarding the relationship established between two key concepts: nation and culture. In other terms, one is to observe the ways by means of which the notion of culture acquires the attribute of strictly national. In general, identifying culture as national is equal to correlating it with a specific national identity stemming from the concept of nationalism.

According to Anthony D. Smith, nationalism being addressed as an ideological movement aimed at the attainment and preservation of a unique and distinctive identity shared by a certain group of the population united by historic territory, contributes to the emergence of nations as constructs against the background of modernity.[43] This line of argument is further being highlighted by Benedict Anderson, who addresses the notion of the nation as a complex ideological construction or an imagined community artificially originating from the connection between the state and a certain cultural group bounded by distinctive cultural artefacts: both tangible and intangible.[44]

Therefore, it is suggested that the process of correlating a specific culture with a particular national identity is grounded on the reification of the former. Within the context of nationalism, the perception of culture is twofold. On the one hand, it serves as a unifying factor bounding a specific group of the population through a cluster of shared cultural artefacts. On the other hand, culture functions as a distinctive factor allowing nations to differentiate between themselves by the use of unique cultural heritage. Thus, the reification

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[42] Stephen Crofts, "Concepts of national cinema" in *World Cinema: Critical Approaches* ed. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (Oxford University Press, 2000), 385-386.

[43] Anthony D. Smith, "Culture, Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism", International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 72, no. 3 (1996), 447.

[44] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006, first published in 1983), 5-7.

of culture in general by a specific nation implies that a cluster of cultural artefacts is being created in order to represent a particular nation as holistic and to emphasize its distinctiveness.[45]

Based on the abovementioned correlation between the concepts of nationalism, nation, and culture, it could be concluded that the concept of national culture is to be seen as an instrument which acquires a threefold potential. Firstly, national culture assumes a function of a tool that could be utilized in order to recreate the sense of integrity and affiliation to a particular nation among its representatives. The nationalist discourses embrace the criticism towards modernity which originated at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution and led to a certain degree of alienation among individuals given the rise of urbanization and consequent dissemination of population. Therefore, national culture as a source of recreation of common values and heritage would restore and enhance the holistic nature of a nation by prompting a sense of belonging to a specific group of the population.[46]

Secondly, national culture might function as a tool that contributes to the establishment of boundaries separating one nation from another. As it was mentioned previously, the nation is to be addressed as an artificially constructed sociocultural community. However, from the perspective of nationalist discourses, it is to comply with a particular state to such an extent that both notions appear to be equitable and codependent. As a result, it is assumed that the cultural boundaries of a nation are to correspond to the political borders of the state.[47]

Lastly, national culture as a tool has the capacity to secure and reshape national narratives. It is admitted that the notion of nation is inextricably linked to the concept of collective memory which is deeply rooted in shared culture, common narratives and values embraced by a specific group of people. From the perspective of the nationalist discourses, collective memory serves as a solid basis for consolidation and possible mobilization of the nation's self-awareness. Being tightly associated with physical territory, a common past and the sense of the homeland, the national narratives of collective memory require its reification into artefacts, which is attained by means of shared national culture. On the other hand, being

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[45] Susan Hayward, "Framing National Cinemas" in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (London: Routledge, 2000), 89.
[46] Hayward, "Framing National Cinemas", 89.
[47] Ibid., 90.

a simultaneous source of the above-mentioned narratives, national culture can be utilized to reshape or reassess specific pages of the collective past.[48]

Thus, in order to acquire the attribute of strictly "national," culture implies the process of reification of distinctive narratives and collective memories that are shared by a particular nation in diverse manifestations. In this instance, the concept of national culture derives from the instrumentalist interpretation as well since it can be addressed as a tool that enhances national self-awareness and simultaneously highlights and represents its distinctiveness in the international arena by using a plethora of various media in particular including cinematography.

1.5. National Cinema as a Multidimensional Concept

Previously, the concept of national cinema was approached primarily from the essentialist and constructivist perspective. The former defined cinema is a territorialized historical-cultural artefact linked to a particular nation. National cinematography was regarded as a cluster of collective narratives, recurring imageries, and shared myths. However, the essentialist approach was connected with the risk of representational narrative tautology. In that case, national cinema could have been seen rather as a distillate of self-reflexive stereotypes alongside spurious and artificial sociocultural barriers which could have in the aftermath distorted the nation's self-awareness.[49] On the contrary, being sufficiently inspired by Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities, there also existed the constructivist approach to the notion of national cinema. Heavily relying on the textual aspect of filmmaking, this perspective implied that national cinema is artificially woven from collective narratives, values and tangible attributes associated with a specific nation. As a medium of narration, cinema has the capacity to communicate certain myths concerning the nation and, thus, contribute to its self-perception.[50]

Apparently, both essentialist and constructivist approaches addressed the concept of national cinema primarily — if not solely — from the textual perspective. However, national cinema is a far more complex concept inextricably linked with two crucial contexts. It is to be considered from both an industrial and an institutional perspective alongside the above-mentioned textual viewpoint. This threefold approach to the framing of national cinema was

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[48] Ibid., 90-91.
[49] Elsaesser, "ImpersoNations: National Cinema, Historical Imaginaries and New Cinema Europe", (2013)
[50] Ibid., (2013).

introduced by Thomas O'Regan. The proposed definition of the concept constitutes a triangular composition of relations existing between the textual aspect, production aspect and legitimate aspect. The textual aspect embraces national narratives alongside distinctive cultural specificity depicted in cinema. The production aspect refers to the national filmmaking industry from the viewpoints of industrial structure, technologies, and human resources alongside its relation with foreign and international cinematic industries. The legitimate aspect concerns the degree of the state's involvement in the filmmaking industry on the level of policies, regulation, and legislation. Thus, the proposed conceptualizing model of the national cinema emphasized its interdisciplinarity and interconnectedness with diverse aspects of society.[51]

The proposed three-dimensional model of defining the concept of national cinema was expanded further by Professor Andrew Higson, who as well suggested that this term is not bounded solely to the production of cinematic products by a specific nation-state. His perspective on the notion of national cinema is based upon four complementary approaches to the subject. Firstly, the discussed concept could be defined in economic terms. This approach is deeply rooted in de facto correlation between the notions of "national cinema" and the "domestic film industry." It is supposed that the domestic film industry — as well as the national cinematography per se — is constituted by a set of norms and practices that affect the final product — national cinema. Furthermore, it embraces diverse components including political economy, structural organization of the industry, technological aspects, and the degree of control posed over the process.[52] Secondly, Higson pays tribute to the textual approach to defining national cinema. This perspective largely refers to the exploration, construction, and depiction of national character by means of cinematography. On the one hand, this approach implies the study of systematic generic and cultural conventions that are adopted by a particular nation. On the other hand, it is related to the themes and narratives embraced by the national cinema that contributes to the shaping and representation of the nation.[53]

Thirdly, the concept of national cinema could be approached from the perspective of consumption-based perspective. This approach is associated with two aspects: the exhibition of national cinema and the audiences' response to it. This perspective is for the most part

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[51] Hayward, "Framing National Cinemas", 92-93.

[52] Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema", Screen 30, no. 4 (1989), 36.

[53] Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema", 36.

based on quantitative research and box-office statistics.[54] Besides, it analyses the exhibition opportunities and practices adopted in domestic cinema alongside audiences' consumption of the latter in the context of obvious competition with the Hollywood industry. In this regard, the issue of transnational filmmaking practices gains its momentum. However, the usage of the term "transnational" with respect to the cinema is more commonly associated with either particular narratives being present across diverse nations or with coproduction practices that might appear beneficial for all parties involved without jeopardizing their national distinctiveness.[55] Lastly, national cinema could be defined in terms of a criticism-led approach. On the one hand, it implies the discourse in which national cinema is being hyphenated to a high-brow artistic product of the film-making industry juxtaposed against the concept of popular culture. On the other hand, a criticism-led approach defines the distinctiveness and significance of national cinema on the basis of the opinion of the critics and film academies as well as in the context of its presence and success within famous film festivals.[56]

Thus, it is suggested that the conceptualization of national cinema stems from the coherence between specific modes of productional-distributional-consumption practices with a range of textual conventions. This coherence could be established by a combination of three different approaches. Firstly, one could implement an outward-looking comparison based on the degree of alterity. In this instance, the coherence is identified by contrasting one national cinema to another. Secondly, one could implement an inward-looking analysis. This approach includes the evaluation of established coherence based on currently adopted national identity. It implies as well the interpretation and reflection of the past on behalf of the nation itself. Lastly, the coherence could be approached from the perspective of a more generalized cultural context stemming from the spectator's experience. In this instance, the cohesion is based on a cluster of discourses related to national cinema in a particular socio-cultural community.[57]

Thus, as a prominent constituent of national culture, it embraces unique socio-historical paradigms and reflects them alongside the economic and political aspects of a particular nation-state. As a complex business sector, it finely combines national narratives

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[54] Ibid., 37.
[55] Andrew Higson, "Contribution to Austin Fisher and Iain Robert Smith, 'Transnational Cinemas: A Critical Roundtable'", Frames Cinema Journal 9 (2016), 15-16.
[56] Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema", 37.
[57] Ibid., 40-46.

with the potential to maximize the local cultural industry and enhance its visibility on the international level. Therefore, the degree of capacity embedded in national cinema is still considerable despite the previously mentioned debate concerning transnational modes of filmmaking practices. Additionally, the significance of this concept has increased during the last decades given several reasons.

On the one hand, the renaissance of the nationalist discourses might be seen as a response to the rising of globalized conglomerates associated with anxieties about the loss of unique identity within transnational or even post-national contexts. Being transferred to the political field, these anxieties were reassessed within the populist rhetoric. Within the scope of these discourses, national cinema would inevitably be spurred. However, it is essential to admit that hardly could national cinema be addressed as an uncontested mouthpiece for the dissemination of populist rhetoric. Instead, the rising relevance and significance of the national cinema might be interpreted as a form of response to the realia of the globalized world.[58] On the other hand, national cinema as an industrial formation remains an important source of beneficiation. The inflow of inward and foreign investment permitted by the state in domestic filmmaking contributes to the enhancement of the local economy. In particular, the development of attractive conditions for the cinematic industry — both domestic and foreign — supported by the governmental policies leads to raising capital. As a consequence, despite the possibility of being involved in transnational filmmaking practices, the uniqueness of national cinema remains legitimately protected.[59] Lastly, the concept of national cinema is revived within the context of nation branding. The latter, as a common denominator to the neoliberal visions of the globalized market and preservation of distinctive identity, utilizes national cinema as an instrument of communicating the image of a state.[60] Thus, the value and relevance of national cinema as a tool of nation branding strategy are to be discussed.

1.6. Instrumentalization of National Cinema: Medial Capacity and Communicative Potential

Within the context of strategic communication cinema established itself as one of the most potent and accessible mediums. Its capacity extends far beyond solely entertaining

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[58] Andrew Higson, "The resilience of popular national cinemas in Europe (Part Two)", Transnational Screens 12 no. 3 (2021), 8.

[59] Higson, "The resilience of popular national cinemas in Europe (Part Two)", 8-9.

[60] Ibid., 8.

dimension and finds a place in education, international relations, or economy. Therefore, cinematography appears to be a relatively agile medium that is likely to foster the transmission of information, narratives, and notions of particular national identities, respectively nation brands.

This flexibility and effectiveness of cinema — and national cinema in particular — stem from a cluster of specific characteristics inherent in it. First and foremost, cinematography as a medium combines diverse methods of stimulation of the senses that make it a spectacular means of informational transfer. From the technological perspective, a cinematic product is a dynamic video sequence of vivid, moving images coupled with high-quality sound and various optional special effects that largely contribute to the immersive and captivating experience for the audience. Additionally, in the case of traditional cinema-going practices or festival screenings, spectators are denied the opportunity to intervene in the timing of a film. Therefore, the duration of the cinema alongside its multisensory influence on the audience evokes a vivid experience that could be nested within the minds of the latter. As far as nation branding is concerned, evoking, and anchoring a specific image of a country through cinema technologies appears to be a prospective strategy.[61] Secondly, the flexibility of national cinema as a medium could be characterized by the implication of the creative transmission of a country's brand. The capacity of cinematography to construct and communicate a specific national image is grounded in its ability to narrate through visualization. Previously discussed advanced technical aspects of cinema prompted freshly new methods of creative storytelling and image building allowing encapsulation of distinctive features of a respective nation. Thus, by uniting storytelling and showing methods national cinema allows spectators to experience a particular country by utilizing its distinctive attributes.[62] Lastly, national cinema is a relatively agile medium as far as the field of strategic communication is concerned. From the industrial viewpoint, national cinema is characterized by close relations with the state from both political and economic perspectives. Since a film might be seen as a creative cast from realia of a respective country, government and non-government stakeholders could strategically invest in this medium. As a result, through national cinema, the constructed vision of a state could be intentionally handled.[63]

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[61] Gupta, Shashwat, Mohammad Mahdi Foroudi, Juha Väätänen, Suraksha Gupta and Len Tiu Wright. "Nations as brands: Cinema's place in the branding role", Journal of Business Research 116 (2020) 721-722.
[62] Gupta, et al., "Nations as brands: Cinema's place in the branding role", 722.
[63] Ibid., 722.

Thus, as far as the context of nation branding is concerned, it could be suggested that the nature of the representation of the specific nation by means of respective national cinema has a cumulative impact on the perception of the communicated brand. In particular, the direction of the influence is twofold. On the one hand, national cinema extends and transmits the established nation's brand across borders to diverse audiences. On the other hand, national cinema encompasses attributes, values, and aspirations of the given nation in the form of attractive moving images.

As far as communicated attributes are concerned, the capacity of national cinema extends to five key areas that can be reflected within a particular film and affect the image of a national brand. The first aspect to consider is related to the country's infrastructure. This area is closely related to the visualization and utilization of attractive or recognizable locations associated with a specific country. The infrastructural aspect resonates with the concept of place branding since the latter pursues the objective of creating an appealing identity associated with a distinct physical location.[64] Therefore, vibrant visualization of valuable or attractive locations — either urban or natural — within national cinema would highly likely entrench itself in the minds of spectators and contribute to the enhancement of certain notions regarding a respective country.[65]

The second area of communicated attributes embraces cultural dimension. In terms of both narration and visual representation cinema has the potential to embrace, contextualize and strategically utilize a wide plethora of tangible and intangible cultural artefacts and transmit them to diverse audiences. The managed representation of distinctive elements that constitute national culture on the screen is likely to establish awareness of the latter and stimulate the appearance of an emotional response on the part of the audience. As a result, a spectator would emotionally associate a country with a set of cultural aspects and images constructed by means of national cinema.[66]

The third area is related to the depiction of the political and economic conditions. Undoubtedly, both political and economic contexts largely contribute to the construction of a national brand and its perception by the targeted audience. For instance, the image of the country could be affected by the ruling regime, the level of economic stability and political transparency alongside the adopted agenda. The role of national cinema in these regards is

[64] Elyria Kemp, Carla Childers and Kim H. Williams, "Place branding: Creating self-brand connections and brand advocacy", Journal of Product & Brand Management 21, no. 7 (2012) 147-148.
[65] Gupta et al., "Nations as brands: Cinema's place in the branding role", 723-724.
[66] Ibid., 724.

sufficient enough since it has the potential to reflect on both aspects in order to present them to the audience in a certain light thereby establishing particular narratives and images associated with the country's brand.[67]

The fourth aspect of communicated attributes is linked to the socio-psychological dimension. Each country is associated with specific clusters of social norms accepted and shared by members of this society. National cinematography in its turn suggests an insight into particularities of social norms either with educative purposes or with reflexive and even critical intentions. Nonetheless, in each of these instances, an audience gains a particular understanding of the socio-psychological context of the country that would inevitably affect the complete image of the respective national brand in the eyes of spectators.[68]

Thus, national cinema has proved itself as a potentially agile medium given its technical, industrial, and creative characteristics. The combination of discussed specific traits largely contributes to the multidimensional potential of national cinema which consists in the fact that it is capable of shaping and altering particular aspects of the national brand and supports its general course. On the other hand, national cinema being a spectacular and accessible medium of informational transfer would highly likely engrain the resulting national brand in the minds of audiences and influence their perception and attitudes towards the respected country.

1.7. Methodological Overview

As far as the methodology is concerned, the proposed thesis is — in the broader sense — a qualitative case study aimed at the examination of the contribution provided by national cinematography to the process of shaping a specific national brand of contemporary Georgia. In this instance, Georgian national cinema, which is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, is considered a tool that could be instrumentalized within the context of the country's image building. Therefore, this case study combines the features of exploratory and instrumental types.[69] On the one hand, it focuses on an opportunity to gain a more profound understanding of the constructed modern Georgian national brand through the lens of the national filmmaking industry. On the other hand, by approaching the concept of

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[67] Ibid., 724.

[68] Ibid., 724

[69] Pamela Baxter, Susan Jack, "Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers", *Qualitative Report* 13, no. 4, (2010), 548-549.

national cinema from the instrumentalist perspective, this case study examines its capacity in terms of nation branding on the basis of contemporary Georgia.

Additionally, in a narrower sense, the proposed thesis incorporates elements and strategies of film analysis. As such, this qualitative research method utilizes a systemic examination and consequent interpretation of diverse aspects inherent to filmic structures. Given the rapidly rising degree of mediatization present in the global community, the usage of filmic structures in the context of sociological research receives increasing attention. Being seen as a channel of informational transmission, cinema has already become an inseparable element of discursive and social practices. As a communicative medium, cinematography can interact with spectators through two processes: reception and appropriation The former refers to the direct engagement with a film leading to the attachment of specific meanings to the original cinematic product and the consequent production of a received text by the spectator. The latter, on the other hand, implies the transfer of the received text constructed by a spectator to common discourses and communicative activities.[70]

Thus, a film is to be seen as a complex object of sociological research which is liable to examination from different perspectives since it conjuncts textuality with discourses and realia. As a consequence, there emerges a vast option field encompassing diverse variables that could potentially be observed and investigated. Therefore, cinema requires a more systemic approach in terms of analysis.[71] This statement is correct with respect to the national cinema as well since the latter is a subordinate constituent of cinematography in general.

1.8. General Model of Film Analysis

The above-mentioned multiplicity of potential perspectives and objects of film analysis constitutes a noticeable challenge. Therefore, to overcome this hindrance, it is crucial to establish an agile research model that would enable limiting the scope of analysis in compliance with the key objectives of the research and take into account theoretical and socio-historical contextualization. Thus, the methodological approach of the proposed thesis is built upon the 14-step model, developed by Prof. Dr. Lothar Mikos, whose main scientific

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[70] Lothar Mikos, "Analysis of Film" in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* ed. Uwe Flick (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2014), ISBN 978-1-4462-0898-4, 410.
[71] Mikos, "Analysis of Film", 409.

interest includes qualitative research methods in film and television analysis. The general model that could be adjusted to the specific needs of a study consists of the following steps:

1. Formulation of a core cognitive purpose;
2. Viewing the selected visual material;
3. Theoretical and socio-historical contextualization of the theme;
4. Formulation of a set of specific cognitive purposes;
5. Formulation of specific supporting questions;
6. Selection of aspects relevant to the analysis;
7. Determine the technical aspects;
8. Data gathering from the selected visual material;
9. Brief description of the selected visual material;
10. Analysis of the selected components and relations between them;
11. Contextualization and explanation of the material;
12. Assessment I: evaluation of the gathered data;
13. Assessment II: evaluation of the analytical outcome with respect to the cognitive purpose;
14. Demonstration of the outcomes.[72]

Thus, the proposed general model consists of two meaningful sections. The first section comprises steps 1-8 and constitutes the preparatory phase for further analysis. At this stage, it is necessary to determine more accurately the scope, variables and formal aspects that appear to be crucial for the conduction of a study. The second section comprises steps 9-13 and constitutes the core of the analysis and subsequent evaluation of the obtained results. Additionally, it is to be noted that the flexibility of the general model allows the removal and merging of selected steps depending on the key objectives of the study.

1.9.   Cognitive Purpose in Film Analysis: Explanation

Since the proposed general model emphasizes the role of a cognitive purpose in terms of its limiting potential, it seems crucial to briefly unpack this term. Methodologically, the cognitive purpose encompasses five different levels that could be examined in the analysis of any filmic structure. This division allows limiting the examined analytic scope.

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[72] Ibid., 420.

Nevertheless, it is to be noted that it is not obligatory to examine all five levels in the process of analysis.[73]

The first level embraces aspects related to the content and means of its representation on the screen. In this case, the content is to be understood as a cluster of themes, narratives and objects that are considered within a particular film. Simultaneously, this level of analysis touches upon the modes and means of content representation which fosters the process of construction and allocation of meanings conducted by a spectator. As such, representation implies the usage of specific signs, languages, and mental concepts through which the content could be articulated.[74]

The second level of the film analysis embraces both narration and dramaturgy. In contrast to the previous aspect, which primarily deals with the establishment of meanings, narration and dramaturgy constitute the process of communicative transfer of determined meanings. In other terms, at this level, a particular mode of storytelling is analyzed. Particularly, one could examine the structural characteristics and climax points of the plot that are intentionally constructed in order to entrench themselves in the mind of the spectator.[75]

The third level addresses the analysis of the characters of a respective film. As such, the analysis of characters and personalities depicted in cinema appears to be prominent given the two reasons. Firstly, being an integral part of a filmic narrative, characters play a pivotal role in advancing the dramatic storyline. Secondly, the perception of the characters is significantly influenced by identitarian concepts, notions and aspects embraced in a society. Therefore, by means of cinema, a spectator's identity could be affected by the characters' values and behavioural patterns conveyed in a film.[76]

The fourth level of analysis is related to the aesthetic dimension. The specific arrangement of divided images in a holistic and continuous flow appears to be fundamental for any filmic structure. Therefore, aesthetic representational techniques are used to engage the audience and immerse them in the events unfolding on the screen. Particularly, the aesthetics of a film elicit an emotional response on the part of spectators by directing their focus of attention to particular aspects of the visual narrative.[77]

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[73] Ibid., 410.
[74] Ibid., 413-414.
[75] Ibid., 415.
[76] Ibid., 416-417.
[77] Ibid., 418-419.

The last level of analysis embraces the examination of diverse contexts that transcend the textual level of a film. Since cinema cannot be detached from particular realia, this aspect refers to the investigation of social, historical, cultural, industrial, economic, political, and other contexts that appears relevant with respect to a specific film. Additionally, the interdependence between cinema and the above-mentioned contexts affects the cluster of meanings that could be produced by a spectator. Therefore, being analysed from the perspective of diverse contexts, one film could potentially motivate a viewer to create several meanings depending on the standpoint.[78]

Thus, the discussed general model designed for film analysis is an effective methodological tool given its agility and logical orderliness. It enables the narrowing of the scope that is to be analysed in accordance with the chosen objective of the study. On the other hand, given its flexibility, this model provides an opportunity to examine a specific filmic structure through different lenses which are as well selected on the basis of the set goals. Thus, to adjust this model to the purposes of the thesis it is crucial to take into consideration the specificities of key attributes of Georgia's national brand alongside the status and essence of the country's national cinema per se. However, prior to the development of the research model, it is important to define the key to data selection.

1.10. Key Criteria for Material Selection

In order to establish a key for research material sampling it is crucial to take into consideration several aspects based on the theoretical part of the thesis. In particular, these aspects are stemming from the notions of nation branding and national cinema per se. Furthermore, it is equally important to take into consideration the specificity of the previously contextualised case of Georgia. In general terms, there are suggested six main criteria that constitute a key for the selection of films suitable for further analysis.

The first criterion is the compliance of a film with the term *national cinema*. This criterion stems from the definition of national cinema enshrined in the previously discussed Georgian law *On the State Support of the National Cinematography*. For a brief recapitulation, a film must be produced in the Georgian language whereas the majority of the filmmaking crew as well as the director and producer must either hold Georgian citizenship or be officially registered in Georgia. The majority of entities responsible for the

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[78] Ibid., 420.

processes of production, distribution and exhibition must be legally registered on Georgian territory as well. However, it should be once again noted that the usage of foreign languages is not forbidden as long as it is justified by the plotline.

The second criterion is the relevance of the depicted material. Since nation branding could be addressed as a representational strategy of a country's image, it is crucial that the respective country constitutes an integral part of the filmic structure. The representation may for instance encompass the portrayal of particular physical locations, elements of national heritage, culture and history alongside thematic narratives, realia, values, challenges, and aspirations embraced by society. Therefore, a selected film must address the image of Georgia in one or several of the above-discussed contexts.

The third criterion is financial backing provided by the Georgian National Film Centre. Its importance lies in the fact that this legal institution functions as a bridge between the filmmaking industry and the distribution of the budget allocated by the government. Therefore, it could be suggested that films created with financial backing on the part of the Georgian National Film Centre are supported by the government. In fact, this suggestion is supported by Order No. 3/257 that contains competition regulations for the Georgian National Film Centre and guidelines for procedure of decision making as far as the allocation of the allocated state financing is concerned.[79] In this instance, a film can potentially be considered as a product that is likely to communicate a specific image of Georgia that aligns with the current aspirations and values of the state in case it was financially supported by the Georgian National Film Centre since the latter is legal entity of public law under the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth of Georgia responsible for the allocation and financing of cinematic projects in the country.

The fourth criterion is the accessibility of the film. Since the nation branding strategy is primarily aimed at international audiences and the promotion of the country in the eyes of the global community, it is crucial for the selected examples of Georgian cinema to be available for a wider range of spectators. Therefore, a selected film is to be available on the Internet, for instance on streaming platforms or video hostings. Additionally, in order to eliminate the hindrance in the form of a language barrier it is crucial that chosen examples of Georgian national cinema include either subtitles or voiceover at least in English.

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[79] The Ministry of Culture, Sport, and Youth of Georgia, *On a Legal Entity under Public Law*, Order No. 3/257, adopted 7 August 2006, Art. 2

The fifth criterion is international visibility. As a rule, awards, favourable and positive reviews alongside the recognition of cinema on the international level within the circuit of festivals tend to attract attention to particular films. As a consequence, it increases the likelihood that a wider audience would watch the respective piece of national cinema. Additionally, artistic merit consisting in a fine direction coupled with a strong script, acting and thematic message acclaimed by critics constitute an opportunity to showcase the talent and creativity of Georgian filmmakers which is seen as an advantage in terms of nation branding.

The sixth criterion is suitable time framing. Since as it has been noted in the theoretical part, the occurrence of a more consolidated Georgia's national brand dates back to 2012, the selected films are to be produced within the interval from 2012 to 2022. However, as far as the thematic content of cinema is concerned, it may embrace the interval from 1991 till the present, which complies with the existence of independent modern Georgia.

Thus, the proposed six criteria are essential for choosing and narrowing the cluster of Georgian national films that comply with the set objectives of the thesis. The list of the selected exemplary films is presented in the analytical part of the thesis. Therefore, based on the proposed key for material sampling and the theoretical part it is possible to edit the research design which stems from the above-mentioned 14-step general model.

1.11. Adjustments to the General Model of Film Analysis

As far as the research design is concerned, this subchapter provides a set of adjustments incorporated into the general model. First and foremost, it is essential to set a more precise formulation of the general cognitive purpose and specific ones that derive from it. As regards the former, it can be articulated in the following terms: *what image of modern Georgia is being constructed and communicated through the prism of respective national cinema*? Further, taking into consideration the previously contextualised twofold dimension of developing Georgia's national brand, there can be derived two specific cognitive purposes:

Does contemporary Georgian national cinema reflect aspirations and orientation towards pro-Western values and if so, in what way?

Does contemporary Georgian national cinema reflect traditional national culture, narratives, and values and if so, in what way?

The theoretical and socio-historical contextualisation of the theme has already been provided in the previous section of the thesis. As far as the selection of relevant aspects is concerned, they primarily refer to three of the five discussed levels of analysis: thematic content, aesthetic elements, and contextual references. This selection is conditioned by the fact that they are most likely to be effective in terms of representation of the constructed brand of Georgia whereas the analysis of both narration and characters seems to gravitate more towards the field of film criticism. However, in the event that one or both of these aspects would play a significant role in terms of representation, they are to be incorporated as well. Therefore, the sampling units could be subdivided into several categories: *themes, objects, spaces, and events*. All of these four categories are expected to possess the largest representational and illustrative capacity in terms of communication of discussed aspects related to the national image. As far as the technical aspect is concerned, the selected films are available online with either English subtitles or English voiceovers on three of the following platforms: Mubi, Netflix and Amazon Prime. Lastly, the analysis and assessment of obtained results are to be presented in the following analytical part of the thesis.

2. Nation Branding in Georgia

As far as the post-Soviet space is concerned, the issue of nation branding starts to obtain more attention. After the dissolution of the Soviet block, each of the newly emerged independent states had to face the problem of choosing the course of further development in the globalised world. Therefore, the development of a consistent and strong reputational image alongside the national brand appears to be one of the crucial objectives and challenges that the post-Soviet states had to encounter in order to strengthen their positions on the international scene. Thus, it seems crucial to discuss the specifics of nation branding as far as the post-Soviet space is concerned.

It is equally noteworthy that in the Caucasus region, Georgia appears to be the only state that embraced the allegiance to liberal democratic values and opted for the possibility of Euro-Atlantic integration. Not only had this decision affected the further development of the state but had a specific impact on the essence of the communicated national brand as well. Thus, in this chapter, a set of crucial milestones in the history of post-Soviet Georgia will be contextualised. Lastly, there will be discussed the essence of contemporary Georgia's

national brand on the basis of the existing strategic narrative implemented by the government.

2.1. Nation Branding in the Post-Soviet Space

Due to the inevitable enhancement of communication speed, international connections and resulting interdependencies, there could be observed a certain degree of mundialisation related to democratic and liberal aspirations being embraced within political, economic, and social spheres. As a consequence, the number of states engaged in the globalised marketing space is by and large increasing over the course of time. This kind of ambitious strive is particularly noticeable in the case of transition countries in the post-Soviet space. As previously mentioned, within the paradigm of a globalised market and close international cooperation, it is crucial for a state to maintain its distinctive image by utilising communicative and representational strategies, one of them being nation branding. Thus, for the countries of the post-Soviet space, the development of a holistic and sustainable national brand in order to gain a competitive advantage on the international scene appears to be of paramount importance.[80]

It is suggested that in the post-Soviet space, there exists a cluster of commonly shared distinctive patterns that determine the rise of interest and demand for the development and implementation of consistent national brands. It should be mentioned that the increasing tendency to invest in the competitive capacity as far as transition counties are concerned is defined by the need to re-establish the independent uniqueness of national identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[81] In particular, by means of nation branding strategy, it appears possible to bridge the gaps between diverse aspects associated with each of the national identities existing in the post-Soviet space. Thus, each of the transition countries has the capacity to restore internal consistency in terms of national, cultural, political, and economic self-identification that previously was to a significant extent subordinate to the ideas of transnational rapprochement and fusion largely embraced by the Soviet ideology.[82]

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[80] Katarzyna Skiert-Andrzejuk, "Georgia's national brand in the European Union – is it possible "to sell the nation"?", Studia Orientalne 2, no. 12 (2017), 98.

[81] Skiert-Andrzejuk, "Georgia's national brand in the European Union…", 104.

[82] Dusan Radunovic, "Incommensurable distance : Georgian cinema as a (trans)national cinema", in *Cinema, state socialism and society in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1917-1989* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 49-73.

As far as the above-mentioned common patterns are concerned, there could be defined four key aspects that in a majority of cases contribute to the rising interest in nation branding in the post-Soviet space. Firstly, one could observe the aspirations towards the strengthening of democracy. This argument stems from the assumption that transition countries can be characterised by a continuing transformational process. As a consequence, they tend to re-approach previously existing socio-political and economic structures to implement more effective ones. A project of this kind in the majority of instances requires support initiatives that could be fostered by utilising close cooperation with other states. It appears that the democratic system is regarded as a credible source of prospective development and effective support especially given the previously discussed context of globalisation. Additionally, a lean towards democracy might be seen as an essential part of a nation branding strategy since it can in the broader sense enhance the recognition of a country on the part of the international community.[83]

The second aspect is referred to the pattern of aspirations towards economic enhancement. Democratic and liberal agendas are tightly related to the context of globalised marketing space. As such they enable participation in international economic processes leading towards close-knit cooperation between states. Given this context, it is crucial for the transition countries to establish their unique and recognisable competitive images in order to gain access to the resources necessary for the development and enrichment of their local economies. For instance, a national brand could be enhanced by means of investment in unique flag products or strategically valuable regions from an economic perspective.[84]

The third aspect to be considered is the tendency towards strengthening and promotion of a holistic national identity. The latter could be conceptualised as a sense of belonging to a particular group of people that is perceived as an integral community unified by utilising shared cultural attributes, historical narratives, and specific physical territory. As such, national brands are in close connection with respective national identities since the former serves as an encapsulated representation of the latter. Therefore, there is a direct interdependence between a cohesive national identity and a compelling national brand that would highly likely provide the enhancement of a state's position on the international scene.[85]

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[83] Skiert-Andrzejuk, "Georgia's national brand in the European Union…", 105.
[84] Ibid., 106.
[85] Ibid., 107.

Lastly, there could be observed a tendency to promote transition countries as appealing tourist destinations. Being seen as a promising constituent of the nation branding strategy, the development of a tourist sector in the post-Soviet space appears to be present in the majority of the respective states. Tourism as such implies direct engagement with a specific country. In case of a positively perceived experience, the tourist flows would provide the state with capital inflow and foreign investments crucial and beneficial for the further development of the country. Thus, the development of a consistent and distinctive national brand by means of a positive tourist experience would largely contribute to the re-establishment of the image of the former Soviet states.[86]

Thus, the role of nation branding in the post-Soviet space proved itself to be relevant, especially given the observed aspirations towards the creation of idiosyncratic, holistic, and robust images on the international scene. Being still in the process of development, national brands of transition countries could be characterised by a cluster of common tendencies stemming from the shared historical experience within the context of the Soviet past. Nevertheless, each of the transition states logically follows its path as far as the nation branding is concerned. Therefore, the case of Georgia's national brand will be discussed in the following subchapters.

2.2.   Milestones in the History of Independent Georgia

It is suggested that the advent and subsequent shifts in the primary perception of smaller nation-states on a "mental world map," which is anchored firmly enough in the minds of a wider international community, is accomplished through specific historical events that have symbolic significance. These milestones provide the foundation for the establishment of a particular image of a country on the global scene and create an initial impression of it that, however, could be eventually altered through strategic nation branding. Therefore, the importance of historical context must not be underestimated as far as the issue of nation branding is concerned. Thus, prior to defining key attributes of contemporary Georgia's national brand, it is crucial to briefly contextualise pivotal milestones related to the modern period in its history dating back to the dissolution of the Soviet bloc.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the appearance of fifteen independent states on the political map of the world. The Republic of Georgia was among them. However, the

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[86] Ibid., 107.

first crucial milestone dates back to April 9, 1991, prior to the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, when Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who was consequently elected as the first president of the newly emerged sovereign Georgia, declared the independence of the country.[87] However, despite the fact that the process of recognition of the young republic of Georgia on the part of the international community was uneventful and went without any apparent disputes, the development of a westernised liberal democracy as a robust form of governance and socio-economic order was marked by notable complications.[88]

The major impediment stemmed from the incapacity of the state's authorities to consolidate the rule of law and extend it throughout the entire territory of the respective country. As a consequence, the first years of the existence of sovereign Georgia were tempered by ethnopolitical tensions and armed clashes that sparked between the South Ossetian and Georgian forces, violent disturbances and subsequent military coup d'état that erupted in the very heart of the capital of Tbilisi in 1991 and lasted two weeks.[89] Therefore, the credible and sustainable image of independent Georgia was relatively far from the targeted one.

This complicated period fraught with obstacles continued after the arrival of Eduard Shevardnadze in 1992 in the capacity of a Speaker of the Parliament, however, it was marked by the gradual shift towards stabilisation. On the one hand, during the government of Shevardnadze, there had been observed the restoration of relative order given through the adoption of the Constitution in 1995 which contributed to the reformation of the political system and enshrined the integrity and indivisibility of Georgia. Particularly, it consolidated the semi-presidential form of government and introduced the separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches. Additionally, the previously mentioned armed conflict that arose in the South Ossetian region had been resolved in 1992 shortly after the conclusion of the ceasefire agreement.[90] This agreement largely contributed to the enhancement of Georgia's credibility in the eyes of the international community and, therefore, July 31, 1992, when the country was admitted to the United Nations, might be

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[87] Ghia Nodia, Canan Atilgan, „Summarizing Quarter of Century of Development", in *25 Years of Independent Georgia. Achievements and Unfinished Projects*, ed. Prof. Gia Nodia, (Tbilisi: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2016), 5–10.
[88] Christofer Berglund, Timothy Blauvelt, "Redefining the Nation: From Ethnic Fragmentation to Civic Integration?" in *25 Years of Independent Georgia. Achievements and Unfinished Projects*, ed. Prof. Gia Nodia, (Tbilisi: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2016), 22
[89] Christofer Berglund, Timothy Blauvelt, "Redefining the Nation…", 18, 21
[90] Ibid., 24.

seen as another essential milestone in the state's history that had emphasised the aspirations towards Euro-Atlantic values.[91] On the other hand, however, Georgia had to encounter another ethnopolitical clash with the secessionist region of Abkhazia that had ended in 1993 by the conclusion of the ceasefire agreement. Therefore, the issues related to the extension of the state authority over the whole territory, pervasive corruption embedded within the political and social structures alongside the risks of further ethnic conflicts markedly complicated further development of the westernised image of Georgia.[92]

Thus, the discussed cluster of events and circumstances led to another milestone — the Rose Revolution which happened in November 2003 and forced Shevardnadze to resign. As a result of subsequent presidential elections, the power was transferred to Mikheil Saakashvili, a former minister of justice. During his presidential mandate, Georgia has embarked on a sequence of significant reforms and renovation processes aimed at further bolstering of commitment and aspirations towards liberal democracy. The key objective of a wide plethora of reforms implemented by Saakashvili leaned towards a fortification of both the state and the economy.[93]

The issue was approached comprehensively and therefore launched transformational processes in diverse areas including police and power units, educational system, taxation, licensing, infrastructure, and enhancement of the governmental authority across the entire state area comprising previously mentioned secessionist regions. The economic system as well witnessed a significant shift towards a neoliberal model during the proactive period of reformation. As far as the aspirations towards Western structures and Euro-Atlantic organisations, Saakashvili was committed to securing Georgia's potential membership in North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union and therefore supported the enrollment of the country in partnership programmes. Additionally, Saakashvili might be seen as the first president interested in the strategic development of a consistent image of modern Georgia that not only would embrace pro-western liberal aspirations but its authentic national and cultural heritage. As a result, the parliament endorsed the new state symbols

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[91] UN (United Nations) General Assembly, "Admission of the Republic of Georgia to membership in the United Nations : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly", forty-sixth session. (1992), A/RES/46/241
[92] Adrian Brisku, „Modern Georgia", in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, ed. David Ludden, Oxford University Press, published online (2020), 13.
[93] Christofer Berglund, Timothy Blauvelt, "Redefining the Nation…", 30-31.

including the anthem and flag that blended attributes of religious, premodern, and contemporary aspects of Georgian national identity.[94]

However, the discussed period of reformation still stood in sharp contrast with a certain degree of criticism regarding the reinforcement of the presidential authority which consequently led to the appearance of cleavage in society being further enhanced by suppression of the opposition. More importantly, the Russian-Georgian armed conflict that erupted in August 2008 in South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions cast a shadow over the degree of success as far as the consolidation of the state is concerned.[95] Thus, despite significant progress as far as the reformational and renovation processes are concerned, the image of modern Georgia on the international scene remained to some extent vague since no consistent nation branding strategy was implemented during Saakashvili's presidential terms. However, it is suggested that the undertaken reforms laid the foundation for further development of the holistic national brand.[96]

Another crucial milestone was achieved during the parliamentary elections in 2012 and the consequent presidential elections in 2013. Both cases are to be seen as noteworthy due to the fact that the transfer of legitimate authority to the oppositional coalition named *Georgian Dream* and the newly elected president Giorgi Margvelashvili happened uneventfully and in peace. This circumstance may serve as an indication of the enhancement and strengthening of the previously established political and social structures. In addition, the newly elected state authorities and representatives actively support the orientation towards Western liberal democracy and further development of the state in accordance with the standards and aspirations widely embraced by European Union.[97] Current Georgia, being essentially a parliamentary republic and governed by Salome Zurabishvili since 2018, continues to adhere to the previously established course in terms of aspirations to EU and NATO integration and enhancement of the integral and solid national image of modern Georgia on the international scene.[98] The key aspects of the latter are to be discussed in the following subchapter.

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[94] Djakeli, "Country's Branding for More Attractive Image of Georgia". 17-18.

[95] Christofer Berglund, Timothy Blauvelt, "Redefining the Nation…", 39.

[96] Kakhaber Djakeli, "Country's Branding for More Attractive Image of Georgia", 18.

[97] Stephen Jones, Levan Kakhishvili, "The Interregnum: Georgian Foreign Policy from Independence to the Rose Revolution" in *Georgian Foreign Policy The Quest for Sustainable Security* ed. Kornely Kakachia, Michael Cecire (Tbilisi: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2013), 28-29.

[98] Adrian Brisku, „Modern Georgia", in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, ed. David Ludden, Oxford University Press, published online (2020), 15.

2.3. Georgia's Strategic Narrative as a Basis for Nation Branding

The universal foundation for the development of any nation branding strategy is to be found in strategic narratives that are embraced and communicated within the context of the chosen foreign policy orientation. As such, strategic narratives could be characterised as instruments serving to encapsulate a state's values, aspirations and ambitions alongside its future-oriented desirable image coupled with methods to achieve the latter. By means of this tool, a state could potentially define itself within the global arena and shape the existing discursive environment as far as the field of international relations is concerned.[99] It is suggested that the effectiveness of foreign policies in the context of the post-Soviet space is driven by a cluster of diverse factors including for instance geography, economics, culture, or national identity. The latter, however, is likely to occupy a prominent role in the process of strategic narratives shaping by providing capacity and limitations. In this regard, Georgia is no exception, since its strategic narrative appears to stem from the process of internalisation of specific identity constituents that were determined by social, cultural, and historic patterns.

In general, Georgia's strategic narrative seems to be twofold. On the one hand, it focuses on distancing from the post-Soviet area and consequent self-disassociation with the former. It is suggested that the post-Soviet space is marked by a lack of stability and consistency alongside the stagnation being observed. Therefore, it appears doubtful that allegiance to this region would contribute to Georgia's positive development and further consolidation. This line of discourse is reinforced by the willingness to escape Russia's zone of geographic and socio-historical influence taking into account that the latter is being viewed as an inheritor of the Soviet legacy. Proceeding from the complicated historical experience of Russo-Georgian relations, the immediate proximity to Russia is perceived as disquieting and insecure. Additionally, it should be noted that within the Georgian political agenda, Russia is to a significant degree associated with imperial geopolitical ambitions stemming from the Eurasianist discourses that are not regarded as compelling or beneficial as well. Therefore, the incompatibility of values, aspirations and social order embraced by

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[99] Miskimmon, Alister, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, eds., *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 2017), 1-22.

both countries increases the distance between Georgia and the post-Soviet area as far as the strategic narrative is concerned.[100]

On the other hand, the contemporary nucleus of Georgia's strategic narrative is based on the idea of reconnection with Europe and their inseparable historical and cultural bonds. This line of argument stems from two crucial aspects. Firstly, Georgia's strategic narrative emphasises its belonging to the Greco-Roman cultural legacy alongside Christian traditions and values. However, despite being virtually separated from European Christian civilization after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Georgia was still regarded as a stronghold of Christendom in the face of mighty Islamic empires namely the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Persia. Therefore, religion became an integral constituent of Georgia's identity and significantly contributed to its image of a warrior-martyr standing guard over Christian-European civilization. The second aspect is grounded in Georgia's geographical location. Historically the country occupied a position of a buffer zone between powerful empires and diverse cultures. Additionally, being seen as a crossroad of European and Asian cultures and commerce, Georgia's location remains of strategic importance down to the present day.[101]

Thus, taking into account both of the above-mentioned aspects, the aspiration towards reconnection with the Euro-Atlantic world could be seen as the narrative that embraces the restoration of historical justice. Considering the involuntary separation from Europe alongside the enforced accession to the Russian Empire and subsequently to the Soviet Union, Georgia had little opportunity to develop at a similar pace as Europe did. Therefore, the aspirations towards liberal democratic order alongside distancing from the post-Soviet legacy could be interpreted as a path leading to the re-integration into the Europan civilization.[102]

The discussed strategic narrative is reflected and thus fixed in several documents elaborated by the Ministry of Defence of Georgia and ratified by the Parliament of Georgia. The key objective of the first document entitled "*National Security Concept of Georgia*" is to introduce the cluster of national values and identify directions for further development of

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[100] Kornely Kakachia, "Georgia: identity, foreign policy and the politics of a "Euro-Atlantic orientation", The Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF), Policy Brief, March 2013, 2-3.

[101] Kornely Kakachia, „European, Asian, or Eurasian?: Georgian Identity and the Struggle for Euro-Atlantic Integration", in *Georgian Foreign Policy: The Quest for Sustainable Security*, ed. Kornely Kakachia and Michael Cecirel. (Tbilisi: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2013), 43-44.

[102] Kakachia, „European, Asian, or Eurasian?: Georgian Identity and the Struggle for Euro-Atlantic Integration", 45.

the state.[103] The second document entitled "*Communication Strategy of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia (2021-2024)*" was designed to emphasise the key aspects of the accepted strategic narrative, main channels for the transfer of the communicated image, risk assessment, and analysis of the target audience alongside stakeholders. [104] Thus, based on the above-mentioned strategic narrative it seems possible to compile the cluster of key attributes that constitute Georgia's national brand.

2.4. Nation Branding in Georgia: Key Attributes

In general terms, it is assumed that Georgia's national brand is currently in its formative period. Particularly, this suggestion stems from the long-lasting period of historically subordinate position to more powerful neighbouring states. Therefore, for modern Georgia the matter of choice between democratic and non-democratic, global-oriented, and traditions-oriented paths of development was fundamental. As already mentioned, the state's preference for the pro-Western path was accompanied by specific hindrances and resistance. Hence, as far as Georgia's national brand is concerned, one could currently observe its endeavour to develop the balance between two key aspects: aspirations towards European-style liberal democracy and traditional sensibility, values, and legacy.[105]

Regarding the former aspect, the national brand of Georgia gravitates to the reputational image of a reliable and credible partner committed to the fundamental principles of liberal democracy and the strengthening of cooperation with major democratic states.[106] By identifying itself as an undeniable part of the Euro-Atlantic space, the country emphasises the adherence of its national values to democratic ones. Therefore, an essential part of Georgia's national brand is based upon aspirations towards the creation of a united, civil, and inclusive society based on the principles of respect, protection of rights and liberties belonging to citizens and minorities, equality before the law, tolerance, and pluralism of opinions despite of political, religious, gender or racial affiliation. In this regard, openness, which manifests itself in diversity, proactive engagement of multiethnic and multi-confessional society in public and political life and establishment of solid legitimate

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[103] MOD Georgia – Ministry of Defense of Georgia (2018). National security concept of Georgia, 2.
[104] MOD Georgia – Ministry of Defense of Georgia (2021). Communication Strategy of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia (2021-2024), 1.
[105] Skiert-Andrzejuk, "Georgia's national brand in the European Union…", 104.
[106] MOD Georgia, Communication Strategy of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia (2021-2024), 6.

relationships with other nations, largely contribute to the development of a progressive modern Georgia.[107]

On the other hand, the discussed aspirations go hand in hand with the prioritised development of holistic national and cultural uniqueness with respect to the traditional Georgian legacy.[108] It is suggested that values and aspirations deriving from historical affiliation to Christianity, a certain degree of patriarchalism being present in society and sensibility of national culture are to be seen as foundational in terms of framing of national identity and, accordingly, distinctive national brand. The significance of traditional legacy is emphasised by international organisations and especially UNESCO. The preservation and protection of a large number of tangible and intangible artefacts of national culture including historical monuments, writing systems, national landscapes, polyphonic singing and ancient Qvevri winemaking method is the prerogative not solely of the state but of the international organisations as well.[109] Therefore, in becoming conscious of itself as an essential part of the world's cultural context, Georgian traditional national heritage remains a determinant as far as the development of a national brand is concerned.

It could be argued that both Georgian identity and subsequently Georgian national brand are balancing at the brink of contraposed attributes associated with West and East. On the one hand, the proximity to the West — and Europe in particular — appeared to be an aspirational aspect of identity construction. Over the course of time, the notion of Europe has been combining diverse connotations and discourses ranging from its perception as a source of power and alternative path development to a dovish unification of states. Therefore, the aspiration towards the Western attributes and further integration into its space seems to be a symbolic pursuit of a prosperous future yet coupled with looming uncertainties.[110] On the other hand, as far as the Georgian case is concerned, a range of Eastern, or traditional aspects of national identity are not necessarily perceived and reflected as undesirable. The proximity to the Eastern cultural narratives and historic context gravitated to the positive representation at specific points when the preeminent influence of the West declined. Not the last role in these tendencies was played by the twofold character

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[107] MOD Georgia, National security concept of Georgia, 5.
[108] Ibid., 26.
[109] "UNESCO Culture for Development Indicators for Georgia (Analytical and Technical Report)" in *Culture and Creativity: European Union-Eastern Partnership Programme*, October 2017, 82-88
[110] Adrian Brisku, *Bittersweet Europe: Albanian and Georgian Discourses on Europe, 1878-2008* (Berghahn Books, 2013), 198-199

of the Christian heritage. While serving as an enduring bridge between Georgia and Europe, it remains an integral part of traditional attributes associated with the national identity. [111]

Thus, being currently in the process of development, Georgia's national brand confronts the necessity to balance progressive and traditional attributes. This issue seems to be especially noticeable since the state aspires to position itself as multiethnic and multi-confessional paying a tribute of respect to conventional and Christian values. Taking into consideration the transitional aspects of modern Georgia, one could conclude that the request for the development, communication and promotion of a distinctive national image not only would increase the degree of awareness regarding the country in the eyes of the international community but would contribute to its further internal consolidation as well.
Additionally, while acknowledging the importance of strategic communication, an integral part of which is nation branding, Georgian authorities admit and emphasise the increasing role of diverse informational channels. [112] Thus, it is suggested that the effective promotion and strengthening of Georgia's national image to a significant degree is to be affected by the usage of potentially powerful and accessible media as impactful tools, one of which is cinema.

3.   Georgian National Cinema

Georgian cinema constitutes a unique and remarkable cultural phenomenon. Being characterised by rich and sophisticated history, for more than a century it remains a mirror reflecting profound spirituality and sensibility, commitment to the legacy and values of ancestors, historical turmoils and individual stories of personal joys and sorrows. Having endured the existence in limiting status of a minor culture during the Soviet regime and socio-political havoc after obtaining independence, Georgian cinema, nonetheless, was able to develop and preserve its unique recognisable style. This has been facilitated by the two waves of a cultural renaissance. [113] As far as the contemporary state of affairs is concerned, since the early 2000s, Georgian cinema has maintained a noticeable presence on the international scene, buoyed by government support and burgeoning initiatives in the field of the cultural sector and developing cross-border ties. [114]

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[111] Brisku, *Bittersweet Europe: Albanian and Georgian Discourses on Europe, 1878-2008,* 200

[112] MOD Georgia, Communication Strategy of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia (2021-2024), 7.

[113]   Bartosz Wieczorek, "Faces of Georgian Cinema", in *Kultura – Media – Teologia* 47, no. 5 (2021), 218-219.

[114] Georgian National Film Centre (2012). *Georgian Film Sector Mapping*, Final Report, 4.

As it has been discussed, national cinema is regarded as a flexible and high-potential tool for communicating and promoting the country's image, long-lasting and distinctive Georgian filmmaking tradition is likely to contribute to the advancement of the national brand. Given the constantly increasing number of cultural initiatives, streaming services, and investments in the development of the creative sector, Georgian cinema with each passing year is becoming more visible and accessible to the international audience. Its cultural and strategic significance is equally acknowledged by the governmental authorities.[115] Therefore, it is crucial to contextualise the development path that had been passed by Georgian filmmaking alongside its current status on the international scene and from the legislative perspective.

3.1.   Historical Overview of Georgian National Cinema

Georgian national cinema, being well-known for its idiosyncratic visual style, poetic narration, individualism, sensibility, and artistic profundity, is marked by a long and rich history dating back to the dawn of the 20th century. For the first time cinema appeared in Georgia in 1896, which was shortly after its debut in Paris and, soon after, several movie theatres including Odeon and Apollo were opened in Tbilisi. However, it was the year 1908 when Georgian national cinema took its origin in the early documentaries directed by Vasil Amashukeli. As far as feature films are concerned, the first Georgian full-length picture "Christine" directed by Alexandre Tsutsunava saw the light in 1919.[116]

With the arrival of the Soviet regime in 1921, the blooming development of Georgian national cinema was overshadowed by the growing influence of socialist realism which determined the course of culture in constituent republics. Additionally, cinematic production in Soviet republics depended on quotas allocated by the central authorities of the Soviet Union, which, for instance, led to the creation of the Georgian Film Studio in Tbilisi in 1923. However, in general, roughly until around the mid-1950s Georgian filmmaking industry faced a dim period, being forced to comply with official communist ideology and become a part of the propaganda machine. During that time, it was mainly directors of non-Georgian origin who were responsible for producing Georgian cinematic products. Therefore, to a large extent, they perceived the Caucasus as an exotic and mysterious area. As a result, the

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[115] Georgian National Film Centre. *Georgian Film Sector Mapping*, 28-30.
[116] Ibid., 4.

films of that period appeared to be alien to the traditional Georgian culture, despite being unfolded in Georgian context and realia. Nevertheless, Georgia managed to produce cinema based on the national literary heritage, which represented an effort to maintain a connection to the country's cultural legacy.[117]

The first prominent shifts in terms of the scope of socio-cultural liberalisation were noticed during the period of Khrushchev's thaw. For this reason, in the 1950s Georgian cinema was partly exempted from having to reproduce socialist myths. Instead, a greater emphasis had been put on individualism. This fact largely contributed to the further development of the Georgian national filmmaking industry. Starting from the 1960s, when the Georgian New Wave was born out of this spirit of national renaissance. Therefore, Georgian national cinema of that decade appeared to be a significant counterweight to the previously discussed socialist realism. Despite a sufficient degree of censorship that was still present, Georgian filmmakers widely gravitated to the genre of magical realism that gave rise to the poetic cinema. In contrast to social realism, this movement combines mundane reality with symbolism and phantasmagorical elements. Therefore, Georgian filmmakers unfolded their stories in timeless and metaphoric worlds which still incorporated recognisable traditional traits. The advantage of this approach was twofold. On the one hand, this strategy allowed Georgian directors to distance national cinema from the propaganda machine and protect it from potential censoring. On the other hand, by incorporating artistic traits inherent to magical realism, Georgian cinema could reestablish the continuity of national identity and reflect on it through the prism of current realia by linking them to indigenous traditions and cultural heritage including mythology, history, and references to national arts and especially literature. For instance, Giorgi Shengelaia's film "Pirosmani" (1969) explores the identitarian issues through the prism of Niko Pirosmani's life and creativity whereas Tengiz Abuladze's art drama "The Plea" (1967) is based on the poems written by Vazha-Pshavela.[118] Additionally, a greater emphasis was put on individualism. Since the 1960s the subject of Georgian cinema has indeed rejected collective identification posed by the Soviet authorities and embraced the vast domain of memory and traditional culture. Besides, the inclination to individualism manifested itself even in the style of acting which partly opposed the widely accepted Stanislavski's system. The latter appeared to be unsuitable for expressing the Georgian emotional and psychological temper. Thus, the

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[117] Wieczorek, "Faces of Georgian Cinema", 220-221.
[118] Ibid., 222-224.

emergence of the self-reflexive national characters conscious of their own cultural and historical origins provided space for more intimate issues that were relevant to Georgian society. For instance, in Otar Iosseliani's Falling Leaves (1966) the protagonist is involved in the conflict between the pragmatic world of industrial development and principles of moral integrity.[119]

In the 1970s Georgian national cinema in many respects continued the previously established course. However, during this decade it was marked by a more significant degree of profundity. In particular, Georgian directors embarked on the exploration of national sensibility, emotional temper, and psychology. Therefore, as far as cinematic genres are concerned, the prominent position was occupied by comedy and its variations including grotesque, tragicomedy, or farce. For instance, Eldar Shengelaia's *The Eccentrics* (1973) appeared to be an eclectic mixture of upbeat comedy and witty irony that depicted the ordinary life and struggles of Georgians in a contemporary setting. Another example would be Lana Gogoberidze's *Commotion* (1975) which portrayed how a drowsy traditional life pace in a small rural town in Eastern Georgia was altered by an ambitious actress coming from that place.[120]

During the 1980s the prevailing poetic style of national cinema was converted to a more careful observation of the current realia. In particular, Georgian directors started to address the issue of existing relations between the Soviet Union and the Georgian nation. Therefore, the contemplative sensibility of Georgian national cinema was infused with irony and a sufficient degree of criticism. Driven by the rising aspirations towards independence, films produced by Georgian directors started to satirize life in the Soviet Union and rebel against the communist ideology. For instance, Tengiz Abuladze's art drama Repentance (1987) — a universal story of a dictator and the struggle for freedom — was a powerful semi-allegorical critique of Stalinism. Simultaneously, Georgian cinema of the 1980s reflects on the trauma of deprived national identity by means of reinterpretation of national mythology and traditions. Thus, Sergo Parajanov's drama The Legend of the Suram Fortress (1984) based on the Georgian folk tale appeared to be a powerful author's statement on the issues related to the restoration of national independence, revival, and the narrative of homecoming.[121]

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[119] Radunovic, "Incommensurable distance : Georgian cinema as a (trans)national cinema" (2014).
[120] Wieczorek, "Faces of Georgian Cinema", 225.
[121] Radunovic, "Incommensurable distance : Georgian cinema as a (trans)national cinema", (2014)

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the establishment of an independent state, Georgian national filmmaking faced approximately a decade of stagnation. This was given to socio-political havoc during the first years of Georgia's independence, the transitional process to a market economy, obsolete technical equipment used within the industry and the outflow of skilful human resources and film directors including Otar Iosseliani, Mikheil Kobakhidze and Nana Jorjadze.[122] Nevertheless, after the Rose Revolution in 2003 which marked the beginning of the intense reformational period, Georgian national cinema experienced the renaissance for the second part. The filmmaking industry gained financial support from the government, the infrastructure was innovated, new studios and institutions were founded, and fresh producers provided opportunities for further development of the sector.[123]

Additionally, since the early 2000s, Georgian national cinema started to enter the international scene and contributed Georgia's to visibility in the eyes of the global community. On the one hand, the country itself noticeably contributes to the enhancement of promotion and accessibility of the domestic filmmaking industry to the multinational audience alongside the support for further cooperation in the discussed field. For instance, Georgia annually organises film festivals and events, one of the most prominent being the Tbilisi International Film Festival which since the year 2000 serves as a gathering place for diverse audiences and stakeholders engaged in the cinematic industry.[124] It is equally important to admit that Georgia has established close ties with prestigious international entities involved in the filmmaking industry. Thus, since 2010 Georgian remains a member of such organisations as *Eurimages*, *European Film Promotion* and *Film New Europe*. Besides, since 2015 the country joined the programme *Creative Europe* dedicated to the development of cross-border cooperation in the field of the cultural sector.[125] On the other hand, the value of Georgian national cinema is being reciprocally appreciated on the international level. The industry becomes the object of cultural events and exhibitions, as, for instance, has been the case with an initiative *Discovering Georgian Cinema* organised by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 2014.[126] Furthermore, the success of

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[122] Wieczorek, "Faces of Georgian Cinema", 228.

[123] Georgian National Film Centre. *Georgian Film Sector Mapping*, 4.

[124] „History of Tbilisi International Film Festival", The Tbilisi International Film Festival (TIFF), last updated 2023, https://www.tbilisifilmfestival.ge/en/about-us/

[125] "Georgian National Film Centre: About", *Georgian National Film Centre*, updated in 2021, https://www.gnfc.ge/ka/about/about

[126] Jerry White, "Report from Tbilisi", in *Film Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2018), 58.

contemporary Georgian national cinema at international film festivals deserves special mention. Films created by Georgian directors frequently enough to become the object of positive reviews on the part of film critics and academics. For instance, the Georgian drama *In Bloom* — a bildungsroman unfolding shortly after the declaration of independent Georgia — directed by Nana Ekvtimishvili and Simon Groß won the C.I.C.A.E. Award at the Berlinale in 2013,[127] *Corn Island* — drama that explores fates of ordinary peoples amidst military and ethnic tensions — directed by Giorgi Ovashvili won the Crystal Globe award at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 2014[128] or *My Happy Family* — a drama about the struggles of an independent woman — directed by Nana Ekvtimishvili and Simon Groß won the Best Screenplay award at the Sundance Film Festival in 2017.[129] Besides, Georgian films quite often became nominees during famous events in the field of cinema, as has been the case with *Tangerines* — a morality tale unfolding during the Abkhazian conflict — directed by Zaza Urushadze in 2013 which was nominated by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) for the Best Foreign Language Film.[130]

Thus, it appears self-evident that Georgian national cinema, being marked by a long history and artistic idiosyncrasy, remains a mirror that reflects social shifts, anxieties, and aspirations. Taking into account its notable presence within the context of film festivals, the international cultural sector alongside various streaming platforms and video hostings including Amazon Prime,[131] Netflix[132] and Mubi,[133] contemporary Georgian cinematography appears to be an effective and accessible channel of communication. This circumstance is especially crucial as far as the issue of nation branding is concerned. Additionally, up until now the cultivation and promotion of Georgian national cinema remain one of the strategic priorities of the government. Therefore, the official positioning of contemporary Georgian filmmaking is discussed in the following subchapter.

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[127] „In Bloom: Awards ", IMDb, last updated 2023, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2741806/awards/
[128]   „Corn   Island: Awards",   IMDb,   last   updated   2023, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1863192/awards/?ref_=tt_awd
[129]   „My   Happy   Family: Awards",   IMDb,   last   updated   2023, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5791536/awards/?ref_=tt_awd
[130]   „Tangerines: Awards   ",   IMDb,   last   updated   2023, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2991224/awards/?ref_=tt_awd
[131] „And Then We Danced", *Amazon Prime*, last updated 2023, https://www.amazon.com/Then-We-Danced-Levan-Gelbakhiani/dp/B088FD6B1D
[132] „Netflix set to premiere 'My Happy Family' as first Georgian film on platform", *Agenda.ge*, 30 November 2017, https://agenda.ge/en/news/2017/2639 (downloaded 28 March 2023)
[133]   „Georgian",   *Mubi*,   last   updated   2023,   https://mubi.com/lists/georgian-964f291d-f5f7-469d-ac92-82a533c26d01

3.2. The Status of Georgian National Cinema in Terms of Legislation

The significant status of Georgian national cinema is legislatively established and codified into the law entitled "*On the State Support of the National Cinematography*" and adopted on 5 December 2000. By defining Georgian national cinematography as a long-standing and inalienable element of national art and culture, the key objective of the law consists in ensuring the legal grounds for further support, advancement, and promotion of the domestic film-making industry. Therefore, the law provides an overview of the legal criteria for the assignment of national status to a specific cinematic product alongside the frameworks determining the mode of financing local cinema. Additionally, the law defines the legitimacy of a crucial institution that contributes to the development of the domestic film-making industry.[134]

First and foremost, it is essential to understand the order of assignment of the national status to a particular film. In accordance with the law, a cinematic product is to be addressed as national in the event that it fulfils several conditions. Firstly, a film must be produced in the Georgian language, the state's official language. However, a cinematic product which was created in a foreign language could obtain national status in case the usage of a foreign language is logically determined by the script. Secondly, both the producer and the filmmakers must hold Georgian citizenship or be registered on Georgian territory as a legal entity. Thirdly, as far as the shooting team is concerned, the number of crew members who do not possess Georgian citizenship cannot exceed 30% of the total. Lastly, at least half of the filmmaking process including production, distribution and exhibition must be implemented by the entity that is legally registered on Georgian territory. However, it is vital to note that a film, which was created in a coproduction with foreign companies or institutions, could acquire national status in the event that it does not violate international agreements.[135]

It is equally important to highlight the status and role of the Georgian National Film Centre (GNFC) since this institution is the connecting link between the government and the filmmaking industry. As such, the Georgian National Film Centre is a legal institution founded as part of the Ministry of Culture, Sport, and Youth of Georgia the key objective of

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[134] Parliament of Georgia, *On the State Support of the National Cinematography*, Law of Georgia, 655, adopted 5 December 2000, Ch. I, art. 1-2.
[135] Parliament of Georgia, *On the State Support of the National Cinematography*, Ch. I, art. 5

which is to support, coordinate and foster the domestic filmmaking industry at all levels of production, distribution, and exhibition. Not only does it endeavour to preserve the richness of Georgian national cinema but also it seeks to establish a sustainable competitive industry on the international level. Being financed from the state budget, the Georgian National Film Centre, nevertheless, is eligible to organise further entrepreneurial initiatives in the event that they would contribute to the execution of its primary objective.[136]

The scope of influence and responsibilities belonging to the institution encompasses a set of diverse activities. The Georgian National Film Centre participates in the development and execution of normative acts, regulations and initiatives related to the functioning and coordination of the domestic filmmaking industry. The institution is also responsible for the creation of a centralised database of national cinema alongside the archive for the preservation of the latter. Additionally, the Georgian National Film Centre participates in the enhancement of educational programs in the context of film studies and advanced training of human resources engaged in the field of the filmmaking industry. But most importantly, the institution is responsible for the allocation of budget and resources granted by the Georgian government in order to develop national cinema.[137] The provided finances are allocated through legitimate competition that is to be coordinated by an expert commission assembled on the basis of recommendations of the Director of the Georgian National Film Centre. However, the financial sum allocated by the state in the majority of cases does not exceed three-quarters of the expected costs.[138]

Thus, it can be argued that the Georgian National Film Centre serves as a direct channel of communication between governmental interests and the domestic filmmaking industry. On the one hand, the institution significantly contributes to the development and promotion of Georgian national cinema by means of financing, creative initiatives, and networking with international organisations. On the other hand, being essentially a governmental institution, the Georgian National Film Centre could be seen as a mediator between the existing strategic narrative and the domestic filmmaking industry. Therefore, it can be assumed that a film sponsored and promoted by the institution can be regarded as a product that possesses a capacity to transmit a specific image of Georgia which aligns with

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[136] Ibid., Ch. II, art. 7-8.
[137] Ibid., Ch. II, art. 8.
[138] Ibid., Ch. III, art. 10.

aspirations and values embraced by the state. Thus, it is likely that such a film could be seen as a manifestation of a national brand.

Summing up, contemporary Georgian cinema as such could be addressed as a valuable constituent of the communicative strategy aimed at shaping and promoting the country's national brand. Being seen as a distinctive and idiosyncratic creative form, which stems from long-lasting tradition, it functions as a medium that has the capacity to transfer compelling artistic expressions, ideas and statements about modern Georgia that would align with the country's strategic narrative and promote its values, visions, and aspirations. The scientific interest in approaching Georgian cinema within the context of nation branding is further reinforced by a sufficient level of its international visibility, accessibility, and appreciation by international audiences. However, since national cinema proved to be a complex and multidimensional concept in terms of examination, it is crucial to establish a research model that would, on the one hand, limit the scope of the investigated material in accordance with the objectives and, on the other hand, conduct a more profound research of the selected material. Therefore, the research model alongside the material for research and the key for selecting the latter are presented in the subsequent chapter of the thesis.

4. Georgian Cinema as Nation Branding Medium: Portrayal of Western-Oriented and Traditional Features

Based on the established methodological model, the analytical part of the submitted thesis contains the analysis of four films that met the set criteria: *What Do We See When We Look At The Sky* directed by Alexandre Koberidze, *The Summer of Frozen Fountains* directed by Vano Burduli, *My Happy Family* directed by Nana Ekvtimishvili and Simon Gross and *Corn Island* directed by Giorgi Ovashvili. In each case, there is provided general information regarding the film in compliance with set criteria. Next, the conducted analysis of the selected material is presented. It follows the adjusted research model and two specific cognitive purposes introduced in the previous chapter. Finally, the analytical part provides the summarisation and evaluation of the obtained results with respect to the key objective of the thesis and the second hypothesis set in the introductory chapter.

4.1. *What Do We See When We Look At The Sky (2017)*

General Information

What Do We See When We Look At The Sky is a contemplative, self-reflexive yet lyrical drama produced in 2020[139] and presented to the public during the following year.[140] The film was directed by Alexandre Koberidze,[141] who debuted on the international scene in 2017 with a feature docufiction *Let the Summer Never Come Again,* which received Grand Prix at the French FIDMarseille cinema festival.[142] The screenplay was written by Koberidze as well. In terms of production, *What Do We See When We Look At The Sky* is a product of cooperation between Georgia and Germany with a general producer being Mariam Shatberashvili.[143] The list of production entities and key stakeholders includes the previously mentioned *GNFC*, a Georgian company *Sakdoc film*, and German company *New Matter Films* alongside German Film and Television Academy located in Berlin.[144] As far as the language is concerned, the film was shot entirely in Georgian. In technical terms, the duration of *What Do We See When We Look At The Sky* is 150 minutes.[145] At the moment of writing the thesis, the film was available with English subtitles on a range of streaming platforms including Apple TV+ and MUBI.[146] As far as artistic prominence is concerned, *What Do We See When We Look At The Sky* won 12 awards at different film festivals across the world and it was a nominee in 26 categories. Additionally, it was awarded by German Film Critics Association in 2023 and the International Cinephile Society in 2022.[147]

Analysis of the Film

What Do We See When We Look At The Sky is an enchanting and immersive urban tale that blurs the boundaries between mundane, ordinary routine and irrational, dreamlike wonder. In this film, Koberidze tells a cunningly intricated story of love, loss and regaining

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[139] „What Do We See When We Look At The Sky", Georgian National Film Center (GNFC), last updated 2021

[140] „What Do We See When We Look At The Sky", National Filmography, last updated 2021

[141] "What Do We See When We Look At The Sky", GNFC, last updated 2021

[142] „Let the summer never come again", FIDMarseille, last updated 2023

[143] „What Do We See When We Look At The Sky", GNFC, last updated 2021

[144] Ibid., last updated 2021

[145] Ibid., last updated 2021

[146] „What Do We See When We Look at the Sky?", JustWatch, last updated 2023

[147] „What Do We See When We Look At The Sky: Awards", IMDb, last updated 2023

unfolding between pharmacist student Lisa and football player Giorgi in the welcoming atmosphere of ancient Kutaisi. In a twist of fate, they happen to encounter each other and feel mutual sympathy. By the will of a curse, they both happen to wake up in different bodies having lost the knowledge and a chance to find each other again. By chance, their paths cross repeatedly in Kutaisi and eventually, they succeed in breaking the hex to finally recognise each other and reunite.

To start with, *What Do We See When We Look At The Sky* continues the long-lasting tradition of the magic realism genre, which is firmly entrenched in the historical context of Georgian national cinema. By thematically incorporating fantastic elements including curses, legends, disguises and enlivening of ordinary objects like a surveillance camera or a seedling, Koberidze creates a dreamlike narrative, which, on the one hand, appears a distinctive sign of Georgian cinema and, on the other hand, literally immerse the viewer into the unfolding action by a direct appeal from the screen. The latter could be seen as an advantageous move likely to boost the probability that the film would imprint in the minds of the audiences, which is crucial as far as nation branding is concerned. Additionally, in terms of the covered topics, one of the overarching themes discussed in *What Do We See When We Look At The Sky* is a universal tale of love that could be grasped by viewers belonging to diverse cultures and counties without risk of misinterpretation.

As far as the objects and spaces subsumed under the aesthetic terms are concerned, the exceptional contribution of Koberidze's film consists in its exact, appealing, and picturesque portrayal of Kutaisi — an ancient and vibrant city, once the capital city of the Kingdom of Georgia. Being one of the notorious tourist destinations alongside Tbilisi and Batumi, Kutaisi has its own recognisable image composed of serene landscapes, antique attractions, and lively city districts.[148] In this regard, *What Do We See When We Look At The Sky* could be seen as a guidebook on Kutaisi, which appealingly depicts it in warm hues and sunlit greenness. Through the footage being held at concrete spots and unmistakable locations, the film creates a vast panorama of tangible pieces of historical Georgian cultural heritage including for instance the old city centre, David Agmashenebeli Square crowned with the Colchis Fountain, the Central Garden "Boulevard", magnificent Meskhishvili Theatre alongside the White and Red Bridges thrown across Rioni river and thereby enhances particular aspects of Georgia's national brand that are associated with its traditional

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[148] „Kutaisi", Georgia.Travel, last updated 2023

image. The latter is further evoked by picturesque mountainous sceneries capturing not only natural landscapes but also highland villages that are an essential part of Georgian realia and a constituent of historic heritage reflected in the national brand.

As far as the aspect of events is concerned, *What Do We See When We Look At The Sky* is not related directly to major historical milestones or pivotal contexts. However, at the level of a plotline, it incorporates several episodes that reflect events related to traditional rituals transferred into contemporaneity. Among these could be mentioned the scene of a customary celebration held in the highland village. Another example to be mentioned is the a cappella polyphonic singing, which is a further enhancing aspect of a traditional cultural line in the Georgian national brand.

Summing up, Koberidze's *What Do We See When We Look At The Sky* appears to be a highly potential illustration of national cinema being used in the context of nation branding strategy. It incorporates a generally understandable yet emotional dream-like story of love being, however, placed in a recognisable and expressly designated location in Georgia. Through artistic and aesthetic means, the film creates a vivid, warm, and welcoming image of the country which solicitously and respectfully preserved its historical and cultural legacy up to contemporary times. Despite being related to any of the prominent contextual events, *What Do We See When We Look At The Sky* has a lot to offer in terms of Georgia's national brand depiction through a timeless story set in concrete sociocultural chronotope.

4.2. *The Summer of Frozen Fountains (2015)*

General Information

The Summer of Frozen Fountains is a tessellated poetic anthology about the search and acquisition of happiness produced in 2015[149] and released in the same year in Tallinn during the Black Nights Film Festival.[150] The film was directed by Vano Burduli,[151] already a well-known figure in the context of international cinema festivals primarily for his feature war drama *The Conflict Zone* (2009), which was highly appreciated by the critics during the Moscow International Film Festival and Cottbus Film Festival at the same year.[152] The

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[149] „The Summer of Frozen Fountains", Georgian National Film Center (GNFC), last updated 2021
[150] „The Summer of Frozen Fountains", IMDb, last updated 2023
[151] „The Summer of Frozen Fountains", GNFC, last updated 2021
[152] „Conflict Zone: Awards", IMDb, last updated 2023

screenplay was created by Burduli himself in tandem with Dato Chubinishvili.[153] As far as production is concerned, *The Summer of Frozen Fountains* is a result of cooperation between the Georgian *GNFC* and *Studio 29+7* alongside the Russian *CTB Film Company*.[154] The production was handled by two Georgian filmmakers — Vano Burduli and Tinatin Kajrishvili — with additional support provided by Sergey Selyanov.[155] In terms of language, the film was shot in Georgian, however, it incorporates some scenes in English as well. In technical terms, the duration of *The Summer of Frozen Fountains* is 100 minutes.[156] At the moment of writing the thesis, the film was available with English subtitles on a MUBI streaming platform. As far as artistic prominence is concerned, *The Summer of Frozen Fountains* won a Special Jury Award at Sofia International Film Festival in 2016 and was nominated for the Best Film Award at both the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival and Luxor Egyptian and European Film Festival in 2016.[157]

Analysis of the Film

The Summer of Frozen Fountains is another embodiment of traditional sensibility that, however, provides another perspective in terms of Georgia's brand representation. Vano Burduli offers a glimpse of the country's panorama woven from multiple viewpoints appropriated to different characters. *The Summer of Frozen Fountains* is indeed a mosaic constituted by intricate ties unfolding between all the characters whose life paths intersect in the welcoming, sunlit spaces of Tbilisi. However, the integrity of the narrative is not falling to pieces due to the overarching theme of diverse faces of love and anticipation that solidly binds together all the plotlines leading them to logical conclusions.

Similarly, to the previously discussed Koberidze's film, *The Summer of Frozen Fountains* reveals a slice of ordinary life in Georgia that is now unfolding in the capital and city of Tbilisi. However, Burduli does not thematically or stylistically adhere to the principles of the magic realist tradition. Instead, he offers a more grounded and casual yet equally appealing representation of Georgia's image. Nevertheless, despite being relatively ordinary, the depicted manifestations of a multifaceted love, crystalised in a web of relations and expectations, are accessible — largely through its simplicity and simultaneous lyricism

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[153] „The Summer of Frozen Fountains", IMDb, last updated 2023
[154] Ibid., last updated 2023
[155] „The Summer of Frozen Fountains", GNFC, last updated 2021
[156] Ibid., last updated 2021
[157] „The Summer of Frozen Fountains", IMDb, last updated 2023

— to a wide range of audiences across different states. However, *The Summer of Frozen Fountains* does not dwell on the image of a poetic Georgia. It progresses to the representation of another attractive aspect that has a long-lasting tradition in terms of Georgian cinema. Exactly through the incorporation of witty humour Burduli's film leaves a pleasant impression after watching thereby transmitting it to the perception of both country's image and brand.

In terms of aesthetic aspects which embrace both objects and spaces, *The Summer of Frozen Fountains* represents Georgia's brand in a twofold way. On the other hand, audiences are getting acquainted with Tbilisi as though in the form of attractive tourist advertising. Nearly panoramic filming captures views of the natural hilly greenery and the wide Mtkvari river alongside the sunlit cobblestoned streets on the Old Town and more tranquil residential areas. The nighttime filming of Georgia's capital appears equally picturesque since the urban illumination lights up notorious landmarks including Narikala Fortress and Metekhi Church. No less alluring appears the bustle of the market, where the audiences are briefly introduced to the lifestory of Niko Pirosmani and his idiosyncratic paintings.

Thus, at this point, *The Summer of Frozen Fountains* — similar to Koberidze's film — depicts and crystalises the county's artistic and historical heritage thereby contributing to the enhancement of Georgia's brand through the dimension of distinctive national culture. However, on the other hand, Burduli captures another side of Tbilisi. In harmonious contrast to the warmth of old flats and meandering narrow streets *The Summer of Frozen Fountains* provides a view of modern Tbilisi consisting of glass buildings, and minimalist apartments alongside up-to-date gadgets and technologies. However, this urbanistic image of the capital — being automatically transferred to the whole country — is not competing with its ancient part. Instead, it complements the scene and smoothly broadens the constructed brand of Georgia in the direction of urban contemporaneity.

In terms of events, *The Summer of Frozen Fountains* appears not to be directly related to significant historical contexts thereby remaining a reflection of a slice of life in modern Georgia. Therefore, to recapitulate, Burduli's film to some extent follows the trajectory previously observed in Koberidze's film. A vivid and memorable cinematic image of Georgia based upon the capturing of its tangible and intangible cultural legacy constituting a significant part of the country's national brand. However, the important difference lies in the fact that *The Summer of Frozen Fountains* acquaints the viewer with a more advanced,

modern, and dynamic image of contemporary Georgia in which there is still a place for the recognisable narratives and timeless themes.

4.3. *My Happy Family (2017)*

General Information

My Happy Family is a social drama about the struggles of an individualist female protagonist produced in 2017[158] and presented to a wider audience during the 67th Berlinale held the same year.[159] The film was directed by Nana Ekvtimishvili and Simon Gross.[160] This creative Georgian-German tandem was already internationally famous for their bildungsroman drama *In Bloom* (2013), which gained the prestigious C.I.C.A.E. Award at the 63rd Berlinale.[161] Nana Ekvtimishvili acted as a screenwriter as well.[162] In terms of production, *My Happy Family* is a product of cooperation between Georgia and Germany with a general producer being Simon Gross.[163] The company responsible for the production of the film was Georgian *Polare Film* with support on the part of the *GNFC*.[164] As far as the language is concerned, the film was shot entirely in Georgian. In technical terms, the duration of *What Do We See When We Look At The Sky* is 119 minutes.[165] At the moment of writing the thesis, the film was available with English subtitles on a range of streaming platforms including MUBI and Netflix.[166] As far as artistic prominence is concerned, *My Happy Family* won 13 awards at different film festivals across the world and gained 10 nominations in 2017. The most notable nomination to be mentioned is the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance Film Festival.[167]

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[158] „My Happy Family", Georgian National Film Center (GNFC), last updated 2021
[159] „My Happy Family", Berlinale: Archive, last updated 2017
[160] „In Bloom: Awards", IMDb, last updated 2023
[161] Ibid., last updated 2023
[162] „My Happy Family", GNFC, last updated 2021
[163] Ibid., last updated 2021
[164] Ibid., last updated 2021
[165] Ibid., last updated 2021
[166] „My Happy Family", JustWatch, last updated 2023
[167] „My Happy Family: Awards", IMDb, last updated 2023

Analysis of the Film

Unlike both Koberidze's and Burduli's films, *My Happy Family* is an example of a contained family drama and a strong statement about the clash of the traditional social fabric and individualistic spirit. The tandem of Ekvtimishvili and Gross brought to the screen the story of Manana: a middle-aged schoolteacher who decided to start living separately from her multigenerational large family. This decision is confronted with a lack of understanding and condemnation on the part of her relatives. However, Manana, being fully determined to her individualistic stances, rises to the challenge for her happiness concealed in personal independence.

Thematically, *My Happy Family* conveys a debate about traditional social codes existing in contemporary Georgia and the degree of acceptable individualism within them. The contrast between the two poles of this axis of confrontation is approached through the narration and the characters' relations. By refusing to adhere to the existing life order, Manana chooses the path of financial and mental independence, however, without demonisation or condemnation of the traditional ways of living. In contrast, her family appears to be an entrenched embodiment of customary unwritten laws passed and functioning for generations. In these terms, Manana's individualistic revolt is initially perceived as a glitch in the traditional system of assigned roles and expectations. Therefore, *My Happy Family* offers a reflection on the topic of a juxtaposition of traditionalism and novelty. However, in the context of nation branding, such thematic content does not discredit the country's mental profile and values. In reverse, through this film, the audience gains insight into the maturity of Georgian society. Georgia is represented as a self-reflexive and progressive country capable of approaching complicated themes grounding them in contemporary contexts including for instance the feminist perspective or the debate on the individualism-holism dichotomy.

As far as the aesthetic aspect is concerned, *My Happy Family* does not offer vast panoramas capturing the picturesque of recognisable Georgian scenery. However, in spatial terms, it still invites the audience to glimpse at the vibrant hustling and bustling of Tbilisian markets similar to those depicted in Burduli's cinema. It is to be noted that the distinctive element of this film, as far as the representation of a national brand is concerned, is the aesthetic of Georgian music as an essential part of the traditional cultural code of the country. For instance, the characters in several scenes are playing panduri — a three-stringed lute that is spread in the Eastern regions of Georgia. Brisk traditional national music and singing at

the dinner table, however, intertwine with Western serene sonatas composed by Mozart and create a balanced sound picture. Thus, in terms of nation branding, the aesthetical aspect of Ekvtimishvili and Gross' film, on the one hand, provides a glimpse of some specific recognisable locations and traditional cultural elements and arts. On the other hand, however, they are to a certain degree intermingled with recognisable markers of Western culture harmoniously with music being one of the most prominent examples. Therefore, at this level of analysis, *My Happy Family* contributes to the construction of the image of modern Georgia as a country that embraces both national and Western cultures equally.

In terms of the last aspect concerning contextual references, Ekvtimishvili and Gross' film seems to be rather a contained slice of ordinary life than a reflection of historical milestones. Thus, through several episodes and events, *My Happy Family* reveals traditions of collective celebrations alongside customary practices that go in contrast to individualistic modes that seem to be a relative novelty in the narrative and event-driven matrix of the film. Through these aspects, Georgia's image acquires an attribute of an acceptive, broad-minded country that is not confined solely to the social fabric of long-lasting traditions. On the contrary, despite the necessity to overcome certain behavioural stereotypes and roles, it is capable of adopting alternative, more liberal perspectives as far as the way of living is concerned. Thus, the most significant contribution made by *My Happy Family* lies in the representation of Georgia as a mature, self-reflexive and broad-minded country that is ready to accept and discuss new alternatives without rejecting or demonising its past.

4.4. *Corn Island (2014)*

General Information

Corn Island is a contemplative minimalist drama unfolding on a tiny island amidst the Enguri River and escalating tensions produced in 2014[168] and released in the same year in Karlovy Vary during the 49th International Film Festival.[169] The film was directed by Giorgi Ovashvili,[170] already a well-known figure in the context of international cinema festivals primarily for his feature war drama *The Other Bank* (2009), which was Georgia's submission for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film the same year and

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[168] „Corn Island", Georgian National Film Center (GNFC), last updated 2021
[169] „Corn Island: Release Information", IMDb, last updated 2023
[170] „Corn Island", GNFC, last updated 2021

became an indisputable winner of several international festivals.[171] The screenplay was created by Ovashvili himself in tandem with Nugzar Shataidze.[172] As far as production is concerned, *Corn Island* is a result of cooperation between the Georgian *GNFC* and *Alamdary Films*, French *Arizona Productions*, German *42 Films* and Czech *Akhman Productions*.[173] The production was handled by Nino Devdariani.[174] In terms of language, the film was shot in Georgian, however, it incorporates some scenes in Abkhaz as well. In technical terms, the duration of *Corn Island* is 101 minutes.[175] At the moment of writing the thesis, the film was available with English subtitles on for instance a MUBI or Filmingo streaming platforms.[176] As far as artistic prominence is concerned, *Corn Island* won 23 awards at different film festivals across the world and was nominated 12 times. The most notable award to be mentioned is the Crystal Globe, which is the Grand Prix at Karlovy Vary International Film Festival.[177]

Analysis of the Film

Corn Island is another remarkable example of contemplative Georgian cinema. This thoughtful drama almost without saying a word tells an allegorical tale about the recurring life cycle set on the small island located in the middle of the Enguri River. Ovashvili's film is rather minimalistic and follows the story of a grandfather and granddaughter who cultivate corn on a silt island. However, their crystallised meditative existence is disrupted by the constant disturbing presence of Abkhazian, Georgian and Russian soldiers. Therefore, *Corn Island* confronts both idealistic isolation and grim reality to explore the complexity of their interrelation.

As far as the thematic aspect is concerned, Ovashvili's film to a certain degree embraces the contemplative mode of narration, characteristic of Georgian national cinematography. But more importantly, it touches upon the subject matter of the agricultural tradition. The whole process of cultivating and harvesting is depicted as an inseparable part of the constant renewal of the life cycle. From this perspective, within the context of *Corn Island* Georgia is presented as a country of trustful and diligent workers who are experienced

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[171] „The Other Bank: Awards", IMDb, last updated 2023
[172] „Corn Island", National Filmography, last updated 2021
[173] „Corn Island", GNFC, last updated 2021
[174] „Corn Island", National Filmography, last updated 2021
[175] „Corn Island", GNFC, last updated 2021
[176] „Corn Island", JustWatch, last updated 2023
[177] „Corn Island: Awards", IMDb, last updated 2023

in traditional craftsmanship and simultaneously are respectful of nature and clean organics. Another essential thematic aspect is related to pacifism. *Corn Island* reflects on the military tensions related to the Abkhaz–Georgian conflict. However, in a broader sense violence in Ovashvili's film appears to be rudimentary and inevitably leads to calamities. Instead, *Corn Island* provides a perspective on the possibility of peaceful resolution and the prevalence of humanism over feuds. From this perspective, pacifism, and the tendency to resolve conflicts by peaceful means appear to be an essential part of a national brand echoing the strategic narrative.

In terms of aesthetic dimension, the spacial aspect of *Corn Island* appears to be tightly related to the contextual one. On the one hand, the audiences are introduced to the picturesque and tranquil sceneries of the Enguri Valley and the river itself. The placid views are coupled with serene natural sounding and meditative melodies. Even the sparkles of tension emanating from the presence of the soldiers later are released gradually. In sum, Ovashvili's film offers an immersive and unhurried experience to the audiences without shattering the dynamics of narration. Therefore, the magnificent yet tranquil image of Georgian natural beauty is highly likely to gain a foothold in the minds of spectators by means of this distinctive idiosyncratic aesthetics thereby enhancing the appealing image of the country.

On the other hand, the contextual aspect of *Corn Island* reflects upon the long-lasting tensions existing between Georgia and Abkhazia. The setting itself — the Enguri River and surrounding valley — is indeed an extended administrative borderline where several border checkpoints are located. This explains the presence of several groups of soldiers rarely passing by the river from both sides and the intermittent sounds of gunfire being heard. However, Ovashvili never gives the audience a hint as far as the time period of the central action is concerned. Nevertheless, the historical reference appears to be clearly obvious. However, *Corn Island* leaves this conflict on the periphery focusing intently on the tiny island where all visitors are treated equally, thereby enhancing the previously discussed aspect of pacifism that manifests itself in the national brand of Georgia.

4.5. Final Summarisation

Based on the analysis of the above-mentioned examples of contemporary national cinema, it can be concluded that its potential — as far as the context of nation branding is

concerned — appears to be rather high, however, there still could be observed points for further growth. To begin with, as far as the second hypothesis of the thesis is concerned, the selected material demonstrates that Georgian cinema represents the key attributes of the county's national brand expressively and accessibly enough on thematic and aesthetic levels by the implication of diverse means including for instance modes of narration, sounding and visual sequences. However, the aspect of contextual referencing in terms of the discussed examples — with the exception of Ovashvili's *Corn Island* — remains of lesser prominence. Therefore, it can be concluded that the selected material gravitates to the representation and enhancement of Georgia's brand through — to a larger extent — particular thematic and aesthetic elements.

On a more profound level of analysis, it seems evident that Georgian national cinema reveals itself as a mature artistic and industrial medium that could reflect on both key directions of the contemporary national brand, however, it might seem unbalanced perfectly. As far as the Western-oriented aspect is concerned, Ekvtimishvili and Gross' *My Happy Family* appears to be the most prolific in these regards since it reflects upon the independent spirit, rationality, and freedom to choose an alternative way of living that gravitates more to the Western understandings which nonjudgmentally contrasts to the collective customary mode of living. A similar degree of individualism, self-expression and self-identification coupled with the confrontation with traditional confines could be observed in Levan Akin's bildungsroman-drama *And Then We Danced* (2019). However, this film does not comply with the set of criteria established for material sampling, therefore, it would not be discussed in further detail. In this context, there should be mentioned Bruduli's *The Summer of Frozen Fountains*, which provides an exemplary portrayal of the urbanistic and technological image of modern Georgia being welcoming towards foreigners from Western countries and leaning towards them as to a more appealing role model.

On the other hand, the aspect of national branding that embraces traditional national culture and embedded values seems to slightly outbalance in terms of the discussed cinema. The first triad of the analysed films captures a highly illustrative and distinctive image of contemporary Georgian cities through the recognisable tangible architectonic legacy thereby enhancing the image of the country as a guardian and connoisseur of its cultural heritage and history. In a similar vein there was produced cinematic anthology *Tbilisi, I Love You* which was a part of a filmmaking franchise *Cities Of Love* developed by Emmanuel Benbihy. However, this film does not comply with the set of criteria established for material sampling,

therefore, it would not be discussed in further detail. The last of the discussed examples —
Ovashvili's *Corn Island* — expands this aspect to the dimension of respectful attitudes
towards nature and traditional craftsmanship. Another aspect to be discussed in this
connection is the contribution on the part of national cinema to the representation of
Georgia's cordiality and sensibility manifesting itself in traditional forms of rituals. In this
regard, there are to be mentioned scenes from *What Do We See When We Look At The Sky,
The Summer of Frozen Fountains* and *My Happy Family* that captures the practices of
collective celebrations, singing and music playing. Last but not least to be mentioned is the
aspect of pacifism addressed in *Corn Island*. In this regard, Georgia's image and brand are
extended towards the values of humanism and aspirations regarding peaceful coexistence
with neighbours.

Summing up, the conducted analysis confirms the second hypothesis of this thesis.
Within the context of nation branding, contemporary Georgian national cinema indeed
reflects the established key attributes of the country's brand. The noticed modest leaning
towards the more frequent representation of traditional national culture and values can be
assessed as advantageous since it largely contributes to creating a distinctive and vivid
portrayal of Georgia. However, the implementation of several elements associated with the
Western-oriented aspect of the country's national brand emphasises its growing mental
maturity and positive tendency towards a harmonious blending of traditional legacy and
Western-oriented aspirations. However, as far as the industry is concerned, it is to be
mentioned that it probably requires more investments from the government at the levels of
production and distribution since all of the discussed examples are the results of
coproduction with other states, primarily with European ones.

Conclusion

The focal objective of the submitted thesis was to examine the capacity of national
cinema from the instrumentalist perspective within the framework of nation branding and
subsequently investigate its relevance in the case of contemporary Georgia. The valid
feasibility of the conducted study is predicated on several key factors. In the first instance,
the prominence of the implication of nation branding strategies alongside the development
of a coherent and distinctive image of a country receives more significance due to the
constantly accelerating pace of globalisation and technological advancement alongside

subsequent mounting competition between the states in the international arena. Secondly, cinematography — and national cinematography in particular — could be addressed as one of the most potent instruments and mediums due to its ability to surpass boundaries and access diverse, wide audiences to facilitate the transfer of ideas, images and perceptions. Therefore, within the context of nation branding, it is seen as a potent instrument that can be further utilised for the construction and communication of a country's brand. Lastly, the implication of this theoretical correlation in the case of Georgia appears to be valid due to a couple of reasons. On the one hand, within the context of the post-Soviet space building a consistent and recognisable Georgia's national brand is to be seen as an opportunity to strengthen its position on the international scene in order to enhance the economic, political, and social development of a state. Taking into consideration Georgia's orientation and aspirations towards closer cooperation with the West alongside a consequent possible integration, the development of the country's brand could contribute to the distancing from the label of a "former Soviet satellite state" towards "a modern independent Georgia." On the other hand, Georgian national cinema manifested itself as a potentially impactful and accessible instrument given its long-lasting tradition, sophisticated artistic sensibility and growing prominent presence on the international level.

The theoretical part of the thesis focused on the two core concepts of the thesis: nation branding and national cinema. As far as the former is concerned, it was established that nation branding is a cross-disciplinary concept that is primarily grounded in the fields of marketing, international relations, public diplomacy, and cultural criticism. The country's brand is constituted by six areas of competencies including tourism, culture, investments, governance, exports, and population that can be evaluated by means of diverse scales and approaches, the most well-known of which is Anholts's *Nation Brand Hexagon*. Within these areas of national competencies, countries are able to implement different instruments and strategies that could contribute to the enhancement of their image. Based on the objectives of the thesis, the theoretical part was further dedicated to the conceptualisation of national cinema. It was established that the contemporary notion of national cinema is approached from the four-fold perspective that unites industrial, textual, consumption and critical aspects. Its current instrumental significance stems from requests for the preservation and representation of unique national identities in the globalised context alongside the opportunity to obtain economic and industrial profits. Due to its medial specificity based on technical characteristics and implication of creative potential national cinema possesses a

certain capacity to transmit key attributes that are related to the country's brand: recognisable physical locations, tangible and intangible cultural artefacts, political and economic contexts, and customary practices.

The application of these concepts in Georgia's case was discussed in the theoretical part as well. As far as the nation branding is concerned, there was established that prior to 2012 there was no holistic and consistent strategy given that since after regaining independence, modern Georgia had to face a period of ethnopolitical turmoil and instability and, thus, the discussed concept remained to a large degree on the fringes of interest. However, during Saakashvili's presidency, there could have been noticed first attempts to create a more consistent county's brand. Nevertheless, the communicated image at that time appeared relatively vague to the international audience. The required consistency was gradually achieved during the following years, however, it is to be admitted that Georgia's national brand seems to be still in a formative period. Nonetheless, the significance of the enhancement of Georgia's national image on the international scene was supported by the state authorities who additionally emphasise the role played by media as far as the promotional aspect is concerned. Therefore, it was established that Georgia's national brand gained a firmer foundation in the governmental strategic narrative, which is to be seen as a tool implemented in order to encapsulate a state's values and aspirations alongside its future-oriented desirable image coupled with methods for its achievement. Through the analysis of documents elaborated by the Ministry of Defence of Georgia, it was determined that the current state of Georgia's national brand confronts the necessity to balance Western-oriented attributes with traditional ones. Therefore, these were the two fundamental aspects of Georgia's national brand that were subsequently analysed through the prism of the country's national cinema. The previously noted capacity of the latter alongside its significant status was further proved on the basis of the law "*On the State Support of the National Cinematography*" adopted by the Parliament of Georgia.

In order to achieve the focal objective of the submitted thesis, there was implemented a complex methodology based on a combination of several approaches: semi-systematic and integrative literature review, a qualitative case study and strategies used in qualitative film analysis. This combination enabled a more profound examination of both examined concepts applied in praxis on the exemplary country with respect to its historical and socio-cultural specificity. The potential limitations of the conducted research, discussed in the introductory part of the thesis, were taken into consideration as well since they have allowed to develop

a set of six key criteria for filmic material selection in order to overcome possible constraints. Furthermore, there was introduced an adjusted model for the conduction of film analysis that took into consideration the key objective of the thesis alongside the specificity of Georgia's case. Consequently, the analytical part of the thesis introduced a practical implementation of the designed methodology on the basis of four contemporary Georgian films that comply with the set criteria.

As far as the set hypotheses are concerned, the first was confirmed in the theoretical part of the thesis. On the basis of the examined literature, it was established that national cinema is a multidimensional concept the flexibility of which was proved by the profound analysis of its inherent characteristics. In particular, the technological characteristics of national cinema coupled with the artistic capacity and its industrial essence opened to investments and cooperation, allowing to recreate, anchor and promote a specific image of a country in the minds of audiences. The second hypothesis was confirmed in the analytical part of the thesis. On the basis of the examined films, Georgian national cinema revealed itself as a mature artistic and industrial medium that possesses a capacity to cover and represent both Western-oriented attributes and traditional ones on diverse levels of the analysis. Additionally, there was established a modest leaning towards the more frequent representation of traditional attributes in comparison to the Western-oriented aspect of the country's national brand. Therefore, the was concluded that contemporary Georgian cinema has a significant capacity in terms of illustrative shaping and subsequent accessible representation of the country's national brand on the international scene that had been reinforced by the development of streaming services. It is to be noted, however, that from the industrial perspective, in order to become a more solid instrument in terms of nation branding, Georgian national cinema requires more investments and technological advancement since there had been observed a recurring pattern of implementation of coproduction practices in tandem with other countries.

The submitted thesis applies both theoretical concepts and methodological approaches to the exemplary case of Georgia which is characterised by a relatively young and currently evolving national brand and a mature, long-lasting tradition of national cinema. It observes and emphasises the practical correlation between the two concepts on the cross-disciplinary level. Consequently, it provides a model for further studies in the discussed direction with the capacity of a broader application on the other states in the region. Due to the interdisciplinarity of the conducted research and the currently widely debated issues

related to disinformation and resilience to it, this study can be utilised as complementary material for the study of legitimate strategic communication in comparison to propaganda. In a narrower sense, however, the conducted research provides a ground for further exploration of capacity, content, and further development of Georgia's national brand either in compliance with the introduced approach through national cinema or in other promising directions not concentrated solely on the cultural aspect since there is a vast room for further discussion as far as the other area of the country's brand is concerned.

Summary

Being a relatively recent discipline in the post-Soviet space, nation branding constitutes a promising area for scientific research. The thesis contributes to the debate concerning the instrumentalisation of national cinema in the context of nation branding strategies applied to the case study of contemporary Georgia. While approaching the issue from a cross-disciplinary perspective in terms of conceptual, theoretical, and historical frameworks, the submitted thesis offers the empirical methodological model for further scientific research related to the examination of the correlation between nation branding and national cinema. Furthermore, based on the case study of Georgia, this thesis in praxis provides an analysis of the key aspects related to the country's developing national brand.

Through the profound examination of scientific literature, it appeared that both nation branding and national cinema are complex concepts extending to a wider range of disciplines. The former could be approached from economic, political, and cultural dimensions. The latter is to be analysed through the prism of productional, textual and consumption practices. Yet, from the instrumentalist perspective, national cinema confirmed its status as a flexible tool used for the representation of a country's image given primarily its technical characteristics and accessibility to a wider audience.

Through the conducted study, it was discovered that while balancing at the brink of contraposed attributes associated with West and East, modern and traditional, Georgia's national brand is in the course of formation, which is aimed at the unification of both aspects. This duality is grounded upon the historical milestones, shifts in national discourses and current strategic narratives. Since the country is well known through its unique national cinematography and in this regard visible on the international scene, the latter established

itself as a potent instrument in the context of representation of specific attributes of developing nation branding.

The empirical analysis revealed that there could be observed a modest leaning towards the more frequent representation of traditional attributes in comparison to the Western-oriented aspect of the country's national brand. Furthermore, it was noted that for further enhancement of instrumentalist capacity of Georgian national cinema in the context of consolidation and promotion of the country's brand, it requires more financial investments and technological advancement.

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