Holiday in a conflicted area

A qualitative analysis about changes in tourist perceptions about the Israel-Palestine conflict

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Master thesis Cultural Geography

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Preface

This is the master thesis of my research on tourists' perception changes about the Israel-Palestine conflict. This thesis was written between October 2011 and June 2012 at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences of the University of Groningen.

I have always been interested in the Middle East region and have visited many countries in this region. Many find the subject of their thesis leading, but for me it was the region or country. From the beginning of my study at University of Groningen, I decided to write my thesis about something in the Middle East.

I really enjoined my stay in Israel and Palestine. I made lots of friends. Besides, it was my first time alone abroad. That is partly why I am proud that I went to Israel to do this research.

Sometimes it was hard for me to do the interviews about the conflict Israel - Palestine. I myself have a very strong opinion about the conflict and it was hard not to enter into discussion with people sharing their (different) opinions. Nevertheless, I succeeded in making an objective thesis.

First of all I would like to thank Professor Vanclay for his good accompaniment. Especially for his quick replies on the e-mails I sent him and the useful suggestions he gave me. And not to forget, all his English corrections!

Furthermore, I would like to thank my boyfriend Maarten for his suggestion and support. He always was willing to check some chapters for me and he came with several great suggestions.

I would also like to thank the respondents of all the interviews. They provided me with their opinions about the conflict despite the sensitive subject. I thank them for their trust.

Lastly I would like to say that I really enjoined my studies at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences. All the courses were very interesting and provocative, and the personal interaction with teachers was especially nice to have. That makes this faculty unique.

I have now moved to Amsterdam to do a post-master in Teaching Geography at the University of Amsterdam, but I will certainly miss Groningen a lot.

Anouk Stiphout

Amsterdam, July 2012

Picture of me in the old town of Jerusalem

Summary

This research is about the differences between tourists' perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict before they arrive in Israel, and while they are there. We consider the following research question: *To what extent and how does visiting Israel change tourists' perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?* The following sub-questions will also be answered in this research:

1. What is 'perception' and how do tourists construct it?
2. What do tourists' perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict look like before arrival in Israel?
3. How does their visit change tourists' perceptions?
4. What information on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (e.g. media coverage; friends' stories) were tourists exposed to before travelling to Israel and how prepared were they?

This is a qualitative study. Fifty in-depth semi-structured interviews were held with tourists who visited Israel for the first time. The tourists were interviewed at diverse tourist attractions in Israel. Transcripts were all coded and analyzed with MaxQDA, using the theory of the 'tourist gaze' (Urry, 1991). Tourists look at the world in a different way: they look at what they encounter and are looking for unfamiliar experiences (Urry, 1990). The tourist gaze consists of 5 categories: 'daily life activities', 'signs', 'senses', 'unique elements' and 'unique objects'.

The most important results are shown below:

- 68% of the respondents had a clear perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict before they visited Israel and while visiting Israel;
- This perception was mainly based on the following categories of tourist gaze: 'signs', 'senses' and 'daily life activities';
- 71% of the tourists actively prepared themselves for their visit by watching the news and reading travel books about the Israel-Palestine conflict;
- 65% of the respondents discussed elements of their perception before visiting Israel that fit in the category 'signs'. This number decreased to 11% when discussing their perception of the conflict while actually present in Israel. One reason for this could be that the information sources they were exposed to before travelling to Israel are one-sided when discussing conflict areas (Rouhana & Fiske);
- 18% of the respondents discussed elements of their perception before visiting Israel that fit in the category 'senses'. This increased to 39% when tourists discussed their perception of the conflict while actually present in Israel. This corresponds with the theory of Tuan: physically being physically present in a place can call up special emotions;
- 50% of the respondents discussed elements of their perception after arriving in Israel that fit in the category 'daily life activities' (only 12% mentioned these elements when discussing their perceptions before their visit). The respondents generally agreed that the conflict is less visible than they expected beforehand. This corresponds with theories addressing the influence of media before visiting a conflict area (Sakomoto et al., 2009).

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In this chapter we discuss the aim of this research. We also address the relevance of this research and the contents of subsequent chapters.

1.1 Research aim

When exposed to a limited amount of information about someone else, people will already start forming a first impression of that person, adding to it as more information becomes available. Such a first impression is often hard to change; even when the person in question is finally met. Similarly, when exposed to information about a given place (a nation; a city; a conflict area; a bedroom), people create an initial mental image of this place: an imagined geography. As more information is made available, this imagined geography will also be added to. As with first impressions of people, the question is to what extent the first impression of a place can be changed by actually visiting the place in question.

This research attempts to answer the question to what extent visiting an *actual* geography alters the visitor's *imagined* geography. As the visitor's imagined geography is based on exposure to articles, stories, pictures, rumors, etc. before departure, we would imagine that the strength of the imagined geography depends on the amount of such exposure. Hence visitors to a region that is in the news on a daily basis, or that is the subject of lengthy international debates, are likely to have a more developed imagined geography before arrival.

One such region is the Middle East: specifically Israel and Palestine. Due to the extent of its coverage in the international media, most visitors to Israel will very probably already have developed a strong mental image of the country's conflict with Palestine before arrival. The aim of this research is to explore to what extent tourists' perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict change during their stay in Israel. By doing so, we try to determine how and to what extent imagined geographies based on considerable exposure to a selection of stories, images, or videos beforehand can still be changed by an actual visit to the area in question.

1.2 Research questions

This paper specifically answers the following question:

To what extent and how does visiting Israel change tourists' perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

This question will be split up in the several sub-questions below.

1. What is 'perception' and how do tourists construct it?
2. What do tourists' perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict look like before arrival in Israel?
3. How does their visit change tourists' perceptions?
4. What information on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (e.g. media coverage; friends' stories) were tourists exposed to before travelling to Israel and how prepared were they?

1.4 Relevance

There has only been limited research done on perceptions in conflict areas (Sande et al., 1989; Jervis, 1976; Bronfenbrenner, 1961; White, 1965; Rouhana & Fiske, 1995). However, none of this research addresses changes during the stay in a conflict area. Mansfeld (1994) and Fuch and Reichel (2008)

carried out some similar research on perceptions in conflict areas, and this thesis can add to this research.

Mansfeld (1994) researched the extent of the Israeli – Palestinian conflict's effect on inbound tourist flow to this region, and whether this effect is market differentiated. Mansfeld thinks that when tourists are more familiar with the Middle East region, they are less reluctant to visit a Middle Eastern country as a tourist. They will be less influenced by media representations due to their own (little) experience in that area. However, this was not the case. Patterns were found, but these were not statistically significant. Mansfeld's research addresses whether tourists will still go to Middle Eastern countries, and especially to Israel, if they are aware of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. My thesis will add whether this perception of the conflict changes *during* tourists' stay in Israel.

Fuch and Reichel (2008) researched the concept of destination risk perception while focusing on Israel. Fuch and Reichel asked around 750 tourists in Israel what their perception of risk was prior to their arrival in Israel. They concluded that the destination risk of Israel is a multidimensional concept, where each dimension encompasses several issues. Fuch and Reichel did not research the actual change in perception of risk. They asked tourists only what their perception of risk was before arriving in Israel. They mention that it would be interesting to see if perceptions can change while tourists are in Israel. Although this research is not about the change of risk perception, it is about the change of total perception of a conflict, which carries risk.

1.5 Chapter contents

In chapter 2 the theoretical framework and the conceptual model are shown. Subsequently, the methodology can be found in chapter 3. Besides the research methodology, ethical considerations, reliability, representativeness and validity are discussed. Chapter 4, 5 and 6 present the results. Chapter 4 shows the results of the tourists' perception of the conflict before they visited Israel and chapter 5 of the tourists' perception while they were in Israel. Chapter 6 addresses the preparation, perception change and extended information of the tourists. Finally, this all leads to a conclusion in chapter 7.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the main theories that are relevant for this research are shown. Theories on the perception of a place are discussed in 2.1, and this chapter ends with the conceptual model for this research, including theoretical substantiation.

2.1 Theory

Different theories are discussed in this section. Firstly: how is perception built up and what are its consequences? (2.1.1). Next we focus on 'imagined geography' and how it is constructed (2.1.2). Different definitions of tourism are discussed in 2.1.3: what should be included in this definition and what should not? Finally, we discuss the perception of a conflict area (2.1.4).

2.1.1 Perception of place

Our images of a place are not only built up from visual signals and our knowledge of the environment, but are also built up from crucial information derived from taste, touch, smell and hearing (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). Although much of the information in geography is visual (Rose, 1993), other senses also contribute to understanding of our surrounding. So perception is not only about sight; it is about all our senses.

Perception is an attempt to give meaning to stimuli which trigger the different senses in life. Stimuli can be physical or chemical, and the brain uses these to see, hear, smell, taste and feel. Some stimuli can have more than one feature: they can be smelled as well as seen (for example smoke). The brain automatically selects and interpretes stimuli and gives them meaning (Bloemers & Hagedoorn, 1996).

Kirk argues that people do not make decisions based on full and objective information about what really exists in the world. He states that humans make decisions based on what our senses tell us that exist and what our brain is capable of dealing with (Kirk, 1963). So according to Kirk, perception are used when making decisions. How the human mind assimilates these perceptions is different for each individual. In Kirk's approach, the human itself plays an inactive, passive role and the surrounding is leading. But cognition focuses on the interpretation and analysis of perceived information by the brain. This is different for every human (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001).

Summing up, people's knowledge of their surroundings is perceived through their senses and mediated by processes in their mind. Our behavior and decisions are based on objective knowledge and on perception. Perception results from our personal interactions with our surroundings, as well as the information which we derive from other representations of those surroundings (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). Think, for example, of different media, storytelling and experiences. This is backed up by Sakamoto et al. (2009), among others, who researched the correlation between the change of perception of Japanese citizens towards foreign people during the Olympics of 1992. They report that the correlation between the eventual change of perception and the amount of the subject's exposure to Olympic-related television was significant.

Perception changes can occur due to stimulus changes. The perceptual system which responds to change can be portrayed as enhancing contrast. Perception at any particular time or place depends on spatially adjacent information, and can therefore change at any time. Sensory contrast has been explored most as a mechanism of visual perception (Kluender et al., 2003) and is one of the reasons too that perception changes. Contrast can exaggerate changes in perception. Changes in contrast perception are incorporated in the earliest visual process, which involves locating, representing and interpreting (Marr, 1976; Marr, 1982).

Figure 2.1 shows how 'real' information leads to a representation of one's surroundings through perception. First there is the real world: a person's surroundings, how the surroundings really are. These surroundings contain information, but not only the surroundings count. The information a person read or heard before about these surroundings plays a part here as well. This information is perceived through (and influenced by) the senses. This perception leads to cognition in the mind. Cognition is the knowledge which a person already had about a certain subject and is influenced by the personality and knowledge of a person. Finally this all leads to a personal representation of the original 'real' surroundings.
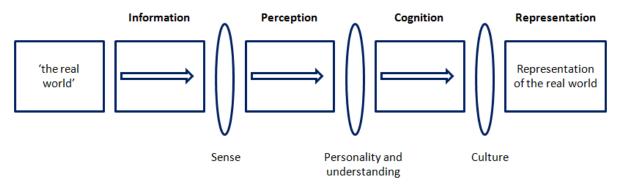

Figure 2.1 How information leads to representation in the mind (Knox & Marston, 2004)

Perception of a place can finally result in 'mental maps'. Mental maps are created by direct or indirect means. Indirect means due to elicitation and/or assessment of places by verbal means, producing data which is presented in map form after processing. In fact, mental maps are presentations of perceptions (Gould and White, 1974). These maps are therefore different for each individual. Each person forms a mental map of a place with information which is useful for them, and the mental map reflects the personal relation with the surrounding. As such, mental maps are not complete but simplified and distorted. They are simplified because it is impossible that a person can remember every image and is able to reproduce these images including details. They are distorted due to their own subjectivity of the surrounding (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001).

Concluding, perception is based on different sources of information and influenced by individual senses. Perception can be different for everybody because not everybody receives the same information of a surrounding; in fact perceptions are always unique. In this research we will focus on the way that perception is formed by information (the second and third block of figure 2.1).

2.1.2 Imagined Geography

Edward Said (1978) first introduced the term 'imagined geography' in his book *Orientalism*. In *Orientalism,* Said describes how the Orient is represented through a dominant western framework which helps to legitimize European hegemony. He states that the European sense of self is predicated on the other. He describes this as imagined geography.

Anderson (1983) gives a different definition on the concept of imagined geography. Anderson claims that nation states are imagined communities: they are not based on territory but rather they are mental constructs. He underpins this statement by saying that in no nation members know every fellow member, but all the members feel a shared identity. This identity will be sustained by members despite any differences and injustices between them (Anderson, 1983). The link between Anderson's and Said's definitions is that both are concerned with how we imagine whose space it is and how we construct self and other (Valentine, 1999).

Imagined geographies are important because they help to shape our attitude towards other places and people (May, 1996). Besides, imagined geographies help us understand space and construct our

sense of self and other. Imagined geographies are produced by collective actions and individual perceptions. Imagined geographies are in fact perceptions of unknown places (Valentine, 1999).

Imagined geographies are influenced by moral representations and cultural representations. Moral representations include for example whether we should belong to a specific group or not, or what we should or should not eat. Cultural representations are more about what is 'good' and 'bad' and what is appropriate to do. Due to these moral and cultural influences, it is difficult for us to see ourselves in another way. You could say that geographies are lived as they are constituted (Valentine, 1999).

Imagined geographies can also have something to do with forming images of the unknown. When you read something about a place, you unconsciously, subjectively remember some of this information: what you think is important. So people filter information about a place from their environment, personality and culture to produce cognitive images of their environment: pictures or representations of the world that can be called to mind through the imagination. Incomplete subjective information, however, leads to distortions in humans' cognitive images. Once a person goes beyond familiar terrain, imagined geography plays a larger role. A person then has to rely on often biased information from other people, books, magazines, etc. But they also have to rely on themselves; what they remember, like, or think about places is significant. It is about how that information attributes to the place, all are functions of culture, experiences and culture to which we have been exposed (Knox & Marston, 2010).

2.1.3 Tourism

It is difficult to formulate a definition of tourism. For example, are you a tourist if you make a day trip from your home? And what about when you stay over for at least one night? And if you go abroad for a conference for example, does that count? Over the years, researchers invented many different definitions for a tourist or tourism. According to Leiper (1979) all these could be reduced to three main definitions: one economic, one technical and one holistic.

McIntosh (1977) had the following definition for tourism, from an economic angle: *"Tourism can be defined as the science, art and business of attracting and transporting visitors, accommodating them and graciously catering to their needs and wants."* But McIntosh forgets the human: the tourist.

A technical definition is given by the International Union of Official Travel Organizations (1971): *"Temporary visitors staying more than twenty-four hours in the country visited."* But this definition is weak. For example, if you made a walk in the Swiss Alps while your accommodation is in the French Alps, were you not a tourist that day?

The holistic approach attempts to embrace 'the whole' essence of tourism. Jafari (1977) defined tourism in a holistic way: *"Tourism is the study of man away from his usual habitat, of the industry which responds to his needs, and of the impacts that both he and the industry have on the host's socio-cultural, economic and physical environments."* Although this is a holistic definition it still ignores the factors of distance and purpose (Leiper, 1979).

Finally, Leiper created his own definition: *"Tourism is the system involving the discretionary travel and temporary stay of persons away from their usual place of residence for one or more nights, excepting tours made for the primary purpose of earning remuneration from points en route."* In this research we will use Leiper's definition because the purpose, distance in relation to the home and the duration are mentioned clearly; this definition is the most comprehensive one.

Urry (1990) points out that one of the main elements in tourism is the difference between the unknown experience and the everyday experience. According to him, a tourist is both looking for unfamiliar experiences; for the unknown, as well for familiar experience. A tourist looks at the world in a different way: a tourist looks at what he encounters (Lippard, 1999). This is what Urry (1990)

calls the 'tourist gaze'. The tourist gaze is socially constructed, as each tourist gaze differs depending on culture and society. Tourists always have some expectations about their destination or a specific place within a destination. This is due to different stimuli like storytelling, pictures, television, websites and books. These stimuli form and strengthen the tourist gaze. Tourists chose a specific place because of their expectations, and these expectations define the tourist gaze. This is not a random selection, but a selective process; the tourist *gazes* only at places which he knew beforehand.

There is not one single product on which the tourist gaze is focused. In total, four visual categories can be distinguished (Urry, 1990). The first category is familiar 'daily life activities' carried out in unfamiliar surroundings, such as an inhabitant of England going for a promenade, but in the Amazon jungle. The second category concerns the gaze of 'unfamiliar elements' of things which should be familiar. For example: showers in small villages in central Africa will look different than showers in Europe. A third category is 'unique objects' like Big Ben and the Taj Mahal, most people do know these objects. Finally, tourists can gaze at 'signs', like trendy New York or a dangerous Burundi (Urry, 1990; van Eck, 2012). Urry based this on the earlier work of Culler (1981). Culler notes that all tourists are looking for signs that underpin their stereotyping. For example, when a tourist is in Paris and sees a couple walking hand-in-hand the sign is a romantic Paris. According to Urry (1991) there are two different kinds of signs: metaphor and metonym. Metaphor includes images or places as standing for something else, like the sunset as a metaphor for romance. Metonym involves the substitution of some features or effect or cause of the phenomenon itself. Like military presence can be a metonym for war.

Urry revised his 1990 research because he found that there was no mention of 'senses' that could play a part in tourists' experiences. Smells, sounds and touches can contribute to one's experience of a place (Bull, 2000; Urry, 1992). When you are walking down the road with a walkman, for example, you experience that place differently than a person who walks down the same road without one, due to the lack of ambient noise (Bull, 2000). Hence the tourist gaze is not only about sight, but also about the other senses.

Urry (1991) emphasized that tourist gaze is self-consciously organized by professionals, such as writers of travel books. And those different gazes are outlined by different discourses. So the reason for travelling as a tourist matters for the final gaze.

The theory of the tourist gaze is significant for this research. Urry (1990) states that tourists always have a certain expectation about their destination due to different sources like storytelling, television, websites and books. Because of this, choosing a certain touristic place is always selective. In this research we examine the difference between expectations (perceptions) of tourists before entering Israel, and their perceptions once they are actually in Israel. We expect that most tourists would have certain expectations about the Israel-Palestine conflict because this conflict is regularly on the news, so the 'tourist gaze' has been developed beforehand. The tourist's perception (which we call imagined geography, as defined in 2.1.2) can change once in Israel when influenced by one or more of the four visual categories mentioned above, or by other stimuli such as smell or sound. During their stay in Israel, tourists will be more exposed to one or more of these gaze categories and for this reason perception of the conflict can change.

2.1.4 Perception of a conflicted area

Research on perceptions in conflict areas has generally focused on parties who enjoy equal power relations (Bronfenbrenner, 1961; White, 1965), mutual perception and misperceptions (Sande et al. 1989; Jervis, 1976) and mutual threat (Stein, 1988). The overall conclusion of this research is that the perception that applies to one side is the mirror image of the other side (Rouhana & Fiske, 1995). But important to consider is that parties in a conflicted area never enjoy equal power. This is especially

the case in multiethnic states (Horowitz, 1985). According to Rouhana and Fiske (1995) this consideration is central to understanding the dynamics of inter-ethnic conflict, as each party might bring different perceptions and motivations to the conflict. Hence differences in power status can affect perceptions of power, threat and intensity of conflict, thus affecting the strategic conflict behavior of each party. We can derive from this information that because power is not equally divided between ethnicities and in the media, the outcome is not equally divided either.

Tuan (1979) researched the relationship between fear and place. He argued that fear is a fundamental human experience. Fear can be associated with specific places. Fear or anxiety within a place can happen when a person is away from home in a place where he or she is not comfortable. These feelings of fear can arise because of the presence of other people, noise and complexity. What we know about different places is mostly based on what others tell us. It is about stories. Some stories might say it is a dangerous place to visit. These stories do have an effect on the behavior of people (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1992; Herbert, 1993). Persons can avoid these places.

Luyendijk (2011) researched in the Middle East region and concluded that the party with the best media methods and the most money has the most influence in the region and the world. Due to these media benefits, one party in a conflicted area can have a more 'positive' influence on the perceptions of third parties than the other party.

My research does not discuss the details or motivations of the Israel-Palestine conflict, but aims to determine to what extent imagined geography is affected by the information tourists receive before arrival. Tourists indicated which information they received about the conflict beforehand, and what their sources were, and the way in which these media represent the conflict is assessed at a later date.

2.2 Conceptual model

This research focuses on the change in tourists' perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As seen in the model (figure 2.2), a distinction is made between the perception of the conflict before going to Israel and the perception while tourists actually *are* in Israel. For measuring this perception, the theory of the tourist gaze (Urry, 1991) is used. During their stay in Israel, it is likely that the tourists' perceptions of the conflict change when they become exposed to one or more of the five categories determined by Urry.

Tourists always have certain expectations about their destination, based on sources like storytelling, television, websites and books (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Urry, 1991). Most people will have certain expectations about the Israel Palestine conflict because the conflict is often in the news, so most tourists will have a certain 'tourist gaze' beforehand. It is possible that the eventual change has something to do with the exposed information about the conflict (Luyendijk, 2011; Rouhana and Fiske, 1995). Respondents were also asked what information they were exposed to about the conflict before going to Israel and while in Israel. Besides the extended information, preparation is important as well. It is possible that the perception of a person who is well prepared through different sources of information would change less than the perception of a person who was not well prepared before arriving.
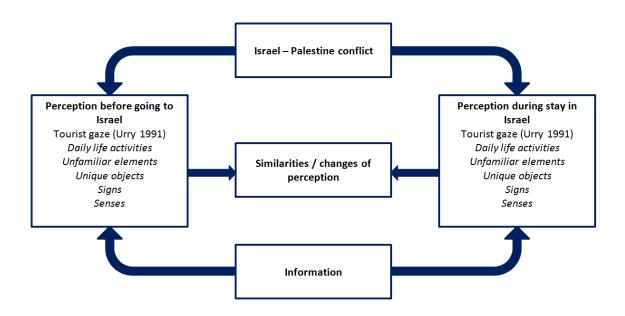
Figure 2.2 Conceptual model

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter focuses on the methodology used in this research. We will first discuss the type of research used (3.1), followed by refined definitions of used concepts (3.2). In 3.3 we discuss the specific method of data collection for each research sub-question, followed by any ethical considerations (3.4). Finally the reliability, representativeness and validity of this research is discussed in 3.5.

3.1 Type of research

This research is a combination of descriptive and explanatory research. As noted above, the research question is: *To what extent and how does visiting Israel change tourists' perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?*

In fact this research question consists of two parts: (1) *"To what extent does visiting Israel change tourists' perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?"* and (2) *"how does visiting Israel change tourists' perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?"*.

The first part of the research question is descriptive. We describe *to what extent* perceptions change. Descriptive research does not address what caused a certain situation, but is purely factual (Babbie, 1999). Although descriptive research tends to be quantitative, we will answer this first part of the question in a qualitative way.

The second part of the research question is not descriptive, but explanatory or analytical. Descriptive research cannot be used to prove a causal relationship (Babbie, 1999). Explanatory research, on the other hand, does try to look for the actual reasons for an observed phenomenon (New York University, 2011). In fact, the way of change is a consequence of exposed information or experiences. That is way this part of the question is explanatory.

3.2 Definition of concepts

Below you will find the refinement and specification of concepts used in this research.

Imagined geography
"Imagined geography is a mental image of a place. It is produced by collective actions and individual perceptions and helps us to understand space and construct our sense of self and other" (Valentine, 1999, p. 47). In this research we apply this definition of imagined geography to places a person has not yet visited.

Israel
This research was carried out in Israel, not including the Gaza Strip, East-Jerusalem and the West Bank. The Gaza Strip, East-Jerusalem and the West Bank are highly disputed territories; some regard them as parts of Israel, others do not. To avoid confusion, no interviews were carried out in these areas. For the sake of this research, Israel therefore refers to the territory shown in green in figure 3.1.

Perception
"Image of a place. These are built of from visual signals, knowledge of the environment and senses" (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001, p. 42).

Tourism
"Tourism is the system involving the discretionary travel and temporary stay of persons away from their usual place of residence for one or more nights, excepting tours made for the primary purpose of earning remuneration from points en route" (Leiper, 1979, p. 390).

<u>Tourist</u>
The tourists interviewed during this research were all tourists living and coming from outside Israel. They were aged between 18 and 70 years. Only tourists traveling to Israel for the first time were interviewed.

<u>Tourist gaze</u>
The 'tourist gaze' is the way in which a tourist looks at his destination. Tourists always have some expectations about their destination or a specific place within their destination. Tourists choose a specific destination based on their expectations, and these expectations in turn define their tourist gaze. Each tourist gaze differs depending on culture and society. Tourist gaze can be subdivided in 5 categories: 'unique objects', 'unfamiliar elements', 'senses', 'daily life activities' and 'signs'. (Urry, 1991).

3.3 Methods of data collection

The method of data collection differs for each research question. Below you can find which methods are used for each sub-question.

3.3.1 Perception

Research sub-question: *What is perception and how do tourists construct it?*

This question is answered through literature research. First a general overview of perception is given. Subsequently the research focuses on perception for tourists. This is where the concept of tourist gaze comes in. Each element that influences and determines tourist gaze is discussed and linked to the concept of perception. The data will be obtained in the Netherlands.

3.3.2 Before and after perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict

Research sub-questions*: 1. What do tourists' perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict look like before arrival in Israel? 2.How does their visit change tourists' perception?*

These questions were answered by in-depth interviews with tourists visiting Israel. The interviews were semi-structured. With semi-structured interviews the interviewer can easily respond to the answers of the respondent and the respondent can add interesting information (Verhoeven, 2004). The main structure of the interviews is shown in appendix 1. In total 50 tourists were interviewed.

The interviews were held in Israel between January 30 and February 8 2012. Israel is a country with diverse types of tourism (pilgrims of diverse religions, young party tourists, divers, etc.). To avoid biased information due to interviewing only one specific tourist group , the interviews were held at diverse cities and at diverse tourist attractions within these cities. Tourists were interviewed in the main tourist cities: Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Nazareth, Eilat and the Dead Sea area (see the red dots on figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Interview locations

Table 3.1 shows the general characteristics of the respondents and figure 3.2 shows the country of resident of the respondents.

Sex	Frequency	Location	Frequency	Age	Frequency	Reason for visiting Israel	Frequency
Male	26	Haifa	7	18 - 25	24	Birthright	4
Female	24	Nazareth	8	25 - 50	22	Business/school	4
		Tel Aviv	8	50 - 70	4	Interested in the country	26
		Jerusalem	10			Pilgrim	2
		Eilat	9			Visiting friends	7
		Dead Sea	8			Voluntering	7

Table 3.1 General characteristics of the respondents

Respondents were selected to participate in the research at diverse tourist attractions in the abovementioned cities. The researcher selected on age (older than 18 years) and if it was their first time visiting Israel.
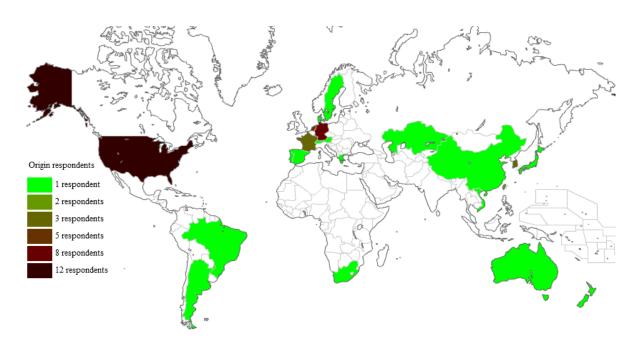

Figure 3.2 Country of residence of the respondents

The interviews were held face-to-face. It was taken into consideration that tourists may not speak openly about their perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The risk of social response bias (receiving socially desirable answers instead of truthful answers) was minimized as much as possible by letting the respondents feel comfortable, by explaining the non-political nature of this research and by anonymizing the results among other things. The average duration of each interview was roughly 20 minutes. Notes were made while respondents were telling their stories. Afterwards, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed with MaxQDA.

MaxQDA is a software program for doing qualitative analysis and works with a coding system. Parts of the transcripts are coded differently for each research question. In this way, patterns of differences and similarities between the respondents' answers can be shown.

Answers to the question: *What is your reason for visiting Israel?* were categorized by different touristic reasons. The codes used here are:

- Tour through Middle Eastern countries;
- Pilgrimage;
- Birthright Israel;[1]
- Voluntary work;
- Interested in Israel.

Some of the codes used during the research were Urry's (1990, 1991) five categories of influences on tourist gaze. The interviews were coded with the following elements:

- Daily life activities;
- Unfamiliar elements;
- Unique objects'

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[1] Birthright is an American non-profit organization that sponsored a 10-days trip for young American Jewish adults to visit Israel and its most important sites. The aim of the trip is creating a connection between Jewish citizens all over the world and especially with Israel.

- Signs;
- Senses.

During the interviews, tourists discussed their perceptions of the conflict. The transcripts were then coded with the five elements of the tourist gaze. As they are very broad free associations were used within the five elements to add more nuance to the respondents' opinions. The following free associations were made (figure 3.4).

Code (tourist gaze, Urry 1991)	Used sub code
Senses	
	Fear
	Connection
	Religious connection
	Good feeling
Signs	
	News
	Security
	National sites
Unique objects	
	West Bank barrier[2]
Unfamiliar elements	
Daily life activities	
	Conflict involved
	Conflict not involved

Figure 3.4 Used codes and sub codes

The free associations were made after all the interviews had been carried out. Within each transcript, the relation of each sentence to one of the five tourist gaze categories was examined. This is why the code 'unique objects' only has one subcode: West Bank Barrier. Of course Israel has more than one unique object, but when respondents discussed the Israel-Palestine conflict they only mentioned the West Bank barrier in relation to their perceptions.

The above coding of Urry's tourist gaze was applied to answers to the following questions:

- *What was your perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict before you came to Israel?*
- *What is your perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict while you are here?*

In this way it will become clear what tourists' perceptions were based on, and to what extent their perception changed. Finally, it will become clear if any potential change of perception is related to one of these elements of tourist gaze. For example, it could be that a pattern emerges where perception changes are mostly related to the element 'signs'.

Using above methodologies the following sub-questions will be answered, divided into two chapters:

Chapter 5 Perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict before going to Israel
Research sub-question: *What do tourists' perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict look like before arrival in Israel?*

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[2] West Bank Barrier is a separation barrier constructed by Israel to divide Israel and the West Bank territory.

Research sub- questions: *How does their visit change tourists' perception?*

Respondents were asked what their perceptions were of the Israel-Palestine conflict before arrival in Israel and what they were while in Israel. Due to practical reasons it is not possible to ask a large amount of tourists what they think of the conflict before departure. The decision was therefore made to ask tourists in Israel itself what their perception of the conflict was before they arrived. Note that this may partially bias the obtained information (see chapter 8).

3.3.3 Preparation and extended information

Main research question: *Did the perception of tourists who were well prepared change less than tourist who were not well prepared?*

Sub research questions:

1. Which sources of information did the respondent use to prepare before going to Israel,
2. How prepared were the respondents according to themselves,
3. Did the perception about the conflict Israel-Palestine changed during the stay of the respondents? And finally
4. Is there a relation between preparation and perception change?

Is this chapter the amount of preparation will be compared to the presence of an actual perception change (a yes or no question). As can be seen in Appendix 1, respondents were asked to estimate for themselves how well prepared they were before coming to Israel. Comparing their answers to the possible changes in their perceptions will give us a picture of whether the level of preparation has an impact on perception change.

This data is analyzed with the aid of Excel. No statistical tests were carried out, as this is a qualitative research and the amount of respondents is too small for a useful statistical evaluation of the relation between preparation and perception change. The relation between preparation and perception changed should be seen as exploratory research, and may be helpful for further investigation.

3.4 Ethical considerations

During the research the following ethics were taken into account.

Anonymity and confidentiality: all interviews were anonymized to guarantee the confidentiality of the respondents In this way, the reservations people may have felt when asked to participate in the research were minimized.

Different nationalities: the researcher has a Dutch background and English is not her mother language. Because the mother language of many tourists to Israel is English, the researcher had to be well prepared for any questions that the respondents could possibly ask. For those respondents who did not speak English fluently, their answers were reformulated by the researcher and repeated to the respondent to ensure that all answers were understood correctly. Besides, there were 5 respondents interviewed who where Dutch. These interviews were held in Dutch. Afterwards, these transcripts were translated into English to make the comparison easier.

Risk of harm: it is possible that respondents do not like to talk about their perception of the conflict within Israel because it is a complicated and often emotional subject. To minimize this problem, the researcher always showed her student card to potential respondents. Respondents were likely to less afraid to talk to a student from a foreign country.

Voluntary participation: the respondents participated voluntarily. However, it may be that most respondents who participated did so because they have a clear opinion of the conflict and really want to share this opinion. Hence respondents with a less clear perception of the conflict may not have participated in the first place.

3.5 Reliability, representativeness and validity

Research can be considered reliable if repeating it with the same methodology at a different time would yield the same results (as long as other conditions were the same) (Verhoeven, 2004). Besides, the amount of random errors should be minimalized (Swanborn, 1991). Random errors are errors in measurement that lead to inconsistent values when repeated measures are taken. The question is whether the research is accurate. Would someone else doing the same research get the same answer? By anonymizing the interviews, demonstrating that the researcher is a student from a foreign country and only recording the interview with permission from the interviewee, we can be confident that respondents felt free to express themselves. The answers they gave can be considered reliable, and as long as their perceptions have not changed since the interview, we would expect similar answers when repeating this research.

Representativeness is to what extent the results of the research relate to a comparable group of people and situations (Segers, 1999): can we have confidence that these results apply to all tourists in Israel? By varying the ages and nationalities of the respondents and by varying the locations where respondents were found, we have ensured as much representativeness as possible with a sample of 50 people. As noted above, however, the fact that the interviews were voluntary may mean that only people with a clear opinion on the conflict were interviewed.

The validity of a research addresses the question whether what the researcher sought to research has really been researched (Verhoeven, 2004). The main interviews were firstly tried upon a person to test, as a pilot. By doing so, some abstract concepts like perception could be operationalized to more common concepts for those who are unfamiliar with the subject. Operationalization increases the validity. Furthermore, the interview questions were asked as neutrally as possible and leading questions were avoided. In this way the underlying concepts of perception and imagined geography can be measured as much as possible.

Chapter 4 Results: before going to Israel

This chapter answers the sub-question: *What do tourists' perceptions (imagined geography) of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict look like before arrival in Israel?* The results concerning tourists' perception of the conflict before going to Israel are shown below. As explained in the previous chapter, the interviews have been coded by the theory of tourist gaze (Urry, 1991). The sections below address the different elements of tourist gaze. A general section first discusses the codes used, and the sections after that focus on the specific codes: respectively daily life activities (4.2), unique objects (4.3), signs (4.4) and finally senses (4.5).

4.1 Results coding system

The interviews are analyzed using the theory of the tourist gaze (Urry, 1991). This theory consists of five categories: 'daily life activities', 'unfamiliar elements',' unique objects', 'signs' and 'senses'. Table 4.1 shows the frequency with which each code appears in the transcripts of the interviews, and the percentage of total codes that this represents. The codes in this chapter only apply to tourists' perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict *before* they went to Israel.

Code	Sub code	Frequency code	Percentage code
Senses		10	17.85
	Fear	5	8.93
	Connection	2	3.57
	Religious connection	3	5.36
	Good feeling	-	-
Signs		36	64.30
	News	36	64.29
	Security	-	-
	National sites	-	-
Unique objects		3	5.35
	West Bank Barrier	3	-
Unfamiliar elements		-	-
Daily life activities		7	12.50
	Conflict involved	1	1.79
	Conflict not involved	6	10.71

Table 4.1 Frequency and percentage codes before going to Israel

As is seen in Table 4.1, no text of the interview transcripts is coded with 'unfamiliar elements'. Clearly, respondents did not have any expectations about the conflict with Israel concerning 'unfamiliar elements of things which should be familiar'. The four remaining codes are analyzed below.

4.2 Daily life activities

In total seven respondents (12.5% of codes) had some perceptions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before they went to Israel. Six of these respondents know some people from Israel or were Jewish themselves. Due to this, the respondents knew many stories about daily life despite the

ongoing conflict (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). Six out of these seven respondents had the perception that the conflict is not that visible in Israel's daily life. One respondent stated:

"I have travelled with many Israeli so I knew there were many people in Israel with different attitudes. So I knew liberal Jews and orthodox Jews and conservative Jews; so I knew Israel was a combination of different views." (Male, 38 years, United States)

One respondent stated that he perceived that the conflict played a role in daily life. He had the following to say about his perceptions of the conflict before arriving in Israel:

"I was paranoid to come to Israel. I thought I had some feeling of insecurity because of conflict. ... I thought the conflict was totally involved in daily life and I could feel the conflict all the time." (Male, 25 years, France)

4.3 Unique objects

Only 3 respondents (5%) had a perception of the conflict that was associated with 'unique objects'. All these respondents discussed the West Bank Barrier which divides Palestinian territory and Israel (see figure 4.1). A respondent describes:

"Actually, I did not know much about the conflict with Palestine. Of course I knew that there was a conflict and how the conflict was created. I heard about the wall through Jerusalem and about how the wall divides Palestine and Israel. My opinion at first was, it is like a copy of the Berlin wall. It is definitely not a peace making wall" (Male, 24, the Netherlands; translated)

Figure 4.1 Picture of the West Bank Barrier

4.4 Signs

As discussed in the theoretical framework, 'signs' are about stereotyping. 'Signs' is the most coded category of the tourist gaze theory (64%). One reason for this could be that this chapter discusses perceptions *before* people actually visited Israel. 'Signs' are mostly constructed by travel agents, travel books and media (Urry, 1991; Rouhana & Fiske, 1995), and the information most of the tourists gathered before travelling to Israel came from the news and from guidebooks (see 4.6). Most tourists were not exposed to other sources of information.

One of the main statements falling within the category 'signs' was that respondents thought that Israel was a dangerous country due to the conflict. All perceptions in this category were based on general news. Below are some noteworthy quotes:

"Before I came to Israel I was very aware of the conflict. When you see just every day the news you know something about it. We in Austria are very pro Jews I think. I was that before I came here. I just felt that the Jews deserve their place to live." (Female, 21, Austria)

"Before I came to Israel I heard a lot about it on the news. I think like everybody has. It was very special to come here. I thought I had to be very careful." (Female, 44, Spain)

"My perceptions of Israel before I came here where that Palestinians are mistreated. And you know the images of Israel that everybody carries weapons and drive crazy. I read a lot about Israel and the conflict with Palestine but I always knew that there was no possible solution all due to religion." (Female, 22, Germany)

"I thought Israel was very dangerous because you see it all over the news that people got killed by suicide bombs or other bad attacks. But friends convinced me of going to Israel." (Male, 25, South-Korea)

Tourists always have a certain expectation of their destination based on the news (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Urry, 1991). Some 64% of all codes in the transcripts concerning perceptions before going to Israel fall in the category 'signs', and most perceptions in this category were based on the news. This corresponds with the theory that news is one of the most important factors for creating perceptions of any given place (Rouhana & Fiske, 1994; Holloway & Hubbard, 2001).

4.5 Senses

Ten respondents in total (18%) discussed senses and feelings while describing their perception of the conflict before they went to Israel. Five respondents discussed feelings of fear; two felt a general connection with Israel and three felt a special religious connection with Israel. One man described his connection as follows:

"Everyone from Germany has special relationship with Israel due to the holocaust in World War 2, I think it has something to do with guilt. ... Anyway, I feel connected with Israel because I am a German. I would never imagine travelling to other states in this region and especially not to Palestine." (Male, 36, Germany)

One group of tourists feels especially connected with Israel and has a strong opinion about the conflict. These are people who visit Israel during their birthright. These are all young Jewish Americans who are visiting the roots of their religion. For this reason their visit to Israel is coupled with a lot of different emotions, even before departure. They have a 'special discourse' (Urry, 1991). Two respondents discussed their connection with Israel in relation to their birthright trip:

"I went on birthright. I knew that Israel is an important place. You know, I am Jewish so when I was a young boy I always knew Israel as the promised land. My family told me and in synagogue I heard much about it. So I knew things about Israel but it was very positive. It was the promised land, the land of the Jews. It should be beautiful. And I never heard some conflicted horrible stories." (Male, 27, United States)

"Before I went here and now I still see the Israeli as a strong nation, everything that they do is good. I think and still think while being here that they must take out all the Arabs because the Arabs cause all the problems. I was convinced of this! I studied this and talked to a lot of Israeli's back home in US and they told me horrible stories about the Arabs. If we don't do anything they will slaughter us all!" (Male, 19, United States)

The other transcripts are coded with 'senses' (five times in total) because of the fear people felt before going to Israel. Respondents mentioned fear of all the soldiers on the streets, fear of the tension between Muslims and Jews, fear for the strict border control or fear to go into buses due to a risk of suicide attacks (Horowitz, 1985). Two respondents stated for example:

"I live in a Jewish neighborhood in New York. … In New York there are many Jewish and Palestinian people. … I knew that the Israeli government is good for the Palestinians. But if you let the Palestinians take over Israel they would slaughter all of us if you refuse to become a Muslim. That really scares me! That is why it is good that Israeli does have the power, they don't slaughter the Muslims." (Male, 64, United States)

"I am Jewish and I knew many things about Israel and about the conflict as well. There are heartbreaking stories for both parties. I have family living over here and they told me some stories about suicide bombing." (Male, 26, United States)

4.5 Conclusion

The transcripts were analyzed with the aid of the theory of tourist gaze and its 5 categories (Urry, 1991). However, the category 'unfamiliar elements' is never used in the transcripts. It seems that respondents did not have any expectations about the conflict with Israel concerning 'unfamiliar elements of things which should be familiar'.

12.5% of the transcripts had something to do with 'daily life activities'. Almost all of these were from Jewish respondents. Because of this, they knew many stories about daily life in Israel during the prevailing conflict.

Only 5% of the respondents mentioned 'unique objects'. In all cases this referred to the West Bank Barrier that divides Israel with Palestine.

'Signs' was the most coded category of the tourist gaze theory (64%). This could be because this chapter concerns perception *before* visiting Israel and signs are mostly constructed by travel agents, travel books and the media (Urry, 1991; Rouhana & Fiske, 1995). One of the main recurring comments is that respondents thought that Israel was a dangerous country due to the conflict. 35 out of 36 codes concerned perceptions of the conflict based on general news.

Finally, 18% of the transcripts were coded with 'senses'. Most respondents shared feelings of fear but others felt a connection with Israel. People who were on birthright also talked about the conflict using words which were coded with 'senses'. They were visiting the roots of their religion. Due to this, their visit to Israel was coupled with a lot of different emotions, even before departure. These respondents had a 'special discourse'.

Chapter 5 Results: in Israel

This chapter answers the sub-question: *How does visiting Israel change tourists' perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict?* Below, the results are shown concerning tourists' perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict while in Israel. These parts of the interviews were also coded with the tourist gaze theory (Urry, 1991). The sections below address the different elements of tourist gaze. A general section first discusses the codes used, and the sections after that focus on the specific codes: respectively daily life activities (5.2), signs (5.3), senses (5.4) and a conclusion (5.5).

5.1 Results coding system

The interviews are analyzed using the theory of the tourist gaze (Urry, 1991). This theory consists of five categories: 'daily life activities', 'unfamiliar elements',' unique objects', 'signs' and 'senses'. Table 5.1 shows the frequency with which each code appears in the transcripts of the interviews, and the percentage of total codes that this represents. The codes in this chapter only apply to tourists' perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict *while present* in Israel.

Code	Sub code	Frequency code	Percentage code
Senses		21	39
	Fear	4	8
	Connection	7	13
	Religious connection	8	15
	Good feeling	1	2
Signs		6	11
	News	-	-
	Security	3	6
	National sites	3	6
Unique objects		-	-
	West Bank Barrier	-	-
Unfamiliar elements		-	-
Daily life activities		27	50
	Conflict involved	2	4
	Conflict not involved	25	47

Table 5.1 Frequency and percentage code while being in Israel

As can be seen in Table 5.1, none of the interview transcripts are coded with 'unfamiliar elements'. Clearly, respondents did not associate the conflict with 'unfamiliar elements of things which should be familiar'. Respondents also did not mention anything in relation to 'unique objects'. The different codes are analyzed below.

5.2 Daily life activities

Half of all the codes in the transcripts concerning perceptions while the respondents were in Israel were coded with 'daily life activities': 27 times in total. Of these 27 times, in 25 cases the respondents argued that the conflict was not as visible as they had expected it to be. They noted that that inhabitants of Israel were just living their normal lives (for an impression see figure 5.1). Respondents expected to feel and see more tension between different religions. Some quotes:

"Now that I'm in Israel I don't really feel the conflict. Of course you see many soldiers around the street but that is necessary to protect the nation of Israel. I thought Palestinians were almost only in Gaza and West Bank but I see that is not the case at all. The conflict is less tangible than I had expected." (Female, 26 years, United States)

"The point was securit; I did not feel insecure. The conflict was less on fire than I thought." (Male, 25 years, France)

"The contact and connection between the Muslims and the Jews is much better than I thought it would be. I thought Israel was much more divided between an Israeli and a Palestinian territory. But I see them living all mixed and that gives me a happy and warm feeling. Like the news is not always right." (Male, 24 years, Germany)

Figure 5.1 Mix of people whit different ethnicities walking through the old town of Jerusalem

While above quotes all share the opinion that the inhabitants of Israel are just living their lives, the two remaining respondents who mentioned 'daily life activities' felt the opposite about the Israel Palestine conflict. They considered the conflict to be more involved in daily life than they had expected it to be. A man from Sweden said:

"Yes my perceptions really did change. It is all much worse than I thought before. For example I was in Hebron and Hebron is a famous place when you think of the Israeli settlements. I knew there were settlements but I did not know how extreme it was and how many there were. A Palestinian told me that there were 2000 Israeli soldiers to defense 400 Israeli settlers. It is unbelievable for me." Man, 22 years, Sweden

The difference here is that these two respondents had visited Palestine, and they felt the conflict more because it is more visible in Palestine, especially in Hebron. (In figure 5.2 a general street view of Hebron is shown, near the Israeli settlements.) These respondents were therefore exposed to a broader range of stimuli that form perception, like vision (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Rose, 1993). The other 25 respondents did not mention that they had visited Palestine; only that they had visited an Israel where people were just living their daily lives.

Figure 5.2 Military surveillance near an Israeli settlement in Hebron

5.3 Signs

'Signs' are mostly constructed by travel agents, travel books and media (Urry, 1991; Rouhana & Fiske, 1995). In total there were six transcripts coded with 'signs' (11%). The relation with the transcripts and 'signs' is diverse. Three respondents worried about security. A woman said:

"First I always thought that it was more like a war zone over here. But then you are planning to go. Here I feel comfortable but you keep in mind all the things you see on the news." (Woman, 44 years, Spain)

News is one of the strongest determinants of a person's perceptions of a place that he or she has never visited before (Rouhana & Fiske, 1994; Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). Perception is partly based on information that we derive from other representations of the surroundings (Sakomoto et al. 2009; Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). These respondents clearly still keep stories from the news in mind.

The other 3 respondents mentioned national sites, which also fall under the category 'signs' (Urry, 1991). One American man who was on birthright in Israel describes:

"I saw national sites and I talked with Israeli people during my birthright. Now I really understand the reason why Israel exists." (Male, 27 years, United States)

Another interesting quote came from a woman. She discussed manipulation in Israeli museums, which made her feel more angry about the prevailing conflict. She stated:

"In museums they try all their way to deny the participation of the Muslims in Israel. It is all about the focus of the Jewish participation. Whenever they mention in museum it is always 'Jerusalem the capital of the state Israel' and repeatedly again… and again… in every museum." (Woman, 33 years, China)

This is another form of representation; but not only in the way the maker intended. Parties in a conflicted area never enjoy equal power, especially in multiethnic states (Horowitz, 1985). In its national museums, Israel seems to ignore the role of the Palestinians and of Palestine in the history of the region. These representations within museums can form perceptions (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001).

5.4 Senses

In total 21 respondents (39%) referred to senses and feelings when describing their perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict while in Israel. Eight respondents who were on birthright stated that they loved Israel more and more while in Israel. They have a special discourse (Urry, 1991). Below some quotes:

"I totally understand everything in Israel right now and I feel totally connected. Especially during my birthright trip. Wow that was amazing. I feel at home here and I did not think that would be. … It is the country which I carry with me in my heart. I cannot describe it. (Male, 27 years, United States)

"When I am in Israel I really feel in my heart the love of this country. While I am in Israel I feel the energy, the energy is everywhere! It is the love of the country in my heart. It happen at very small things. For example when I will go to the toilet I see the water tap and it is made in a very engineered way. … It is about the wow-feeling." (Male, 62 years, Portugal)

There were also seven respondents who felt a kind of connection with Israel even when they were not on birthright. One man said:

"I believe that because Jews are Middle Eastern people, when we are around Arabs we come back more to our roots. The Arabs helps us to do that. … But when you come here you really see that Palestinians are part of the Jewish culture. Being here make me more understand what my teacher always said in class. Even though I am an American Jew, I feel connected with the Palestinians." (Male, 28, United States)

There were 4 respondents who felt fear in Israel due to the militarization of the country. This fear is visible due to representations in the news (Rouhana & Fiske, 1994). Below a quote from a French man:

"I know I should not be afraid here in Israel. Everybody around me seems so relaxed. But every time I step into a bus it reminds me of suicide attacks what you hear in the news, that really scares me" (Male, 25, France)

The other respondents did not feel a connection or fear; Israel just gave them a warm feeling. They saw it more as a surprise that the conflict was not as visible as excepted. According to one man:

"I thought Israel was much more divided between an Israel and a Palestinian territory. But I see them living all mixed and that gives me a happy and warm feeling. Like the news is not always right." (Male, 24 years, Germany)

5.5 Conclusion

The transcripts were analyzed with the aid of the theory of tourist gaze and its 5 categories (Urry, 1991). However, the categories 'unfamiliar elements' and 'unique objects' are never used in the transcripts. It seems that respondents did not have any expectations about the conflict with Israel concerning 'unfamiliar elements of things which should be familiar' and 'unique objects'.

50% of the transcripts has something to do with 'daily life activities'. Most of these respondents argued that the conflict was not visible in daily life in Israel. This category was the most coded.

The second most coded category is 'senses', with 39%. Eight people who were on birthright said that they loved Israel more and more while in Israel. There were seven respondents as well who felt a kind of a connection with Israel even though they were not on birthright. Besides this, there were four respondents who still felt fear in Israel due to the militarization of the country. This fear was visible due to representations in the news (Rouhana & Fiske, 1994).

Finally, 11% of the transcripts is coded with 'signs'. The relation with the transcripts and 'signs' is diverse: 6% of tourist talked about security and a further 6% mentioned national sites.

Chapter 6 Extended information and preparation

In this chapter four sub-questions will be answered: 1. *What sources of information did the respondent consult to prepare before going to Israel,* 2. *How prepared were the respondents according to themselves,* 3. *Did the perception about the conflict Israel-Palestine changed during the stay of the respondents?* And finally 4. *Did the perception of tourists who were well prepared change less than tourists who were less well prepared?* As discussed in section 3.3.3, no statistically significant result can be given. This research is of a qualitative nature, and there are too few respondents to apply quantitative analysis. The figures can still mean something; the results should be considered as exploratory and can be used for further research.

At first the sources of Imation are given (6.1), later on preparation (6.2), perception change (6.3), relation of the perception change and preparation (6.4) and finally a conclusion (6.5).

6.1 Sources of information

The respondents were asked on which sources they based their perception of the conflict, and how prepared they were before arriving in Israel. Table 6.1 shows which sources respondents addressed for information about Israel and the conflict with Palestine before they went to Israel.

Source of information	Frequency	Percentage
Education	8	9
Guide book	29	34
News	32	37
Family/friends	8	9
Jewish background	9	10

Table 6.1 Sources of information

Of course, respondents could have more than only one source of information. Most respondents based their perceptions on a guidebook and on the news. These perceptions are all coded with 'signs' (see 4.4). In total there were 9 Jewish respondents, who certainly had a specific opinion about the conflict because they are probably more connected to Israel than other respondents due to 'special discourse' (Urry, 1991). 8 respondents based their perception on stories of friends or family. Finally, another 8 respondents learned about the Israel-Palestine conflict at school.

6.2 Preparation

As discussed in section 2.2, the respondents' preparation is important. It is possible that the perception of a person who is well prepared by different sources of information would change less than the perception of a person who was less prepared before arriving. Perception of a place is created by different stimuli, more stimuli mean a stronger perception which would not change as easily (Bloemers & Hagendoorn, 1996).

Table 6.2 shows how well prepared the respondents were according to themselves.

Grade of preparation	Frequency	Percentage
Very well prepared	12	24
Well prepared	13	26
Normal prepared	15	30
Bad prepared	5	10
Very bad prepared	5	10

Table 6.2 Amount of preparation

Most respondents considered themselves prepared normally (15 in total). Only 10 respondents thought they were poorly prepared or very poorly prepared. According to themselves, 13 respondents are well prepared and 12 respondents are very well prepared.

6.3 Perception change

Table 6.3 shows if the perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict changed during their actual stay in Israel.

Perception of conflict changed during stay in Israel	Frequency	Percentage
Perception changed	34	68
Perception did not changed	16	32

Table 6.3 Perception change

As the table shows, the perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict changed during their stay in Israel for 68% of the respondents. The perception did not changed after arriving in Israel for the other 32%.

6.4 Relation perception change and preparation

A question that rises after seeing these results is: is there a relation between preparation of the respondents before visiting Israel and the change in their perception?

Table 6.4 shows a table with the amount of preparation of the group whose perception changed and a table of the group whose perception did not change. The table does not show any interesting differences between the amount of preparation and the perception change. Most of the numbers are very close to each other.

This relation has not been tested with any statistical test. Firstly, an initial analysis of the results does not suggest any relation between preparation and perception change. The amount of perception change is almost the same at every level of preparation. Secondly, a sample of 50 respondents out of a total population of 3.45 million tourists per year (Herald Sun, 2011) is not big enough to carry out reliable and meaningful quantitative analyses.

Relation actual perception change and preparation				
Amount of preparation	Frequency of respondents with perception change	Percentage of all respondents	Frequency of respondents without perception change	Percentage of all respondents
Very well prepared	7	20.60	5	31.25
Well prepared	10	29.40	3	18.75
Normal	11	32.35	4	25.00
Poorly prepared	3	8.80	2	12.50
Very poorly prepared	3	8.80	2	12.50
Total	34	100	16	100

Table 6.4 Relation preparation and perception change

6.5 Conclusion

Although it is not possible to show a statistically significant result, these results do say something. Most people based their perceptions on a guidebook or on the news (respectively 34% and 37%). Besides, most respondents considered themselves as 'normally prepared' (30%). Only 20% of the respondents considered themselves *poorly* or *very poorly* prepared before going to Israel. Their perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict changed after visiting Israel for 68% of the respondents. Unfortunately there is no sign of a relation between perception change and preparation.

Chapter 7 Discussion

In this chapter we compare perceptions before going to Israel and while being in Israel. We answer the main research question: *To what extent and how does visiting Israel change tourists' perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?* First, the results both before going to Israel and after being in Israel are given for each category of tourist (7.1). Second, the results concerning preparation, extended information and actual perception change are shown (7.2). Finally, the conclusion will be given (7.3).

7.1 Results by category of tourist gaze

The most important differences between perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict before departure and while being in Israel are shown below. In table 7.1 the frequencies and percentages about the used codes and sub codes are given. The main codes are of course the 5 categories of tourist gaze (Urry) and the sub codes are those that fit within the main tourist gaze code.

Code	Sub code	Perception before going to Israel		Perception in Israel	
		Frequency code	Percentage code	Frequency code	Percentage code
Senses		10	18	21	39
	Fear	5	9	4	8
	Connection	2	4	7	13
	Religious connection	3	5	8	15
	Good feeling	-	-	1	2
Signs		36	64	6	11
	News	36	64	-	-
	Security	-	-	3	6
	National sites	-	-	3	6
Unique objects		3	5	-	-
	West Bank Barrier	3	-	-	-
Unfamiliar elements		-	-	-	-
Daily life activities		7	12.50	27	50
	Conflict involved	1	2	2	4
	Conflict not involved	6	11	25	47

Table 7.1 Percentages and frequency of all codes

Looking at the percentages in table 7.1 it is directly clear that the largest changes in perception were mostly in areas related to 'senses', 'signs' and 'daily life activities'. Differences between the codes are discussed below.

7.1.1 Senses

There is a clear increase in the frequency with which perceptions involved 'senses' before and after going to Israel; the code is more than twice as often when discussing perceptions after arrival in Israel (from 18% to 39%). When looking at the sub codes, it is clear that this difference is caused by

the increase in 'Connection' and 'Religious Connection' upon arrival. Tourists felt a general connection or a special religious connection with Israel once they were there (because they were on a birthright trip, for example) (Urry, 1991). A reason for this increase after arriving in Israel could be that physically being in a place can call up special emotions (Tuan, 1977).

Some transcripts were also coded with 'fear'. This fear is based on representations in the news (Rouhana & Fiske, 1994). There was only a small, negligible difference between feelings of fear before going to Israel and while in Israel.

Concluding, the differences between perceptions of the conflict before going to Israel and while being in Israel came about due to a greater connection tourists had with the region. This was either a general connection or special religious connection.

7.1.2 Signs

'Signs' are about stereotyping, such as 'a trendy New Yorker' or 'romantic Paris'" (Urry, 1991). There is a big decrease in the frequency with which this code is used to describe perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict after arrival in Israel, compared to perceptions before departure. 64% of perceptions before going to Israel included this code, and this decreased to 11% for perceptions after arrival.

Looking at the various sub codes, only one category was mentioned by the respondents before departure: news. This code was not mentioned by respondents once in Israel. 'Signs' are mostly constructed by travel agents, travel books and media (Urry, 1991; Rouhana & Fiske, 1995). The information most of the tourists were exposed to before they went to Israel came from news and guidebooks (see 4.6), which is a typical 'sign' (Urry, 1991). The fact that 64% of all transcripts about perceptions before going to Israel were coded with 'signs' corresponds with the theory that news is one of the most important factors for creating perception about a place (Rouhana & Fiske, 1994; Holloway & Hubbard, 2001).

When discussing their perceptions after being in Israel, people referred to 'signs' only 6 times (11%). Sub codes used within this category were national sites and security. Security because people associate Israel with danger, and national sites as a form of representation. This is special in a conflicted area; parties in a conflicted area never enjoy equal power, especially in multiethnic states (Horowitz, 1985). These representations within national sites and museums can form perception (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001).

Concluding, the reason for the large decrease in the importance of this category has to do with the sub code News. As can be read in the results, 71% of respondents prepared themselves for their trip by watching/reading the news. News concerning conflict areas is often biased (Rouhana & Fiske, 1995), which can explain the big decrease in the importance of the category 'signs'.

7.1.3 Unique objects

'Unique objects' are objects that are unique for a region (Urry, 1991), such as Big Ben in London. This code is not used much: in 5% of discussions on perceptions before departure and not at all for perceptions after arrival.

Some respondents mentioned the wall in Jerusalem which divides Palestine territory and Israel before going there; this did not seem to play a role for the tourists once in Israel.

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7.1.4 Unfamiliar elements

'Unfamiliar elements' concern things that *should* be familiar, but are not. A different sort of toilet on holiday than back home, for example. These codes were not used when respondents discussed their perception of the conflict before going to Israel or while in Israel. Clearly, respondents did not associate the conflict with 'unfamiliar elements of things which should be familiar'.

7.1.5 Daily life activities

A big difference can be seen in the recurrence of 'daily life activities' in tourist perceptions of the conflict before going to Israel and while in Israel. 12.5% of codes used to discuss perceptions before arrival involved 'daily life activities' and this increased 50% for perceptions while in Israel.

The respondents who had a perception of the conflict before going to Israel that falls within 'daily life activities' had friends or family who had told them stories of life in Israel. They knew many stories about daily life despite the prevailing conflict (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). Six respondents thought that the conflict is not that visible in Israel's daily life.

Looking at tourists' perceptions of conflict while in fact in Israel, there was a large increase within the sub-code 'conflict not involved'. These respondents argued that the conflict is not as visible as expected. They mentioned that inhabitants of Israel are just living their normal lives. Two respondents saw the conflict as involved in daily life, but these respondents had also visited Palestine and were therefore exposed to more stimuli, like vision, that form perception (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Rose, 1993).

Concluding, 47% of the respondents thought that the conflict was less visible than expected beforehand. A reason for this could be their used of the media for preparation (Sakomoto et al. 2009).

7.2 Extended information, preparation and perception change

In this section the most important results considering perception change of the conflict in relation to extended information, preparation and perception change are shown.

7.2.1 Extended information

Most respondents based their perceptions on a guidebook (34%) and on the news (37%). These perceptions are all coded with 'signs' (Urry, 1991). 10% of the respondents had a Jewish background, and were therefore probably more informed as a result. Urry calls this a special discourse (Urry, 1991). There were also respondents who based their knowledge of the conflict on education (9%) and on stories from family and friends (9%). These are all important stimuli when forming an image of an unknown place, an imagined geography (Valentine, 1999).

7.2.1 Preparation

30% of the respondents considered themselves normally prepared. Only 10 respondents were of the opinion that they were poorly prepared or very poorly prepared. Only 12% of the respondents thought they were well prepared to visit Israel and 13% considered themselves very well prepared. It could be that the range of preparation influenced the actual perception change of the tourists. (Bloemers & Hagendoorn, 1996). The less prepared the tourist was, for example, the greater the perception change. However, no sign of such a relation can be found.

7.2.3 Perception change

During their stay in Israel, the perception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict changed for 68% of all respondents when compared to before departure.. The perception did not change after arrival for 32% of respondents.

7.3 Conclusion

We can conclude that for 68% of respondents, their perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict changed after visiting Israel. These perception changes where mainly related to the categories of tourist gaze 'signs', 'senses' and 'daily life activities'.

The most important source that respondents based their perceptions on before going to Israel were guidebooks (34%) and the news (37%), and 30% of the respondents considered themselves normally prepared. However, no relation can be found between levels of preparation and perception change.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

For 68% of respondents, their perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict changed after visiting Israel. These perception changes where mainly related to the categories of tourist gaze 'signs', 'senses' and 'daily life activities'. Perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict before going to Israel were mainly based on the 'signs' category; this was the case for 64% of all respondents. After visiting Israel this number decreased to 11%. This decrease is due to the way in which respondents prepared for their trip. Namely, 71% of the respondents prepared themselves by reading travel guides and watching the news. Especially when disusing conflict areas, this information can be one-sided (Rouhana & Fiske, 1995). When tourists finally arrive in Israel, they are exposed to many more stimuli which can form their perception more significantly than the one-sided news they saw beforehand. The tourist then looks at what he encounters (Lippard, 1999).

The 'senses' category played a bigger part in perceptions of the conflict while the respondents were in Israel (18% to 39%). One reason for this is that being physically present in a place can call up special emotions (Tuan, 1977).

Finally, when looking at the category of 'daily life activities', these played a part in ca. 15% of perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict before visiting Israel, which increased to 50% when actually in Israel. Respondents sated that the conflict was less visible than thought beforehand. An explanation for this difference could be found in the media sources respondents were exposed to before visiting Israel (Sakomoto et al., 2009). The media mostly mention Israel in relation to its conflict with Palestine, but while tourists were in Israel almost 50% of them said they did not feel the conflict at all.

There are some relevant bias comments that need to be considered when reading these results. In the field, respondents were asked while in fact already in Israel what their perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict was *before* arriving. This can lead to a bias in the research. It would be more accurate to investigate the perceptions of tourists before they depart for Israel, but this was unfortunately impossible.

This paper contributes to the academic research in some fields. Firstly, only limited research has been done on perceptions in conflict areas (Sande et al., 1989; Jervis, 1976; Bronfenbrenner, 1961; White, 1965; Rouhana & Fiske, 1995). However, none of this research addresses perception change during stays at a conflicted area. That is why this paper may add extra information, especially to the two researches below.

Mansfeld (1994) researched the extent of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict's effect upon inbound tourist flow to this region. He thinks that when tourists are more familiar with the Middle East region, they are less reluctant to visit a Middle Eastern country as a tourist. However, this was not the case. Patterns were found, but not significant in statistical sense. Mansfeld's research examines whether tourists will go to Middle Eastern countries, and especially to Israel, even if they are aware of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. My thesis answers the follow-up question whether tourists' perceptions of the conflict change *during* their stay in Israel; which it did for roughly two thirds of the respondents.

Fuch and Reichel (2008) researched the concept of destination risk perception while focusing on the case of Israeli. Fuch and Reichel asked around 750 tourists in Israel what their perception of risk was prior to their arrival in Israel. They concluded that the destination risk of Israel is a multidimensional concept, where each dimension is comprised of several questions. Fuch and Reichel did not research the actual change in perception of risk. They asked tourists only what their perception of risk was before arriving in Israel. They mention that it would be interesting to see if the perception can change while tourists are in Israel. Although this research (Stiphout) is not about the change of risk perception, it is about the change of perception of a conflict, which of course includes risk. This thesis adds that the perception of a conflict does indeed change after tourists are physically in a country of

conflict. This change is primarily based on stereotyping beforehand which turns out not to be accurate once the area is visited. Secondly, it has to do with daily life activities in a country. Most news that people are exposed to before going to a conflict area will concern the conflict itself; once actually in the area it may feel much more harmonious. Finally, physically being in a place can call-up new emotions for tourists.

This thesis holds recommendations for further research. In this research, respondents were asked what sort of information they were exposed to before coming to Israel. By doing so, it became clear how and to what extent imagined geographies based on considerable exposure to a selection of stories, images, or videos beforehand can still be changed by an actual visit to the area in question. However, it would be interesting to explore this more. Respondents told what information about the conflict they were exposed to. It would be interesting to analyze the (traceable) information, and the representation of the conflict by each information source. This representation can then be compared to the tourist's perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict to determine the role of the used information source in shaping the perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Another recommendation could be exploring the difference between the perception change of tourist within a conflict area and the perception change of tourist within a non-conflicted area. By doing so it can be investigated if stimuli like media play a bigger role in shaping the perceptions of tourists who are going to visit a conflict area than of tourists who are visiting a non-conflicted area.

Besides, there is also a practical recommendation for the Israeli Ministry of Tourism. It is clear that tourists' perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict are subject to change. One important subject of this perception change has to do with daily life in Israel. Half of respondents stated that while they were in Israel they did not feel any of the conflict that they expected to see. It would therefore be interesting for the Ministry of Tourism to focus more on the peace in Israel and to promote that. It could be that by doing so, more tourists would we willing to visit who were afraid to visit before.

Last but not least, I hope that this thesis leads to more understanding of perception in conflicted areas. Especially on what the perception before going to a conflict area is based on. And of course how this perception can change by physically being in the conflict area. I hope governments or municipalities of conflicted areas can do something with this information. And I especially hope that there will soon be peace in these areas.

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Attachment 1: General format of interview

Date:

Time:

Duration:

Place:

General information

Age:

Sex:

What was your reason for visiting Israel?

What was your perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict before you came here?

What is your perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict now while you are here?

(If perception changed) What occurred that your perception of the conflict changed?

How prepared do you consider yourself to be for this trip?
- Very Much
- much
- Normal
- poorly
- Very poorly prepared

What sources of information where you exposed to about the Israel-Palestine conflict before visiting Israel?
- Friends/family
- Jewish background
- News
- Travel books
- other