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Place Branding: A Review of Trends and Conceptual Models

The concept of Place Branding has emerged in recent years as a powerful instrument and it is increasingly popular among both commentators on place marketing theory and practitioners in place management all over the world. There is, however, an evident confusion in the use of the term. This paper first offers a short description of the development of place marketing and its routes in general marketing. The paper goes on to describe the recent shift towards place branding. Major trends in current understanding of the concept and its use in the practice of place management are identified. The paper draws on the development of corporate branding to demonstrate its relevance to place branding and discusses two different frameworks for place brand management, found in the literature, comparing them in an attempt to build on the main contributions of each and start an effort of integrating relevant suggestions into one practical framework.

Keywords: place marketing, place branding, corporate branding, place brand management

Introduction

Cities, regions and countries all over the world are faced with the effects that economic and cultural globalisation and other major trends pose to the environment that these places operate in, and are challenged by changes in their economic, cultural and social mosaic. One of these effects is increased competition among places, which is apparent in various levels and fields of activity. Fierce competition for resources, for business relocation, for foreign investment, for visitors, even residents is evident in today's world (Kotler et al. 1999). As people, capital and companies have become more footloose, it is vital for places, in all scales, to provide in all these areas an environment capable not only to attract new activity and place-users but also, and perhaps more importantly, to keep existing ones satisfied with their place. In the effort to respond to the demands of competition and attract the desired target groups, place administrators have recognised in marketing theory and practice a valuable ally. Places are following ideas and employing practices developed by marketing, transferring knowledge to their own, peculiar environment and translating

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concepts according to their needs and characteristics (Rainisto 2003; Barke 1999). This is hardly a new phenomenon, as activities of place promotion have been evident in much earlier times, as the many examples in Gold and Ward (1994) and Ward (1998) illustrate. A closer look at those early practices, though, reveals that these promotional activities were only intuitive and randomly undertaken by various individuals and organisations that had an interest in promoting the place. A more focused, integrated and strategic oriented implementation of place marketing was evident largely in the last three decades.

From Place Promotion to Place Marketing

The application of marketing techniques to places stems from two distinct trends. The first is theoretical and has to do with the development of new marketing approaches, specifically concerned with non-business or non-profit organisations (Barke 1999).

The possibilities for the development of a place marketing theory, together with many other areas of marketing, appeared when, as Holbrook (1996) describes "Kotler and Levy opened our eyes to the possibility that marketing and buyer behaviour involve a whole constellation of products not encompassed by the traditional definition of goods and services" (1996:243), referring to one of the most discussed articles in the history of the discipline • Broadening the Concept of Marketing (Kotler and Levy 1969). Ashworth and Voogd (1990) attribute the theoretical emergence of place marketing to three developments within the marketing discipline that paved the way, by solving the difficulties of transferring marketing knowledge from its initial field of industrial goods and services to places. These are the development of Marketing in Non-Profit Organisations, of Social Marketing and of Image Marketing, all of which contributed to the liberation of traditional marketing thought from goals and practices attached to this initial field of application. Especially the notion of Image Marketing, which stems from the realisation that images can be effectively marketed while the products to which they relate remain vaguely delineated (Ashworth and Voogd 1994), was warm-heartedly accepted by city administrators.

The second trend stems from the practice of city administrators, who found themselves in onset of an 'urban crisis', which was widely perceived as leading to the potential terminal decline of traditional urban economies, with a consequent imperative for economic restructuring and which "stimulated the search for new roles for cities and new ways of managing their problems" (Barke 1999:486). As Hannigan (2003) describes, "in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a fiscal crisis in cities across Europe and North America caused by the triple problems of de-industrialisation, a falling tax base and declining public expenditure had some serious implications for cities. Not only were factories closing and jobs disappearing but the mass industrial culture that had prevailed since the end of the Second World War was steadily weakening. During this same era, we witnessed the re-emergence of political structures and ideologies

based around the notions of privatisation and de-regulation; and the rise of a new urban lifestyle in which visual images and myths were relentlessly packaged and presented (Goodwin 1993:147-8). In combination, these forces provoked the emergence of a new 'entrepreneurial' (Harvey 1989) style of local economic development in which image promotion was privileged as being central by planners and politicians" (Hannigan 2003:353). Entrepreneurialism captures the sense in which cities are being run in a more businesslike manner, and the practices that have seen local government imbued with characteristics once distinctive to businesses - risk-taking, inventiveness, promotion and profit motivation (Hubbard and Hall 1998). The use of marketing was only a natural consequence of such entrepreneurial governance.

Initially this took the form of simple promotion of the city and its attractions but gradually, in some areas, this has evolved into more sophisticated marketing exercises (Barke 1999: 486), with a high degree of importance attributed to the determination of a marketing mix, meaning "the combination of marketing measures needed to achieve the desired strategy" (Ashworth and Voogd 1990). The actual determination, however, of what the place-marketing mix should include, proves to cause problems, which are associated with the peculiarities of cities and generally places as marketable assets and with the limited relevance of the elements of the traditional marketing mix to place marketing.

Ashworth and Voogd (1990) suggest what they term a geographical marketing mix, which "in contrast to the marketing mix usually found in traditional business applications, may be defined as a combination of at least the following sets of instruments:

- a. Promotional measures
- b. Spatial-functional measures
- c. Organisational measures
- d. Financial measures

The scope and effectiveness of city marketing is largely determined by the selection and application of the appropriate combination of these measures" (p. 31). Kotler et al. (1999) adopt the marketing mix as suggested by general marketing, but distinguish between four distinct strategies for place improvement that are the foundations for building a competitive advantage. These are: Design (place as character), Infrastructure (place as fixed environment), Basic services (place as service provider) and Attractions (place as entertainment and recreation).

Parallel to the theoretical suggestions, there have been attempts to identify the actual methods used in cities. For example Hubbard and Hall (1998) describe a generic entrepreneurial model of city governance. As goals of this model they identify re-imagining localities and the transformation of previously productive cities into spectacular cities of (and for) consumption. The achievement of these goals is pursued according to the same authors through specific policies, which include

Advertising and promotion.
 Large - scale physical redevelopment
 Public art and civic statuary
 Mega events
 Cultural regeneration, and finally
 Public - private partnerships.

The above demonstrate that place marketing thought has advanced towards a more mature stage, understanding that it is more than inadequate to simply create a brochure for visitors and a video for potential investors. In some cases places launch an enriched promotional campaign, in few cases a whole strategy of communication, in even fewer cases an integrated marketing strategy.

Trends of Place Branding

Recently there is an apparent shift towards branding, which has been recognised widely in the literature (Hauben et al. 2002; Rainisto 2003; Trueman et al. 2004) and is evident in the practice of place marketing (for a detailed description of this shift see Kavartzis 2004). The popularity and success of product branding and mostly the advent of corporate branding and other corporate-level marketing concepts, which in reality frees the application of marketing from the dependence on the physical product, are the main generators of interest on place branding.

In the literature, distinct trends of discussion have emerged. The subject of place branding is indeed a complex subject and those trends represent the various aspects that bring about this complexity.

Place of Origin Branding (e.g. Kotler and Gertner 2002; Papadopoulos and Heslop 2002): this trend has developed within the marketing discipline and has grown to a large body of publications. It concerns the usage of the place of origin in branding a product. Using the qualities, images and, in most cases, stereotypes of the place and the people living in that place to brand a product that is produced in that place is considered an effective strategy. In essence though, it has little to do with the concept of place branding. Interesting as it may be (and useful for product marketing), this practice does not constitute a place branding strategy, in the sense that it can not be considered a place management strategy.

Nations Branding (e.g. Anholt 2002b; Ham 2001; Gilmore 2001): this trend has also developed within the marketing discipline and especially within the circles of marketing consultants, who act as advisors to national governments, that have realised the potential advantages of branding their country but do not have the knowledge and skills necessary to design and implement branding campaigns and strategies. The interest lies usually in the positive effects of branding the nation for the benefit of tourism development and the attraction of foreign investment. The topic

has grown considerably, so that some commentators propose that the whole foreign affairs policy of the country should be thought of as a branding exercise. A growing number of researchers are examining the potential and suitability of branding nations (e.g. O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy 2000) or specific methods and cases (e.g. Endzina and Luneva 2004; Gilmore 2001).

Culture/Entertainment Branding (e.g. Evans 2003; Greenberg 2003; Hannigan 2004): another interesting and steadily growing trend has been the examination of the effects of cultural and entertainment branding on the physical, economic and (sometimes) social environment of cities. Widely applied in cities all over the world, this cultural branding owes its development to the growing importance of the cultural, leisure and entertainment industries within the contemporary economy, as much for tourists and other visitors, as for the local population. At the same time, attempts to incorporate this trend in planning the city (Evans 2001) and the increased importance of image-based industries and the people these employ (Florida 2002) is reinforcing the processes involved in this kind of place branding. Connected with this trend, one can identify a more recent discussion, especially among urban designers, on the effects of high-profile buildings on the city's image the use of such buildings and other 'landmarks' in general in the city's promotion. Especially after the events of September 11, 2001 in New York City, the discussion has accumulated and has started to examine possible negative effects as well.

Destination Branding (e.g. Morgan et al. 2002; Brent-Ritchie and Ritchie 1998): perhaps the most developed in theory and most used in practice trend within place branding has been the investigation of the role of branding in the marketing of tourism destinations. Starting, arguably, from the realisation that destinations are visited because of their prior images, and they are consumed based on a first-hand comparison of those images with the reality faced in the destination itself, this trend has offered a lot in the theory of place branding. The largest part, at least of the theoretical development in this field comes from Hankinson (2001 and 2004). Starting from his belief that "as yet no general theoretical framework exists to underpin the development of place brands apart from classical, product-based branding theory (Hankinson 2004:110), he provides a refined framework for understanding cities as brands (even if focusing on cities as tourism destinations), which is further discussed below. Brent Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) recognise that a destination brand has the potential to play a coordinating role "for a broad range of community development efforts" (p. 19), and stress the need for other agencies to align with branding the destination brand, in this way realising that destination branding is only part of the whole branding effort of any place.

Place/City Branding: a final and perhaps the most interesting trend in the literature can be found in a number of articles that try to discuss the

possibilities of using branding as an approach to integrate, guide and focus place management. Borrowing from the techniques and ideas developed within general branding, and especially the advent of the increasingly popular concept of corporate branding, these articles discuss the appropriateness of central branding concepts for place branding (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2005) and attempt to either provide a general framework for developing and managing place brands (Hankinson 2001; Hankinson 2004; Kavaratzis 2004;) or examine the suitability of specific branding tools for city branding (Trueman et al. 2004). This last trend is characterised by the attempt to implement the concept of corporate branding and specific methodologies developed in this field in place branding (Kavaratzis 2004; Rainisto 2003; Trueman et al. 2004) and will be further explored below. Place branding methods are also evident in the practice of place management.

According to Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005), there are at least three different sorts of place branding which are often confused in the literature but which are really quite different operations conducted by different types of producers for widely different objectives. The first is geographical nomenclature, the second product-place co-branding and the third branding as place management. Geographical nomenclature is merely where a physical product is named for a geographical location, without a conscious attempt to link any supposed attributes of the place to the product, which gains nothing from the association. Co-branding of product and place, attempts to market a physical product by associating it with a place that is assumed to have attributes beneficial to the image of the product. Place branding can also be treated as a form of place management. At its simplest level much place management depends heavily upon changing the way places are perceived by specified user groups. For instance, "...urban renewal includes the creation of an identity with its own experiential value, which is profoundly original and uncopyable. This touches upon such points as structure, programming, functions, the sort of actions and activities that characterise the image of the city, events and -in the last resort the chemistry of the people who operate there" (Florian 2002: 24). It involves the creation of a recognisable place identity and the subsequent use of that identity to further other desirable processes, whether financial investment, changes in user behaviour or generating political capital. It is clear that this is more than the creation and promotion of place images as part of place management, forwarding a wider approach and better understanding of the application of branding in places.

Corporate Branding and its Relevance

It is widely accepted (e.g. Trueman et al. 2004) that places are very complex and varied brands, serving varied aims and targeting varied groups and individuals at the same time, which makes them much more difficult to control than conventional product brands. This is a notion that has generated doubts on the applicability and usefulness of branding in

place management. But, as some commentators have noticed (e.g. Trueman et al. 2004; Kavartzis 2004; Rainisto 2003), there are significant similarities between corporate brands and place brands, which bring the two concepts close and provide a starting point for a better understanding of place branding.

In an attempt to define the corporate brand Knox and Bickerton (2003) state: "a corporate brand is the visual, verbal and behavioural expression of an organisation's unique business model" (p. 1013). The brand is expressed through the company's mission, core values, beliefs, communication, culture and overall design (Simoes and Dibb 2001). Balmer (2001) argues that at the core of a corporate brand is an explicit covenant (other commentators use the term promise) between an organisation and its key stakeholder groups. Corporate branding draws on the traditions of product branding, in that it shares the same objective of creating differentiation and preference (Knox and Bickerton 2003). However this activity is rendered more complex by managers conducting these practices at the level of the organisation rather than the individual product or service, and the requirement to manage interactions with multiple stakeholder audiences (Knox and Bickerton 2003). Simoes and Dibb (2001) argue that "the entity in corporate branding has a higher level of intangibility, complexity and (social) responsibility, making it much more difficult to build a coherent brand". There is an agreement in the relevant literature on the need for corporate branding to be multidisciplinary, combining elements of strategy, corporate communications and culture (e.g. Balmer 2001; Knox and Bickerton 2003), a view further refined by Hatch and Schultz (2001), who point to the interplay of three variables - vision, culture and image - as a context for corporate branding

According to Aaker (1996) in contemporary marketing, branding is central, as it integrates all the strategic elements into one success formula. Trueman et al. (2001) recognise that there is an urgent need for a robust analysis of the city as a brand and go on to assess that the literature on corporate identity may be relevant. However, the important question would be in what ways is a place a brand or if a place can be seen as a brand. The definition of brands by Aaker (1996:68) might assist in answering this difficult question if only we consider the substitution of brand with place-brand: "a brand is a multidimensional assortment of functional, emotional, relational and strategic elements that collectively generate a unique set of associations in the public mind". The key to successful branding is to establish a relationship between the brand and the consumer, such that there is a close fit between the consumer's own physical and psychological needs and the brand's functional attributes and symbolic values (Hankinson and Cowking 1993). This definition of brands and branding shows the relation of branding to the goals of place marketing and managing the place's image as identified in the literature (e.g. Ashworth and Voogd 1990 and 1994; Kotler et al. 1999). Like brands, also places satisfy functional, symbolic and emotional needs (Rainisto 2003) and the attributes that satisfy those needs need to be

orchestrated into the place's unique proposition (Ashworth and Voogd 1990). Branding provides a good starting point for place marketing (Kotler et al. 1999) and a solid framework by which to manage the place's image. As Vermeulen (2002) suggests, it is the place's image that needs to be planned, managed and marketed, and in this sense, place branding becomes the 'right' approach to place marketing in general. But this demands a broad acceptance of the brand as the guiding light for all marketing activities and not a consideration of the brand just as a promotional tool (as most place administrators seem to think).

Applying corporate branding to places demands a treatment of the place brand as the whole entity of the place-products, in order to achieve consistency of the messages sent. At the same time it demands associating the place with 'stories' about the place not by simply adding them next to the name or trying to imply them by isolating beautiful images of the place. The 'stories' need to be built in the place, not least by planning and design interventions, infrastructure development and the organisational structure and only afterwards, they can and need to be communicated through the more general attitude of the place and, finally, through promotional activities (Kavaratzīs 2004). Rainisto (2003; 50) states that "place brands resemble corporate umbrella brands and can benefit the value of a place's image". Trueman et al. (2004) applied the ACID test for identity management on the city of Bradford and found that it serves well the purpose of identifying gaps in the city-identity management process in the city of Bradford. They recognise that cities can be seen as highly complex brands that are constantly changing and less well defined as well as more difficult to control than those in the corporate domain. However, they found indications that "it is possible to examine the city as a brand using conventional typologies for brand analysis provided that sufficient weight is given to different stakeholders" (2004:328). The topic of the importance of various stakeholders is also addressed in most place branding contributions and has been considered a major characteristic of the current mode of urban branding, which according to Greenberg (2003) is centrally managed by city and state agencies along with professional marketing firms and 'integrated' across a range of public and private initiatives.

Place Brand Management

Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1998) discuss the brand as a multidimensional construct, the boundaries of which are, on the one side the activities of the firm and on the other side the perceptions of the consumers. The brand becomes the interface between these two. A number of elements lie at each end of the boundaries of the brand construct. For the brand owners, these elements are the features and beneficial attributes imbued in the brand. In addition, marketers may choose to stress symbolic, experiential, social and emotional values (Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998), creating the brand identity. But these elements are not enough by themselves to construct a brand, as the

brand relates to quality and values as perceived by the consumer. Branding is a mode of communication and communication is always a two-way process; it is something "done with and not to the consumer" (Morgan et al. 2002:24). From the consumer's side, central to the concept of the brand is the brand image, which incorporates perceptions of quality and values as well as brand associations and feelings. Place brand management needs to take into account this interaction of the two sides of the brand construct and attempt to control it.

Dealing with the communication of the place brand, Kavaratzis (2004) suggests a framework which describes the way in which brand communication takes place through the choice and appropriate treatment of variables. Everything a city consists of, everything that takes place in the city and is done by the city, communicates messages about the city's brand. All the interventions or action areas that are included in the framework have, in the context of city branding, both functional as well as symbolic meaning, which is the main idea that differentiates marketing measures from branding decisions. The brand is communicated through distinct types of communication, namely primary and secondary.

1. Primary Communication relates to the communicative effects of a city's actions, when communication is not the main goal of these actions. It is divided into four broad areas of intervention. **Landscape Strategies** refer to fields of decisions that are relevant to urban design, architecture, or public spaces in the city, incorporating the use of public art and heritage management. **Infrastructure Projects** refer to projects developed to create, improve or give a distinctive character to the various types of infrastructure that are needed in a city, whether guaranteeing the city's accessibility to the various audiences or sufficiency of various facilities like cultural centres, conference facilities etc. **Organisational and Administrative Structure** refers to the effectiveness of the city's governing structure, emphasising community development networks and citizens' participation in the decision making, along with the establishment of Public- Private Partnerships. The organisation of the marketing and branding effort itself falls into this category. Finally, the **City's Behaviour** refers to such issues as the city leaders' vision for the city, the strategy adopted or the financial incentives provided. Two elements of significance are the effectiveness of services provided by the city and the type of events (like festivals and other cultural, sport or leisure events) organised in the city.

2. Secondary Communication is the formal, intentional communication, that most commonly takes place through well known marketing practices like all forms of advertising, public relations, graphic design, the use of a logo etc. It is what in the practice of city marketing is regularly confused with the whole branding effort, so it is useful to stress once more that secondary communication needs to be based on and in complete accordance with the rest of the components of the brand and, most importantly, with the reality of the city as encountered with by the various

city-audiences. As Grabow (1998) concludes, the most important factor of city marketing is a functional communication and "the communicative competence of a city is key factor and vital requirement for all phases of successful urban marketing" (p. 4). This communicative competence of the city is both a goal, as well as a result of the city branding process.

An even wider view is offered by Hankinson (2004), who distinguishes between four branding perspectives, namely: a) brands as perceptual entities, b) brands as communicators, c) brands as relationships and d) brands as value enhancers. He suggests a model of place brands based on the conceptualisation of brands as relationships. Of critical importance for this conceptualisation (and the features that make it clearly relevant to place brands) are a) the notion of the consumer as a co-producer of the place-product, b) the "experiential" nature of place-consumption and c) "marketing networks as vehicles for integrating all stakeholders in a collaborative partnership of value enhancement (Hankinson 2004:111).

The starting point is the core brand (the place's identity and a blueprint for developing and communicating the place brand), which can be defined by the brand personality, the brand positioning and the brand reality. The effectiveness of place branding relies on the extension of the core brand through effective relationships with the various stakeholders. These relationships are grouped in four categories: a) Primary Service Relationships (services at the core of the brand experience, such as retailers, events and leisure or hotels, b) Brand Infrastructure Relationships (access services, brandscape/built environment, various facilities), c) Media Relationships (organic communications, marketing communications) and d) Consumer Relationships (residents and employees, internal customers, managed relationships from the top).

The two frameworks described above differ in the conceptualisation of the place brand in that the first one (Kavaratzis 2004) treats the place brand mainly as a communicator, whereas the second (Hankinson, 2004) adopts the brand as a relationship approach. But in both frameworks the multidimensional nature of the place brand is evident, which leads both of them to integrate into their main approach elements of the different functions of the brand. For instance, the elements of Organisational Structure and Infrastructure Projects in Kavaratzis (2004) in essence address relevant relationships, in much the same way as Hankinson's (2004) Consumer Relationships and Brand Infrastructure Relationships. The three elements of the core brand, which provide the foundation of Hankinson's Model (Personality, Positioning and Reality), are the same elements that the whole framework of Kavaratzis is based on. But Hankinson does take things further with his notion that "the extension of the brand from the core to include primary services, the brand infrastructure, media and communications and consumers is best described as a ripple effect in which brand relationships are gradually extended through a process of progressive interaction between the network of stakeholders" (2004:115).

Research Implications

This paper has identified major trends in the discussion on place branding and attempted to forward its understanding and practical application by examining two different conceptual frameworks. It intended to serve as only the starting point of an effort to reach a more mature theoretical approach towards this increasingly popular topic.

A first obvious need for analysis would be to clarify the concepts, specific aims and methods of the distinct trends of place branding identified in the first part of this paper. The broad implications of all trends for place management and policy making need to become clearer, as need their interrelations. The difference between various geographical scales is a further subject in need of clarification and thought. The two frameworks compared in the later part of the paper are not the only ones suggested. A similar and more detailed analysis of common points and differences using more approaches found in practice, theory or suggested by consultants would be valuable.

The discussion on the applicability and transfer of branding knowledge to the operational environment of places is a vivid and multidisciplinary one. What is needed is much more field research of all aspects of place branding, in order to assess and evaluate the different methods used in practice in various parts of the world. An important step forward has already been made with the recent launching of the first specialised journal on the topic (*Place Branding*, Henry Stewart Publications), which provides an ideal forum for all these topics to be discussed and further developed. My personal desire is to see many more publications on the subject coming from marketing academics and researchers.

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