

Editorial

Place Branding: Connecting Tourist Experiences to Territories

Tourism involves different organizations with different aims, such as public or private sectors non-governmental or associations and even communities. Even in the context of marketing concerns, more specifically in the promotion and branding of a location, the scenario of various stakeholders is evident (e.g. a city, a region or a country). Countries, cities, and areas that serve as tourist destinations compete with one another to draw visitors, residents, and business investment.

Tourism is obviously to be considered as one big production machine of local brands, that is, of territorial images which, by virtue of an effective and obsessive repetition, easily turn into real logos universally recognizable. This process leads to an almost automatic identification, to a conditioned reflex that leads to connecting to one specific tourist brand a limited and well-defined repertoire of landscape images.

This ability of the landscape image to become, with synecdoche function (the part for the whole), the identity flag of the tourist product obviously raises questions of ownership: who 'owns' a territorial brand? For instance, "I Love New York" is considered to be the first and most effective effort to brand a city. To potential tourists who were considering a trip to the Big Apple, a concerted, simple, fun brand for the city showed that New York was consciously working to change its image. To New Yorkers, this was a message that their city was a place of which to be proud. As a whole it was an experiment on how a brand can drive internal and external perceptions of a municipality as a catalyst for change. One more example is the 'I AMsterdam' slogan that has proved to be a hugely popular addition to the tourism scene in the Dutch capital. Similarly, in 2003, Las Vegas used place branding to turn the city's reputation for debauchery into a selling point: today, 'what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas' is a phrase known the world over. Till the more recent slogan of Naples which, recalling the historic phrase of Goethe's journey to Italy ("See Naples and then die"), tries to attract tourists from all over the world with this novel blasting place branding slogan: "See Naples and then come back".

Moreover the use of technologies has radically changed the way travelers find, consume, and generate travel-related information (O'Connor, Höpken, & Gretzel, 2008). The paradigms on which tourism was traditionally based have changed, as have the visitors and their way of travelling. Nowadays the excursionist or the tourist is an attentive individual and a real consumer of local (real) experiences: A person who wishes to get in touch with the destination and establish an authentic and profound relationship with it. The progress of the Internet and social media have had a strong impact on consumers causing changes, first of all, in purchasing habits and behaviors, in their expectations and in the way they communicate. In fact, people can more easily share their thoughts, opinions and sensations with other individuals on the web, whether they are acquaintances (friends and relatives) or strangers. Secondly, Internet has become one of the main sources of information and the most important means by which the territory and tourist destinations communicate with potential visitors. Places must not only have a differentiator, but also advertise and publicize what they do well if they want to appear more attractive (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009). Place branding itself is the process of distinguishing and diversifying, where local tourism organizations, cultural and arts facilities, museums, historic preservation groups join and construct a place's image, helping in producing tourist sites with the common aim to attract consumers and investment to a particular local area.

From this perspective, literature pertaining to place branding has rapidly grown up. Many streams of research have provided input to the creation of knowledge in the domain of place branding. This diversity of sources encompasses many disciplines that rarely, if ever, attract attention in the marketing and branding literature. For example, the fields of sociology, marketing or politics may be regarded as having a potentially important contribution to offer to the practice of place branding. Practitioners and academics involved in place branding should therefore be prepared to scan horizons

far wider than those associated purely with conventional brand management and brand strategy. This reflects the essential role assigned to image formulation and image communication in theoretical discussions (Kavaratzis, 2004).

This special issue of “Fuori Luogo” systemizes the social impact of place branding and thematizes a variety of strategic visions for the places, their purposes, priorities and strategies to support the local way of life, and finding ways to engage people and visitors, especially through arts, architecture, music, fashion and local food projects. This special issue enables readers to figure out how the tourist experience can be managed as a brand through a variety of issues, methodological approaches, and geographical areas, which allows them to adapt frames to different contexts and situations. The primary focus of place branding – counterintuitively – should be the place’s own residents. A good project should make them inspired, enthused, happy to belong where they are, and motivated to do more or better. It is like stirring a whirlwind – the locals start, and the world responds.

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References

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