



From city marketing to city branding: Towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands

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Abstract Cities all over Europe include more and more marketing techniques and methods in their administration practice and governing philosophy. The transfer of marketing knowledge, however, to the operational environment of cities proves a cause of difficulties and misalignments, mostly due to the peculiar nature of places in general and cities in particular as marketable assets.

In this paper, city branding is suggested as the appropriate way to describe and implement city marketing. City marketing application is largely dependent on the construction, communication and management of the city's image, as it is accepted that encounters with the city take place through perceptions and images. Therefore the object of city marketing is the city's image, which in turn is the starting point for developing the city's brand. The most appropriate concept to understand marketing applicability within cities is the recently developed concept of corporate branding, which with the necessary modifications is applied to cities.

The core of the paper is a theoretical framework to understand the city's brand and its management, which was developed through a review of the literature on both city marketing and the corporate brand. City branding provides, on the one hand, the basis for developing policy to pursue economic development and, at the same time, it serves as a conduit for city residents to identify with their city. In this sense the relevance of and need for a framework describing and clarifying the processes involved in city branding are equally strong for facing increasing competition for resources, investment and tourism on the one hand and for addressing urgent social issues like social exclusion and cultural diversity on the other. The framework focuses on the use of city branding and its potential effects on city residents and the way residents associate with and experience their city, and it is based on a combination of city marketing measures and the components of the city's brand management.

Keywords: *City branding, city marketing, corporate branding, city image, city branding variables*

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INTRODUCTION

While the marketing of urban places has been practised, at least, since the 19th century (Ward, 1998), cities increasingly tended to rely on marketing methods in the last three decades, when 'competition for inward investment, tourism revenues and residents at various spatial scales intensified' (Kotler *et al.*, 1999).

It is clear, though, that the early examples mentioned in the literature are only promotional activities undertaken by cities or regions in various places and times. According to Ashworth and Voogd (1994: 39) 'there is nothing new about places being promoted by those likely to profit from their development. What is new, however, is the conscious application of marketing approaches by public planning agencies not just as an additional instrument for the solution of intractable planning problems but, increasingly, as a philosophy of place management.'

The context in which marketing became accessible to city administrators was provided by the rise of the so-called 'entrepreneurial city', and the marketing of places has been one of the defining features of the entrepreneurial modes of urban governance that have come to prominence since the 1970s. According to Griffiths (1998: 41), 'entrepreneurialism as a mode of urban governance came about as a response by individual cities to the collapse of the Fordist social democratic arrangements that had facilitated the spread of managerial forms of governance'. The essence of this transformation of urban politics is that policies pursued by local governments are steered away from the traditional activities associated with the city and state (Hubbard and Hall, 1998). 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. Its implementation, however, was (and to a great extent still is) limited to methods and techniques that were easily transferable from the original field of marketing application, and in most cases restricted to promotional measures. One reason for this partial implementation is the limited knowledge and limited understanding of marketing among people with the task to administer cities, another the embryonic stage of marketing in the public sector, a third the limited understanding among marketing academics and practitioners of the peculiar nature of places; practitioners who were frequently asked to implement city marketing. But as Ashworth (1994: 647) states, '... much of the crudely defined and vaguely targeted boosterism, widely if inaccurately spread by many public sector place promotion agencies barely counts as marketing at all.'

The implementation of marketing philosophy and methodology, or at least of marketing techniques that were easy to adapt and use in the practice of city governance, has been mirrored by the increasing interest of academics from various fields, who believe that the principles of marketing are, with the necessary modifications, applicable to cities and their operational environment. Ashworth and Voogd (1994) 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. The development of the concept of non-profit marketing (Kotler and Levy, 1969) has freed the application of marketing from its connection to direct financial profit making, while the concept of social marketing (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971) introduced the possibility to use marketing in order to alter or reinforce sets of attitudes held by targeted individuals or groups, with the final goal being the good of society at large. The notion of image marketing stems from the realisation that images can be effectively marketed while the products to which they relate remain vaguely delineated (Ashworth and Voogd, 1994), a notion that was warm-heartedly accepted by city administrators faced with the complex and intricate city product.

There are, however, more recent developments within the marketing discipline that make the distance from traditional, general marketing to place and city marketing shorter and the transfer of marketing knowledge easier. According to Borchert (1994), 'the majority of publications [on city marketing] are at best limited to some aspects of marketing and in most cases there exists only a weak relation with modern developments in marketing theory'. One concept that has emerged in recent years and has a clear and direct relevance to marketing implementation in cities is the concept of corporate branding and corporate-level marketing, which is a theoretical and practical development of the earlier concepts of corporate image and corporate identity (eg Balmer, 1998; Balmer and Greyser, 2003).

The applicability of marketing theory and practice in urban governance and urban administration is a matter of great interest, especially within the changing environment in which cities in Europe

operate, and at the same time a matter that needs clarification and further development. Borchert (1994) demonstrates that 'a consensus about what marketing of urban places should include is lacking so far, with many authors having a very limited understanding of the nature and consequences of marketing'. As Ashworth (1994) concludes, 'place marketing is a legitimate form of marketing in the sense that the terminology, techniques and philosophies of marketing can be applied to places but equally, if it is to be attempted successfully, then a special type of marketing has to be devised'.

One of the basic elements of this 'new type of marketing' is the determination of the major action areas that the implementation of a strategic marketing plan should incorporate. It is the articulation and description of broad, distinct categories of actual measures and field actions that are or should be dealt with by city marketers in the effort to implement integrated city marketing. The intention is to create a mix of components that need to be managed and orchestrated, and in this way 'not only delineate the domain (by articulating its key elements), but also provide a basis in which the area may be operationalised' (Balmer, 2002).

FROM CITY MARKETING TO CITY BRANDING

Firat and Venkatesh (1993: 246) consider that in postmodernity 'marketing is the conscious and planned practice of signification and representation'. This thought plays an important role in the development of the theoretical framework, which is described in this paper. It provides the basic guidelines that lead from the city marketing mix to the city's brand, which are the two

distinct approaches to city marketing combined here.

The city marketing mix

The first way to approach the topic is the determination of a set of instruments and activities at the disposal of the marketer that can be combined into a marketing programme and 'are useful in pursuing a certain market response' (van Waterschoot, 2002). In marketing science this has been termed the 'marketing mix'. The importance of the determination of the marketing mix, meaning 'the combination of marketing measures needed to achieve the desired strategy' (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990), has been highlighted in city marketing literature (eg Kotler *et al.*, 1999; van den Berg *et al.*, 1990) and it is acknowledged by most commentators as an essential step in the whole marketing effort. There have been attempts to articulate a mix of elements equivalent to the famous 4Ps of the traditional marketing paradigm. The actual determination, however, of what the marketing mix should include in the context of city marketing proves to cause problems, which are associated with the peculiarities of cities and places generally as marketable assets and with the relevance of the elements of the traditional marketing mix to city marketing. Some commentators, for example, adopt for city marketing the services marketing mix (eg van den Berg *et al.*, 1990); others adopt a wider view.

In the third phase of the city marketing process, 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 and
- (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.'

Kotler *et al.* (1999), although adopting the marketing mix as suggested by general marketing, 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)
- attractions (places as entertainment and recreation).

Hubbard and Hall (1998) describe a generic entrepreneurial model of city governance. As goals of this model they identify re-imaging 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
- public-private partnerships.

The city's image

There is a notable agreement in the literature, as shown in the

above-mentioned sets of marketing variables, that a crucial role within the city marketing mix is played by image formulation and image communication. In some cases, the importance attributed to the image is expressed as a sole focus on the promotion process (eg Burgess, 1982; Gold and Ward, 1994; Ward, 1998), in other cases as an emphasis on the conventional promotional measures (eg Kotler *et al.*, 1999) and in other cases as discussing the possibility of urban promotion through art, festivals and cultural attractions (eg Kearns and Philo, 1993). Borchert (1994: 417) stresses that urban marketing is a relatively unexplored new field, whereas promotion of places is a very old activity indeed, and he further argues that 'the relation between the two seems, unfortunately, obscure for some geographers'. But in other cases the significance of the image is expressed as underlining that a city's image is communicated not only by promotion, but also through the rest of the marketing measures (eg Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Ashworth, 2001; Dematteis, 1994). 'For example, measures operating in spatial design features will contribute towards urban images and thus reinforce, or contradict, promotional measures' (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990: 31).

The above idea of the communicative effect of all marketing measures has origins in the repeated emphasis (both in general marketing and in city marketing literatures) on the need to combine and orchestrate the sets of marketing measures, as one set has implications for the effectiveness of the others. At the same time it stems from the realisation that encounters with the city take place through perceptions and images, thus the object of city marketing is not the city 'itself', but its image. An image is the result of various, different and often

conflicting messages sent by the city and is formed in the mind of each individual receiver of these messages separately. As Bailly (1994) observes, 'like geography, urban marketing is based on representations; this enables us to tackle not the city itself but its meaning in a symbolic and ideological context'. It is this line of thinking that makes Hubbard and Hall (1998: 7) come to the conclusion that 'it is perhaps best to consider the entrepreneurial city as an imaginary city, constituted by a plethora of images and representations'.

Graham (2002) makes a distinction between two parallel cities that exist simultaneously. The first is the 'external city', 'which can, at least superficially, be encapsulated in one or two signature buildings or landmarks'. As he suggests, 'urban conservation (... in this external level) has always been motivated by the desire to enhance distinctive identity at the local scale and to distinguish one place from another'. The same can be said about city marketing, in the sense that it has so far dealt with this external city, trying to conceptualise it as a commodity. 'However, the more conservation is practised, the less locally distinctive identity is likely to become' (Graham, 2002: 1009). The argument raised is that since the methodologies used by different cities in different parts of the world are the same, the outcome will inevitably be the same as well, resulting in 'high streets being "Laura Ashleyised" from Dublin to Potsdam' (Ashworth, 2002). Or as Vermeulen (2002: 12) comments about the practice of city marketing in the Netherlands, 'under pressure from the market, scenery is being erected all over the country which is in no way rooted in the cultural background of the region'. The second parallel city described by Graham (2002: 1011) is the 'internal city', the city of the mind. 'This is a much more

inner-directed mnemonic city, one that is concerned with social inclusion and exclusion, lifestyle, diversity and multiculturalism. It is a place of complex, overlapping and ambiguous messages.'

Extending the above thoughts, it is possible to describe the 'internal city' as the subjective amalgamation of these ambiguous messages, as received by the mind according to each individual's experiences and priorities. The two parallel cities exist simultaneously, overlap and interact. The crucial point for the management and marketing of the city is this point of interaction. The point of interaction is the perception of the city, as formed by each individual that comes to encounters with the city. It is the city's image. Indeed, as Kampschulte (1999) comments, 'the image of the city is best described as the link between real, objective space and its perception'. Vermeulen (2002) adds that the image originates only in part from a physical reality and is based on well-worn prejudices, desires and memories that take shape in the collective memory. As the same author asserts 'it is not the city but the image that has to be planned'. It is, then, the image of the city that is the object of city marketing activities. Hubbard and Hall (1998: 8) recognise that 'the manipulation of city images, cultures and experiences has become probably the most important part of the political armoury of urban governors and their coalition partners in the entrepreneurial era'.

If it is, though, the image of the city that city marketing deals with, this would have serious implications for the relevance of many marketing suggestions found in traditional marketing on the one hand, and for the persistent questions that city marketing has so far failed to answer adequately, namely the definition of the city product, the determination of the city's market and

the understanding of the nature of the place consumer. Furthermore, one would be necessarily led to the notion that in reality one is talking about city branding. Cova (1996: 20) asserts that '... the job of post-modern marketing is to identify the cultural meanings and images that are intended for the product', and goes on to confirm that this 'image marketing and branding or brand management are closely related — branding is of critical importance in post-modern marketing'. The cultural meanings and images intended and desired for the city lie, as well, in the heart of city marketing (eg Kearns and Philo, 1993). Branding endows a product with a specific and more distinctive identity (Cova, 1996) and that is, in many ways, what city marketing seeks to do for cities.

Branding is added to the list of developments that bring marketing theory and practice closer to the nature and characteristics of places. It provides a base for identifying and uniting a wide range of images intended for the city and meanings attributed to the city in one marketing message, the city's brand. The framework to understand a city's brand is provided by the recent development, within the marketing discipline, of corporate branding.

CORPORATE BRANDS

Following the criticism against the marketing mix concept and the charge that in the new economy and society its utility has largely been surpassed (eg Brownlie *et al.*, 1999; O'Malley and Patterson, 1998), there were several attempts to articulate new approaches to marketing that would be more relevant. One of these approaches is the notion of corporate branding and corporate-level marketing, which is a development of traditional product branding, necessitated and, at the same time, enriched by the

rise of other corporate-level concepts, such as corporate image, corporate identity and corporate communications.

The goal of branding as it has evolved during the last 40 years has been to explore ways to add value to the basic product or service and thus create brand preference and loyalty (Knox and Bickerton, 2003). Currently, there is general agreement in the marketing literature that the brand is more than a name given to a product; it embodies a whole set of physical and socio-psychological attributes and beliefs (Simoes and Dibb, 2001). Brands are not only considered as valuable assets of a company, but furthermore, as some experts believe in post-modern consumer culture, brands play a vital role in the construction of consumer identity (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998).

In the early 1990s several branding and communication consultants mentioned and then went on to assess what was then called the 'company brand' (Balmer and Gray, 2003), reflecting the need to deepen the marketing view of the brand to encompass organisational attributes and to shift focus from the integrity of the product brand to the organisation and people behind the brand (Knox and Bickerton, 2003). The later half of the 1990s witnessed a crescendo of writing on the (more encompassing, more strategic-sounding) 'corporate brand', which has since then 'seized the imagination of scholars and managers alike and its rise has been inexorable' (Balmer and Gray, 2003: 975).

A fundamental notion for corporate branding is corporate identity. Corporate identity is a holistic concept that 'articulates the corporate ethos, aims and values and presents a sense of individuality that can help to differentiate the organisation within its competitive environment' (van Riel and Balmer,

1997: 355). A strong identity is very important for transmitting a consistent internal and external image among stakeholders, turning into a valuable asset (Simoes and Dibb, 2001).

Balmer (2002) suggests that the elements that constitute a corporate identity are:

- *strategy* (management vision, corporate strategy, product/services as well as corporate performance, corporate brand covenant, corporate ownership)
- *structure* (relationships between parent company and subsidiaries, relations with alliance or franchise partners)
- *communication* (total corporate communication, which encompasses primary, secondary and tertiary communication)
- *culture* (the soft and subjective elements consisting of the mix of sub-cultures present within, but not always emanating from, the organisation).

As Balmer and Greyser (2002) argue, 'although prevailing corporate thinking considers identity to be a monolithic phenomenon, this premise is narrow and inadequate'. For the same authors, an organisation has multiple identities, which 'can co-exist comfortably within the organisation even if they are slightly different'. Organisations must manage their multiple identities to avoid potentially harmful misalignments. Furthermore, corporate brand management needs to take into account and is inextricably linked to the management of identity (Balmer and Greyser, 2002: 16).

Hatz and Schultz (2001) suggest that creating a corporate brand is complicated and they point to the interplay of three variables — vision, culture and image — that need to be aligned in order to create a strong corporate brand. In an

attempt to define the corporate brand Knox and Bickerton (2003: 1013) state 'a corporate brand is the visual, verbal and behavioural expression of an organisation's unique business model'. 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). 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'.

Brands in general and corporate brands specifically are seen as the base for long-term success of various firms and organisations. According to Aaker (1996), in contemporary marketing branding is central, as it integrates all the strategic elements into one success formula. The whole marketing programme — objectives, strategies and tactics — is derived from brand positioning (Rainisto, 2003).

CITY BRANDS

Hankinson (2001: 129) comments that 'in contrast to the marketing of locations, there are relatively few articles to be found in the academic literature with regard to the promotion of locations as brands. This is in contrast to the increasing evidence in the press that branding, at least as a concept, is increasingly being applied to locations.' The findings of his research

on small municipalities in Britain suggest that branding as a concept was seen as relevant, but not always understood or applied effectively. Trueman *et al.* (2001) recognise that there is an urgent need for a robust analysis of the city as a brand that takes into account a wide range of stakeholders. At this point the literature on corporate identity may be relevant since it offers the dimension of culture to underpin corporate values (Trueman *et al.*, 2001). Also Rainisto (2003: 50) states that 'place brands resemble corporate umbrella brands and can benefit the value of a place's image'. At the same time, it is one of the very few occasions in general marketing texts that a direct reference is made to the relevance of corporate branding to city marketing and to the fact that 'corporate level brands can also be applied to countries, regions and cities' (Balmer and Gray, 2003).

But the important question is: in what ways is a city a brand, or if, indeed, a city can be seen as a brand? The following definition of brands might assist in answering this difficult question: 'a brand is a product or service made distinctive by its positioning relative to the competition and by its personality, which comprises a unique combination of functional attributes and symbolic values' (Hankinson and Cowking, 1993: 10). 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 city marketing and managing the city's image as identified in the literature (eg Ashworth and Voogd, 1990, 1994; Kotler *et al.*, 1999). Like brands, cities

satisfy functional, symbolic and emotional needs (Rainisto, 2003) and the attributes that satisfy those needs need to be orchestrated into the city's unique proposition (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990). Branding provides a good starting point for city marketing (Kotler *et al.*, 1999) and a solid framework by which to manage the city's image. If it is indeed the city's image that needs to be planned (Vermeulen, 2002), managed and marketed, then city branding would be the right theoretical and practical approach.

There is an interesting, revealing and illustrative of the above thoughts similarity between the points made earlier about corporate identities and brands and the following sentence (Florian, 2002: 24) taken from a book entitled 'City Branding': '... urban renewal includes the creation of an identity with its own experiential value, which is profoundly original and uncopiable. 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.'

Additionally, there are common characteristics of corporate branding, as summarised by Balmer and Gray (2003), and city marketing, as described in the literature, that support the suggestion that the framework for understanding city brands is provided by corporate brands and their management. Both corporate brands and city brands have multidisciplinary roots (eg Ashworth and Voogd, 1990), both address multiple groups of stakeholders (eg Kotler *et al.*, 1999; Ashworth, 2001), both have a high level of intangibility and complexity, both need to take into account social responsibility (eg Ave, 1994), both deal with multiple identities (eg Dematteis, 1994). Corporate branding and

corporate-level marketing do have a multitude of suggestions for marketing implementation within cities.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the main difficulties for city marketers is that they are faced with a multitude of target audiences and stakeholders' groups. The focus of the theoretical framework here is clearly on the city's own residents. This does not imply that other target audiences (visitors, investors etc) are or should be considered less important. It just stresses the fact that all activities (whether they concern economic, cultural, social, tourist or any other development of the city) are done in the name of the city's residents and their ultimate goal is to improve their quality of life.

The theoretical framework that this paper centres around is provided by the combination of all of the above-outlined approaches. City marketing measures that make up the city marketing mix as suggested by city marketing theory and applied in practice (described above) and the components of the city's brand management derived from the transfer to the context of cities of the notions of corporate branding (also described above) merge to provide the guidelines for developing and managing the city's brand. The basic elements are represented in the form of a figure which describes the way in which image communication takes place through the choice and appropriate treatment of variables (Figure 1).

The beginning lies in the realisation that all encounters with the city take place through perceptions and images. It is accepted here that it is indeed the image of the city that needs to be planned (Vermeulen, 2002) and consequently marketed. It is the interaction of the 'external' with the

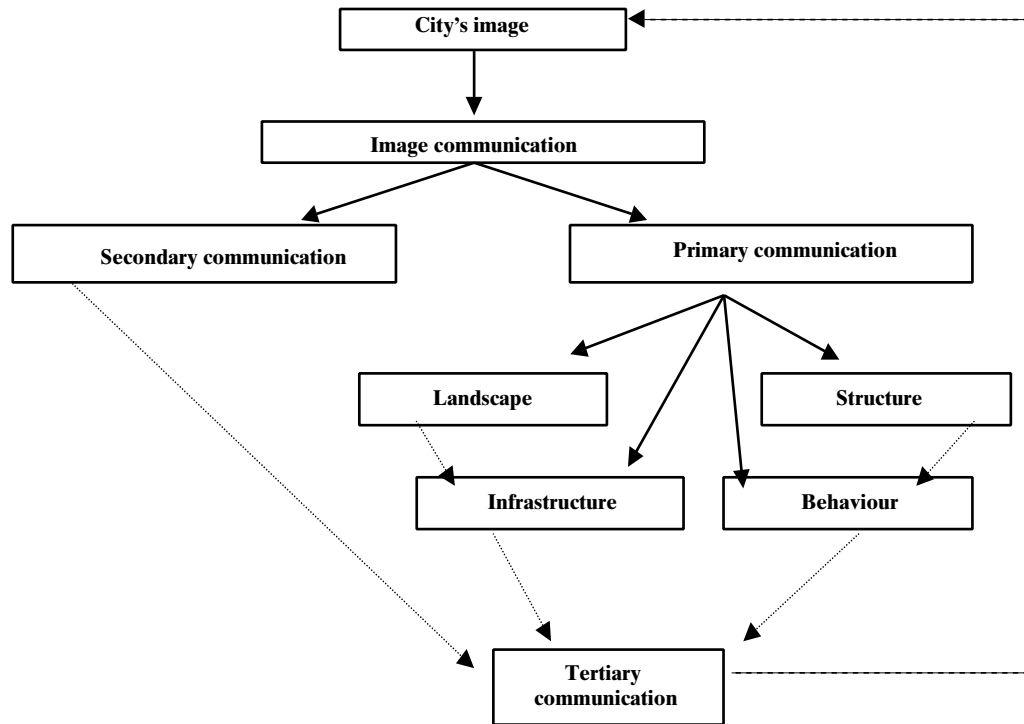


Figure 1: City image communication

‘internal’ city that Graham (2002) describes which becomes the focal point for city branding. Everything a city consists of, everything that takes place in the city and is done by the city, communicates messages about the city’s image. 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 image is communicated through three distinct types of communication, namely primary, secondary and tertiary.

Primary communication

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 actions and decisions that are relevant to urban design, architecture, green spaces and generally public spaces in the city. The increasingly popular use of public art is also included in this category, together with heritage planning. This component is in reality similar to the product component of the traditional 4Ps of marketing and has been suggested in city marketing theory as design (place as character) (Kotler *et al.*, 1999) and as the first part of the ‘spatial-functional measures’ of Ashworth and Voogd (1990). At the same time it is borrowed from the reality of city marketing as practised so far — the same as urban design and place marking (Griffiths, 1998) or the sum of large-scale physical redevelopment and public art (Hubbard and Hall, 1998).

‘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. On the one hand this element of the framework has to do with improving the city's accessibility to the various audiences, whether it is accessibility of the high street to the residents, accessibility of major monuments to visitors or the existence of an adequately large airport. On the other hand it refers to the existence and sufficiency of various facilities like cultural centres, conference facilities etc. Infrastructure projects as a component of the city's brand have the same meaning as infrastructure (place as fixed environment) suggested by Kotler *et al.* (1999) and are the second part of the spatial-functional measures of Ashworth and Voogd (1990).

'Organisational and administrative structure' refers to the effectiveness and improvement of the city's governing structure. Organisational structure is in the same spirit (but wider) as the organisational measures of Ashworth and Voogd (1990), it is the natural extension of the public-private partnerships that Hubbard and Hall (1998) include in their description of city marketing practice. At the same time the organisational structure is one of the main suggestions of corporate branding, it is the structure that Balmer (2002) describes as one of the components of corporate identity. The most important elements of this category would be 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 by the city to various stakeholders. Two elements of

significance are the type of services provided by the city, together with the effectiveness of their provision and the number and type of events (like festivals and other cultural, sports or leisure events) organised in the city. The city's behaviour borrows from the practice of city marketing, the event-based strategies that Griffiths (1998) identifies and the sum of mega-events and cultural regeneration of Hubbard and Hall (1998). It also includes the basic services of Kotler *et al.* (1999) and the financial measures of Ashworth and Voogd (1990). Mostly, though, it is a suggestion in the spirit of corporate branding. It is what Balmer (2002) refers to as strategy, or the sum of vision and culture that Hatz and Schultz (2001) identify as two of the three elements that need to be aligned.

It has to be stressed that this list is not and cannot be exhaustive. It relies on the skills, the innovativeness and the imagination of every city marketer and city administrator to enrich it with new ideas, practices and techniques. It does, however, provide a basis from which to understand the multifaceted process of building city images and managing city brands.

Secondary communication

Secondary communication is the formal, intentional communication that most commonly takes place through well-known marketing practices like indoor and outdoor advertising, public relations, graphic design, the use of a logo etc. It is largely the same as what is meant by the promotion component of the traditional marketing mix and it has been so far the one marketing variable that cities have adopted with great ease. Secondary communication here is in accordance with what is meant by the promotional measures of Ashworth and Voogd (1990) and by the advertising and

promotion of Hubbard and Hall (1998) and Griffiths (1998); it is part of what Balmer (2002) describes as the communication component of corporate identity. 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 in complete accordance with the rest of the components and also in total harmony with the reality of the city as encountered by the various city audiences. At least as close to it as possible, as the well-known rule of marketing applies: 'if you want to kill a bad product, advertise it!'

Starting points for secondary communication are two elements. The content of this communication is the most significant factor, stressing the self-evident, but often forgotten, fact that there simply needs to be something to communicate about; to put it simply, promotion comes only after one has something to promote. At the same time it builds upon the communicative competence of the city. As Grabow (1998: 4) concludes, the most important factor of city marketing is a functional communication and 'the communicative competence of a city is a key factor and vital requirement for all phases of successful urban marketing'. This communicative competence of the city is both a goal, as well as a result of the city branding process.

Tertiary communication

Finally, tertiary communication refers to word of mouth, reinforced by media and competitors' communication. It is linked with the rest by an interrupted line (Figure 1), as it is not controllable by marketers. The whole branding process and the other two controllable types of image communication have as a goal to evoke and reinforce positive tertiary

communication — especially so in the case of the city's own residents, who are at the same time the most important target audience of city branding and the most important city marketers.

WHY CITY BRANDING?

Helbrecht (1994: 528) discusses the relevance of city marketing philosophy and methods to city governance and local development:

'city marketing enables a new level of quality within the local development policy in terms of comprehensiveness, creativity and flexibility. New resources in the form of ideas, capital and local knowledge are mobilised for local policy. In this way city marketing enables a strategic approach to public planning in collaboration with the private sector.'

In the beginning, local authorities eagerly embraced marketing in order to attract inward investment (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990), and this might be one of the reasons why critical voices have raised the argument that city marketing exacerbates social conflicts (Griffiths, 1998). According to Paddison (1993) 'within the '90s reducing the social divisiveness of the city's marketing impetus constitutes as much a challenge as maintaining its momentum'. But things have changed, as the realisation came that for most urban authorities external markets are likely to be, in reality, of minimal importance compared to internal. In fact:

'... it may be as much about communication between citizens as clients and public authorities as service providers as about attractive exogenous investment, employment or customers. Equally, promotion is both easiest and most effective when it is self-promotion. A place is sending messages to itself. The purpose is the fostering of a civic consciousness and self-confidence. This is both

an end in itself and a necessary precondition for external marketing.' (Ashworth, 2001)

City branding implies a significant change of perspective on the whole marketing effort. Marketing is a process that can be used to accomplish various goals set by the city, because 'to discuss city marketing solely in economic terms is to oversimplify its meaning' (Paddison, 1993: 348). City branding is understood as the means both for achieving competitive advantage in order to increase inward investment and tourism, and also for achieving community development, reinforcing local identity and identification of the citizens with their city and activating all social forces to avoid social exclusion and unrest. The perspective adopted for this paper and the study that will follow are in complete accord with the plea made by Ave (1994) for city marketing that can be called social marketing:

'because it evaluates the benefits and costs of a specific project for the whole urban community, not just for the direct beneficiaries or the users of the action carried out. This requires a government action directed at discovering the needs of citizens and groups who cannot speak for themselves. It also requires flexibility to change, an ability to gather new possibilities along the way, and an evaluation of the finished service's effect on the whole city with a view to successive improvement.' (Ave, 1994)

Such a perspective guides the process of developing and managing city brands.

The study of city brands and branding is strongly connected to two other concepts with significant relevance to city residents and urban communities. The first is the matter of the city's distinctive identity. Although there is wide agreement that one of the most important assets cities possess is their local character and identity, the argument

is raised that marketing implementation in cities has resulted in a tendency towards 'sameness', diminishing local identity (Griffiths, 1998; Ashworth, 2002; Vermeulen, 2002). City branding can assist in an attempt to reverse this tendency, since it is largely based upon the distinctive characteristics of the city. Especially useful at this point is the examination of the organisational structure of the city, which underlines subjects such as community participation. The second is the notion of the 'linking value' of products, services and especially brands, a notion developed within the influence of post-modernity on marketing thought. As Cova (1997) remarks, post-modern individuals seek products and services less for their use value and more for their linking value, in order to satisfy their desire for communities; in this sense brands have to serve at the same time the person in their individuality and the group 'togetherness'. This is the case for city brands, especially since the city has always served and still serves as the place of this group togetherness.

It is not the main purpose of this paper to outline in detail the practical techniques used by cities to brand themselves, especially since field research will follow. Suffice it to recall here that the three main techniques currently fashionable among urban planners have been listed (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2004) as 'personality branding' (or 'the Gaudi gambit' after the success of its Barcelona application), 'flagship construction' (or 'the Pompidou ploy' after the *grands projets* on the Paris Beaubourg) and 'events branding' (perhaps Edinburgh and its festival being the best-known example). All are designed not only to attract attention and city recognition but also to raise associations between the city and attributes regarded as being beneficial to

its economic or social development. It is worth noticing that none of the above was originally planned and intended to brand the city, but reality showed that this could be one of the main functions. The question one has to answer, though, is if the city's brand (or even only examining and thinking about the city as a brand) can operate as an umbrella that can cover a multitude of stakeholders and audiences. Can city branding create in the minds of all people who encounter the city the feeling that they are dealing with an entity, with one thing, which they could have a relationship with? Applying corporate branding to places demands a treatment of the place brand as the whole entity comprised 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 and afterwards communicated to all audiences.

This study begins with the belief that the single, ultimate goal of city marketing is to increase living standards for city residents. Within the city marketing context and with this final objective in mind, it is the development of the city's brand and the correct understanding and treatment of its components that carry the most importance for the actual and tangible results of the whole marketing strategy and planning, and in this sense carry the most importance for how city marketing affects the lives of city residents. The selection, use and combination of branding variables, as outlined in the theoretical framework, is the point of contact between theory and practice, between strategy and implementation, between planners and final users; it is the

point where all efforts come together, and therefore the point of more possible conflict or satisfaction (Helbrecht, 1994). In this sense the framework described earlier is focusing on the most crucial point of citizens' experience with the city's marketing effort — on the actual way in which they see, hear and feel what marketing is doing for them. By doing so, it can serve as the centre of a circle that can be expanded to include the rest of the city's key objectives, such as increasing foreign direct investment, promoting tourism and preserving its heritage. All these are goals of city branding and, at the same time, effects of its successful implementation.

Despite the appearance of a small number of publications on the topic of city branding in the last few years (Ashworth, 2001; Hankinson, 2001; Trueman *et al.*, 2001; Hauben *et al.*, 2002; Rainisto, 2003), there is a recognised gap in the literature with regard to the branding process of cities in general (Hankinson, 2001) and real case studies in particular (Anholt, 2002; Rainisto, 2003). 'This is in contrast to the increasing evidence in the press that branding, at least as a concept, is increasingly being applied to locations' (Hankinson, 2001: 129). Moreover, the concept of corporate branding (itself a relatively young concept) has not received adequate attention by commentators interested in place and city marketing, with the exception of the research undertaken by Rainisto (2003) and the working paper of Trueman *et al.* (2001). There is also a 'remarkable paucity of real case histories, and surprisingly little work that is of direct practical application' (Anholt, 2002). Theory development would need more theoretical modelling and field studies to get feedback regarding real needs of the places for sophisticated developments (Rainisto, 2003). The study that will

follow the development of this theoretical framework is a step towards filling this gap by integrating the theoretical suggestions found in both corporate branding and city marketing literature into a detailed framework for understanding and analysing city branding processes in theory and getting feedback from field research in selected European cities.

According to Harding (1994):

‘the more pessimistic scenario (for the future of urban issues) is that a narrow range of interests, driven by inter-urban competition, will continue to favour the pursuit of development at any cost. The most hopeful scenario is that a wide variety of interests can coalesce around the idea that improvements in the quality of urban life for all — an increasingly crucial economic as well as social consideration — can satisfy a wide range of demands and needs.’

The framework described in this paper signifies the beginning of a comprehensive study, the purpose of which will be to contribute to the realisation of this hopeful scenario.

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