From city marketing to city branding
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Chapter 8

Revisiting the theory
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8.1 Introduction

Virgo and Chernatony (2006:379) identify that “… many believe brand steerers are only able to use one part of the marketing mix, namely promotion because they have limited control over the product – the city, or customers’ experience of it”. But that is not necessarily true and it shouldn’t be the case, simply because branding does not equal promotion and brand management cannot be limited to promotional activities. As discussed in previous chapters, branding needs to be thought of as a complete and continuous process interlinked with all marketing efforts. Furthermore, as the next sections of this chapter demonstrate (see also Chapter 3), many elements of the city other than promotional activities lend themselves to control and it is possible to integrate them into coherent and effective city branding strategies.

Place branding is certainly a complex issue and what seems to be missing is a ‘common language’ that would facilitate interaction and further theoretical clarification of the issues involved. This chapter particularly contributes towards the clarification of city-brand-management. To that end, the recent literature on corporate branding and corporate-level marketing is reviewed and major lessons are extracted. A recent stream of publications has dealt specifically with the concept of corporate branding, attempting to adjust its basic elements and specific methodologies for place branding (Rainisto 2003; Trueman and Cornelius 2006; Hankinson 2007; Trueman et al. 2007; Ashworth and Kavaratzis 2007). There are indeed evident similarities between these two forms of branding, which have been identified in chapters 3 and 4 but this chapter further explores.

8.2 Corporate-level marketing

As already discussed in this thesis, recent years have seen the emergence and rapid development of corporate branding and other corporate-level marketing concepts, which shift focus from the integrity of the product brand to the organisation and people behind the brand (Knox and Bickerton 2003). This section re-examines recent developments in this field. A corporate brand is the visual, verbal and behavioural expression of an organisation’s unique business model (Knox and Bickerton

1 This chapter is based on Kavaratzis 2008
2003), which takes place through the company’s mission, core values, beliefs, communication, culture and overall design (Simoes and Dibb 2001; see also Chapter 3). Today an organisation has to coordinate all aspects of its communication and behaviour as it is not possible any more to send differing messages to each one of the organisation’s audiences (Olins 2000). In an era of unpredictable markets and changing ground rules of competition, differentiation requires positioning the whole corporation and the values and emotions symbolised by the organisation become key elements of differentiation strategies (Hatch and Schultz 2003). Hulberg (2006) summarises the reasons for increased interest in corporate branding, which can be broadly explained by three main factors: differentiation (separating oneself from the crowd in an environment where consumers fail to see differences between products offered), transparency (today organisations’ external audiences command access to those who are behind the brand, what they stand for and their policy) and cost reduction (rather than promoting several brands separately, corporate branding creates synergies between brands). Schultz and Chernatony (2002) argue that a well conceived corporate branding strategy provides a holistic framework for conceptualising and aligning the many different activities by which companies express who they are and what they stand for. Thus it provides a solid foundation for developing a coherent and engaging promise to all stakeholders and it acts as a mechanism to align organisational subcultures across functional and geographic boundaries (Schultz and Chernatony 2002).

According to Hatch and Schultz (2001), the foundation of the corporate branding process is the interplay between strategic vision (the central idea behind the organisation and its aspirations), organisational culture (the internal values and basic assumptions that embody the meaning of the organisation) and corporate images (the views on the organisation developed by its internal and external audiences). Hulberg (2006) reviews the essential constructs of corporate branding theories which include: Identity, Organisational culture, Behaviour, Values, Image and Reputation. An obviously central element in corporate branding theories is multiple stakeholders (e.g. Hatch and Schultz 2003). Perceptions of an organisation are formed by the interaction and communication with the organisation and one must be aware of the fact that everything an organisation says and does communicates; therefore every single source of communication must be governed by similar messages to assure uniform delivery to all stakeholders (Hulberg 2006).

Another fundamental notion within corporate branding that deserves a more thorough examination especially because of its relevance to place branding is corporate identity (see also Chapter 3). Although the definition of the concept is rather problematic (Melewar and Jenkins 2002) it is believed that a strong identity is very important for transmitting a consistent internal and external image among stakeholders, creating a valuable asset (Simoes and Dibb 2001). Or as Melewar et al (2006:139) put it “by effectively managing its corporate identity an organisation can build
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understanding and commitment among its diverse stakeholders”. Balmer (2002) proposes a
‘corporate identity mix’, which consists of the following components: 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); and culture (the soft and subjective elements
consisting of the mix of sub-cultures present within, but not always emanating from the
organisation). Melewar and Jenkins (2002) provide a different but not dissimilar model which breaks
down corporate identity into the areas of communication and visual identity, behaviour, corporate
culture and market conditions.

As Hatch and Schultz (2003) summarise, product brands and corporate brands differ in
several respects: their focus (product - company), the responsibility for managing and delivering the
brand (middle managers/marketing department - CEO/whole company), their time horizon (short -
long) and the groups they need to attract attention and gain support of (customers - multiple
stakeholders). Simoes and Dibb (2001) argue that the entity in corporate branding has a higher level
of intangibility, complexity and social responsibility, which makes it much more difficult to build a
coherent brand. Or as Balmer and Gray (2003:976) state: “…corporate brands are fundamentally
different from product brands in terms of disciplinary scope and management, they have a multi-
stakeholder rather than customer orientation and the traditional marketing framework is inadequate
and requires a radical reappraisal”.

This, together with other corporate level concepts, has lead to the concept of corporate
marketing and the introduction and refinement of the corporate marketing mix. As Balmer and
Greyser (2006) emphasise, corporate marketing is more of a philosophy rather than a function,
therefore the elements of the corporate marketing mix should not be seen as elements for a
department of the company to orchestrate but rather as informing an organisation-wide philosophy.
The 6 Cs of Corporate Marketing and the key questions that underpin each of them are (Balmer and
Greyser 2006):

- **Character** (tangible and intangible assets of organisations as well as activities, markets served,
philosophy: What we indubitably are)
- **Culture** (internal collective feeling derived by the values, beliefs and assumptions about the
organisation: What we feel we are)
- **Communication** (channels of communication with customers and other constituencies, ideally
taking into account the effects of word-of-mouth and media/competitor commentary: What
we say we are)
Conceptualisations (perceptions of the corporate brand held by customers and other stakeholder groups: What we are seen to be)

Constituencies (meeting the wants and demands of stakeholder groups taking into account that many customers belong to other groups also: Whom we seek to serve)

Covenant (the promise made by the corporate brand which leads to the expectations associated with it by stakeholders: What is promised and expected)

The rest of this chapter examines the precise link between corporate and city branding and marketing by outlining their similarities and attempting to extract new lessons from corporate branding theories that can inform city branding.

8.3 Are city brands corporate brands?

As noted above, corporate branding is radically different from product branding. City brands, like corporate brands, are also fundamentally different from product brands and the traditional marketing framework is also clearly inadequate. As Virgo and Chernatony (2006) identify, city branding involves complexities beyond those of product and services branding, which arise from the diversity of stakeholders, the number of organisations steering the brand, the limited control brand steerers have over their product and the diverse target groups. These are, of course, issues that have been raised since the very first attempts to adjust marketing concepts to the needs of places (see Ashworth and Voogd 1990) and have not hindered the application or popularity of place marketing. Hankinson (2007) discusses the distinctive factors between product and destination branding, which include the co-production and co-consumption of place products, their variability, the legal definition of place boundaries, the administrative overlap and political accountability. So, city branding and corporate branding are similar in that they are dissimilar to product branding but does this mean that city brands should be treated and managed as corporate brands?

In fact, there are many substantial common characteristics of marketing and branding corporations and cities, a fact recognised by several commentators who point to the relevance of the ‘metaphor of place as corporate brand’ (Anholt 2002). As seen in chapter 3 of this thesis, they both have multidisciplinary roots, both address multiple groups of stakeholders, both have a high level of intangibility and complexity, both need to take into account social responsibility, both deal with multiple identities, both need a long term development. In this sense, corporate branding does seem to offer a multitude of lessons for implementing branding within cities. The corporate marketing mix (Balmer and Greyser 2006) and its elements are fundamentally relevant to cities and their marketing conditions (obviously more so than the 4 Ps of the traditional marketing mix) and it could serve as a basis for the
refinement of city marketing theory. The above stated similarities have encouraged researchers to test corporate branding tools on cities (see for example Trueman et al., 2004; Caldwell and Freire 2004).

Nevertheless, it is not clear in what ways cities could be thought of as corporations and, therefore, whether city brands can be treated as corporate brands. It could be argued that the complexities involved in city branding are even greater than corporate branding and the difficulties more acute. For example, the adoption and projection of a single clear identity, ethos and image by cities is deemed more difficult (Ashworth 2006), if desirable at all. “Cities have many similarities with large commercial corporations but unless these similarities are more important than the dissimilarities of political responsibility and public interest, places cannot be branded in the same sense” (Ashworth 2006). 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 (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2005), which might be trickier than in the case of corporations. At the same time it demands associating the city with ‘stories’ about it that need to be built in the city by planning and design interventions or infrastructure development (Kavaratzis 2004), both of which demand meeting conditions that do not seem to be evident in the corporate marketing environment.

Trueman et al. (2007:21) identify parallels of city branding to corporate marketing “where the tools incorporate people as well as communications, character and covenants”. To that they contrast the differences in that “city brands are multilayered and more complex, since marketing exchange in the public sector does not demand any ‘reciprocation’ and there is often no clear legal or constitutional agreement about brand ownership” (Trueman et al. 2007:21). Hankinson (2007) provides five guiding principles for destination brands based on corporate branding theories. He argues that “there are sufficient similarities between these two types of brand to allow useful lessons to be drawn” and suggests that efficient destination branding depends upon a) a strong, visionary leadership, b) a brand-oriented organisational culture, c) departmental coordination and process alignment, d) consistent communications across a wide range of stakeholders and e) strong, compatible partnerships.

The above discussion on the usefulness of corporate branding models and tools for city branding demonstrates two things. First, that cities do have a lot to learn from corporate-level marketing theory and practice. Secondly, that there is a need to adapt such models for the specific conditions and characteristics of cities and places in general. Applying city branding can rely to a great extend on corporate branding but it can still only be a distinct form of branding. Therefore, what is needed is to develop a branding framework that applies specifically to cities. As Kerr (2006:281) suggests, “…given the widespread acceptance of the similarities between the corporate brand and the location brand, researchers and practitioners in place branding have the opportunity to
draw from the existing models of the corporate brand and to develop a model to reflect the key components of, and relationships within, the location brand architecture and portfolio”.

8.4 City branding frameworks

As stated earlier there is an evident confusion between city branding and promotion, caused by the perceived little control over other elements of the marketing mix (Virgo and Chernatony 2006). This misunderstanding has misled most contemporary city branding practice to the exclusive use of promotional tools like slogans and logos or, at best, advertising campaigns. However, a strategic and responsible view on city branding includes many more areas of activities. Although it is true that considering the popularity of place branding, “very little has been written about how place marketing and in particular the branding of places should be managed” (Hankinson 2007:241), there have been suggestions of place brand management frameworks. This section reviews these frameworks and attempts a synthesis; a process that might eventually lead to a more generally accepted framework of how to develop and manage city brands. Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2007) undertook a similar review that led to the identification of basic similarities of some of the frameworks. However, the review here includes more frameworks and provides, for the first time, a clear and justified suggestion as to the route for their integration.

The first framework is the theoretical framework of this thesis (also Kavaratzis 2004) and has been thoroughly explained in chapter 3 but a brief summary is needed. The framework describes city-brand communication through different variables, which have both functional as well as symbolic meaning. It distinguishes between intentional and unintentional communication:

1. **Unintentional Communication** relates to the communicative effects of a city’s actions and marketing measures when communication is not the main goal. It is divided into four broad areas of intervention: *Landscape Strategies* (including urban design, architecture, public spaces in the city, public art and heritage management); *Infrastructure Projects* (projects developed to create, improve or give a distinctive character to the transport, communication, cultural, tourism and other types of necessary infrastructure); *Organisational Structure* (the effectiveness of the city’s governing structure including organising for marketing, Public Private Partnerships, community development networks and citizens’ participation in the decision making); the *City’s Behaviour* (the city leaders’ vision for the city, the strategy adopted, the financial incentives provided, the quality of services and the number and type of events organised).

2. **Intentional Communication** is the formal communication that most commonly takes place through well known marketing practices like advertising, PR, graphic design, logos etc.
Rainisto (2003) proposes a general framework of place branding concentrating on the marketing of places as business locations and in particular the activities of inward investment agencies. The framework consists of nine success factors of place marketing and branding practices. According to this framework, the core building stones of place marketing (and most important success factors) are: Planning Group (the organ responsible to plan and execute marketing practices), Vision and Strategic Analysis (the insight of the place about its future position), Place Identity and Image (a unique set of place brand associations, which the management wants to create or maintain), Public-Private Partnerships and Leadership (the capability to conduct complex processes and obtain the organising power). These are factors that a place can actively influence and that represent the organising capacity of the place. Another four success factors assist the above to meet the challenges in the environment where place marketing practices are performed; these are Political Unity (agreement about public affairs), Global Marketplace, Local Development and Process Coincidences (remarkable occurrences of events during the marketing process).

Anholt (2006a) describes a framework for evaluating city brands called the city brand hexagon that is used to create the Anholt-GMI City Brands Index. The six components of the hexagon are Presence, Place, Potential, Pulse, People and Prerequisites. The Presence refers to the city’s international status and standing – how familiar people are with the city. The Place component refers to the physical aspects of the city – how beautiful and pleasant or otherwise the city is. The Potential considers the opportunities the city has to offer in terms of economic or educational activities. The Pulse examines the existence of a vibrant urban lifestyle or lack thereof; how exciting people think the city is. The People component examines the local population in terms of openness and warmth and also los at safety issues in the city. Finally, the Prerequisites deal with the basic qualities of the city; the standards and price of accommodation and public amenities. This framework has been developed as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of branding but it is a particularly helpful tool for guiding the branding effort, in that it distinguishes between the broad areas of local policy making that will ultimately influence the judgement of the city’s brand.

A different 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 provides a model of place brands based on the conceptualisation of brands as relationships, in which the brand is construed as having a personality which enables it to form a relationship with the consumer. 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 to services, brandscape/built environment, various facilities); c) Media Relationships (organic and marketing communications); and d) Consumer Relationships (residents and employees, internal customers, managed relationships from the top).

“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” (Hankinson 2004:115).

More recently, the same author (Hankinson 2007) suggested another framework which underlines the leading role played by the Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO). The development and management of the destination brand is described as a process dependent on the effectiveness of brand leadership by the DMO. The process begins with the DMO deciding on a vision for the brand and a strategy for brand-building. First the brand needs to be built internally from the top by embedding its values to the internal culture of the organisation (Internal Brand Identity). The brand ‘rolls out’ to partner organisations, attempting to build strong alliances and partnerships based on compatibility (External Brand Identity). Afterwards, the brand is communicated and the brand experience delivered (Consistent Brand Communications), with the DMO ensuring effective communication with all stakeholders (Multiple Stakeholders).

Trueman and Cornelius (2006) suggest a ‘place branding toolkit’ which includes five fields of measures that can be taken, termed the “5 Ps” of place branding: Presence (on the one hand the appearance of architecture, icons and the built environment, on the other hand the emotional landscape connected to the local social fabric); Purpose (in the levels of various boundaries that exist in the city, for instance neighbourhood vs. city or other social boundaries); Pace (the speed at which the place responds to internal and external market conditions); Personality (which is made up by presence, purpose and pace as well as the visual impact of the built environment); Power (or empowerment of change, without which local communities are unlikely to support regeneration or adopt ownership of city brands). The authors include for each ‘P’ relevant tools that a city can use to successfully cope with the demands of managing each of those areas of intervention and demonstrate this with an application of their toolkit on the city of Bradford. The relevant tools that they suggest are:

- Presence: iconic symbols (that offer a clear visual image and differentiate), ordered and multi-layered identity (that caters for the different needs and aspirations of main stakeholders) and visibility (the visual presence in the street environment).
- Purpose: distinct boundaries (that facilitate the link between the brand and specific locations), brand ownership (a measure of civic pride), multi-cultural society (that facilitates...
regeneration and new ideas) and clear communications channels (that reinforce messages and cohesion).

- Pace: public-private partnerships (that balance the perspective and mitigate tensions).
- Personality: the emotional landscape (that provides a reality check and clarifies evaluations of the city’s aspects).
- Power: social purpose and empowerment (that reinforces brand presence and trust)

### 8.5 Towards integration?

The frameworks described above differ in several respects. Whereas Hankinson focuses on cities as tourism destinations, the rest attempt a wider focus. Anholt’s Hexagon is more a blueprint for research on the effectiveness of a city’s branding effort and its evaluation, while the rest provide the basis for attempting the branding effort. The frameworks also differ in their conceptualization of the place brand. For example, Kavaratzis treats the place brand as a communicator, whereas Hankinson adopts the brand as a relationship approach and Trueman & Cornelius attempt a more integrated conceptualization. In all frameworks, however, the multidimensional nature of the place brand is evident, which leads all of them to integrate into their main approach elements of the different functions of the brand. It becomes obvious from all frameworks that 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, in the same way that this is true for corporations (Hulberg 2006). Strong similarities are actually demonstrated in the frameworks, which could serve as a base for their integration.

For instance, the element of Organisational Structure in Kavaratzis, in essence addresses relevant relationships, in much the same way as Hankinson’s 2004 Consumer Relationships and Trueman & Cornelius’s Power element. It also includes both internal and external brand identity as described in Hankinson 2007. The Prerequisites of Anholt’s model are very similar to the Infrastructure components of both Kavaratzis and Hankinson. Trueman & Cornelius’s Personality emphasises the fact that the communicated purpose and identity of a brand is likely to be credible if it is reinforced by the actual appearance of architecture, landscaping and the heritage of the city, which is the main idea behind the Landscape Strategies of Kavaratzis and the Place feature of Anholt’s model. Potential and opportunities are major elements the models of both Anholt and Trueman & Cornelius. The selected vision for the city and the strategy adopted to achieve it are basic components of three of the frameworks, namely Hankinson 2007, Kavaratzis and Rainisto. Hankinson 2007 and Rainisto also stress the importance of a strong leadership. The increasingly popular establishment of Public Private Partnerships to plan and implement place marketing activities is
highlighted by Rainisto, Trueman & Cornelius and Kavaratzis. Trueman & Cornelius and Kavaratzis add the natural environment to the elements that need to be managed and, finally, Trueman & Cornelius add the importance of gateways into the city or corridors which connect city parts, indeed bringing attention to a neglected subject.

These evident similarities of the suggested frameworks open the way towards their integration, which would constitute a major contribution to the refinement of city branding theory and, consequently, its practice and would provide the basis for the development of a ‘common language’ of place branding. Table 8.1 outlines the evident similarities between the six frameworks and includes the main lessons from corporate branding and marketing theories. The categories of the first column of Table 8.1 highlight and summarise the alignments of the different approaches to developing and managing city brands. These categories will be examined in more detail in the next chapter of this thesis, where they will be integrated with the conclusions of the three case studies undertaken to form the basis of a new integrated city branding framework.

Several issues involved in place branding need further theoretical and practical clarification. First, there is a need to address the differences between branding a nation and smaller geographical entities, like regions and cities (e.g. Caldwell and Freire 2004). Anholt (2007) makes a strong case for the development of a nation brand as a framework to improve a country’s reputation (what he terms competitive identity). He suggests that national policies are by definition branding exercises and he underlines the need to treat brand management as a component of national policy and not a separate activity. As he correctly asserts, “if brand management is… put into a separate silo of ‘communications’, ‘public affairs’ or ‘promotion’, then there is very little it can do” (Anholt 2007:33). But he is not clear about the relation of the nation’s competitive identity to the partial city or regional brands. Questions that require answering in this vein are: is one place brand enough to cover a country and all its regions? Should there be a system of brand architecture with sub-brands under a general ‘umbrella’ nation brand? Should the regional and city brands be treated separately to the nation brand? The second issue is that both the practice and, to an extent, the theory of place branding tend to focus on its benefits to tourism development and management, which, however, is only one of the multiple functions of any place. Is one place brand able to address the distinct needs and expectations of visitors, investors and residents alike? Given that consistency is vital, would a set of brands each addressed to one of those audiences even make sense? How can a place deal with their radical different and often conflicting expectations? A third issue is the further integration of all relevant disciplines that have (or should have) an interest in place branding theory and application. As Therkelsen et al. (2007:2) state, “…in order for one to fully understand the phenomenon of place branding the three academic disciplines of marketing, urban studies and policy-making must be
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addressed. Furthermore … much contemporary branding analysis fails to combine these three fundamental dimensions and tend to focus only on one or two dimensions”. The disciplines of cultural and economic geography should be added to the three above. Morgan (2006) also agrees that it is a sign of maturity of the place branding field that a more critical approach is materialising these years which scrutinises the socio-cultural and political aspects of place branding and hence works as a counterbalance to the very marketing oriented approach that has prevailed for a long time. Another prevailing issue is the ever-lasting confusion of a branding strategy with promotional activities; an issue that despite strong academic emphasis, seems very difficult to put across practitioners. How can it be more emphasised that marketing is more strategic and not merely about communications? “It helps even less that there are so many communications agencies which, perhaps frustrated by the difficulty of selling pure strategy to governments, have fallen into the habit of pandering to this misconception and simply selling logos and slogans to any government prepared to pay for them” (Anholt 2003:28).

The next chapter of this thesis starts with a summary of the research findings and the conclusions that run across the three cities investigated. It then builds on the elements discussed above (see Table 8.1), integrating research conclusions and literature suggestions into a set of significant components of a new city branding framework.