

City Branding Must Reflect on the Past and Point to the Future

City branding and identity of place have assumed centre-stage in policy debates around both economic development and urban leadership in recent years, as urban areas are forced to increasingly compete against each other for investment, talent and visitors. A report by EUROCITIES examined the best practice among Europe's leading metropolises as a means to provide a toolkit for others to apply this learning to formulate their own brand identity and positioning strategy. The report takes in examples from cities as diverse as Manchester, Ghent and Tampere.



Introduction

In early 2010, EUROCITIES established a Working Group on City Attractiveness and Brand Management, which involved over 40 European cities in a dialogue around a workable understanding of the role of place branding and global positioning in their economic development strategies. The work, discussed at several events across Europe, culminated in a special conference in Zaragoza, Spain in December 2010, where the report was adopted.

In his introduction, the Deputy Mayor of Lyon and Vice-President of Greater Lyon Jean-Michel Daclin charts the emergence of city branding as a consequence of the economic dimension of urban development, following its earlier concentration on spatial, security and sanitation issues. This new urban emphasis on marketing and branding, he considers, is a natural development given the global era in which cities now have to compete internationally for talent, investors, events and tourists. As a key tool of urban development therefore, city developers have to consider “What is a city brand? How should it be developed and with whom? Which communication tools should be used? How should the brand be managed?” he argues.

M Daclin counsels however that the report should not be seen a finished product of ready-made branding solutions applicable in all European cities but moreover that it should be the starting point for debate, as cities are “by definition, multilayered and highly varied entities, where specific tailor-made policies are a prerequisite for durable long-term results.” It is worth noting that the academic publishing market is slightly over-burdened with costly ‘how to brand cities’ titles and that the immediate value of this (free) report is that it considers emerging patterns and success stories for wider debate rather than off-the-peg policy consumption.

Main Findings

The report argues that having a city brand strategy brings the following value to cities:

increased competitiveness, resulting in a positive impact on investment, jobs, inhabitants, visitors and events; higher returns on investment in real estate, infrastructure and events; coherent city development, as the physical, social, economic and cultural aspects combine to deliver the brand promise; pride in the city as the inhabitants, businesses and institutions experience a new sense of purpose and direction.

It cites the example of Genoa, where in the 1980s and 1990s, its evolution from an industrial port to a city economy centred on tourism, services and technology saw the internationally renowned architect Renzo Piano employed by the city to construct a new image. Piano's plan saw Genoa re-imagined as an 'urban laboratory' proud of its past but open to innovation, while fostering a sense of inclusion as well as growth through the planning process. This was symbolised by a new logo, centred on the word Genoa but signifying warmth. In contrast, the Swedish city of Karlstad has retained the same branding since 1989, relying on its reputation for hospitality and quality of life.



The report considers that key to this process of working up a city brand is:

allowing cities to develop a long term vision for themselves – by thinking about what the city is, what the city wants to be, and how it wants to get there; helping cities to focus on how they wish to develop in the future; encouraging cities to think beyond their current situation in order to create new opportunities; creating a dynamic environment that will attract and retain collective or individual talents.

It also argues that cities need to define the strategy for the brand, including the key messages, the objectives, and the target audiences. When dealing with a brand anchored in a city's identity, a number of options are available:

the fully architected brand: the brand has a logo and a slogan with a precise meaning that creates an image and is highly memorable; the propositional brand: the brand is a statement of, and a proof of, the positioning of the city; the naked brand: the brand is the city itself, and the marketer has to change people's perceptions of the city.

Here the example of Munich is given, whereby before the 2006 World Cup, the city decided on building a city brand for a variety of uses. It began by defining a set of requirements for the brand: that it should be quick to create, self-explanatory, cover all facets of the city, build on recognised symbols, be intelligible to global audiences, suitable for public and media relations, use the city itself as medium and allow for

partner integration. The end result, the slogan 'Munich loves you' was considered to reflect all these requirements. Design features and imagery were then generated to capture the city's core characteristics: quality of life and leisure time; excellent networks; economic and scientific hospitality; tolerance and cosmopolitan outlook; dynamic with high-achieving sports.

The report also advances the view that stakeholder development is crucial for any successful city brand as city authorities cannot act alone but require input and ownership by the local private sector, tourist facilities and civil society. As such, the stakeholder approach must encompass a number of strands:

partnership: the stakeholder representatives need to work together using a partnership approach, to ensure buy-in and brand credibility; leadership: the stakeholders partners need strong leadership to overcome any internal differences and to ensure progress and effective decision making; continuity: continuity is fundamental in both the partnership and in the leadership, to ensure a long-term strategy and brand durability; shared vision: stakeholders must share a vision for the future of the city if they are to formulate a clear brand strategy; action-based implementation: to implement the brand strategy and create the brand, stakeholders must agree an appropriate set of actions at each stage.

Finally, once the city brand has been developed, it needs to be promoted and communicated to its identified target groups. The report suggests that number of trends can be identified in terms of how cities currently promote their brands:



traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio and TV, are still very much part of the mix; approaches vary from traditional press relations to obtain editorial coverage in targeted newspapers, magazines or TV channels, to pure advertising, right through to promoting a city's ranking in national or international city comparison tables; specific events, where cultural, sporting or economic activities are hosted, are useful in promoting the city's message to a specific target group; ambassador networks are helping to spread city messages across the globe and are also useful in gaining brand support from members of the local community, by giving them Ambassador status; social media increasingly offers the opportunity to communicate with younger target audiences who may be harder to access through more traditional media; merchandising tools can still be a very efficient way of promoting the city brand to a large audience.

Conclusion

The report concludes in drawing three central recommendations from the work over the past year:

as part of the link between a city's brand offer and its identity, it must ensure that the brand message

both points to a future perspective and remains rooted in the true story of the city. Cities should not seek to stretch the gap between rhetoric and reality however. there are no shortcuts to successful branding, stakeholder involvement in brand development is crucial to ensure continuity and shared vision. However, clear leadership and brand management and governance are also necessary. there is no single formula for success as cities have to respond to their own particular situation, but those which are proactive and aware of the experiences of others stand a greater chance of succeeding.

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