

What Does Place Marketing Mean in Practice? A Preliminary Content Analysis of North West England Place-Related Websites

Introduction

Place marketing has been used as a strategic approach focused on the delivery of a place's attributes to target various markets for future economic growth and image improvement, amongst other benefits (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990, 1994; Kotler *et al.*, 1993, 1999; van den Berg & Braun, 1999; Rainisto, 2003; Gertner, 2011). As a result, a variety of marketing, branding, and management concepts and tools are now widely used by practitioners who are engaged in improving the competitive image of a place (Niedomysl & Jonasson, 2012). Place marketing is conceptualised as a long-term, synthetic, and integrated activity, which is unique for every place and its stakeholders, and thus a key component in the overall strategy of a territory (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005).

However, the "place marketing" domain is still blurry due to the difficulties that both academics and practitioners have in agreeing over practices that are part of a "place marketing" framework (Skinner, 2008). In addition, academics are concerned that place marketing is still rooted in product marketing and have raised various concerns. It is believed that practitioners are mainly implementing top-down, commercial, mechanistic methodologies in order to develop place brands and place promotion strategies (Kalandides & Kavaratzis, 2009). Therefore, various authors (see e.g. Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Warnaby & Medway, 2013) claim that such an approach towards marketing a place can be limited and problematic, because it can be meaningless for most audiences and might have the purpose to create a sellable, fixed place identity. However, lack of empirical evidence, as well as confusion over what place marketing is, are hindering academics' attempts to validate those claims and develop new theories (Skinner, 2008; Niedomysl & Jonasson, 2012).

The study's aim is to explore a range of place marketing practices that are identified from the literature and implemented by place marketing actors (e.g. place marketers, place managers, citizens). In order to provide a better understanding of "what place marketing actors do?", the study will provide a preliminary content analysis of North West England websites that engage in place marketing-related activities. In addition, the study will explore the range of stakeholders targeted via these practices, in an attempt to identify the linkages between place marketing practices and place stakeholders and provide insights regarding stakeholder's involvement in the place marketing effort.

Literature Review

Literature on place marketing and interrelated fields (place branding, city marketing, place management, urban planning, etc.) associates place marketing with measures for renewing places and their image. A variety of strategic marketing approaches are applied, in an attempt to assist place making and place transformation (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012), and with the aim of strengthening a place's competitiveness and attractiveness (Berglund and Olsson, 2010). Overall, place marketing has become a strategy widely deployed by local and regional authorities in the governance of cities, towns, and regions, which delivers propositions that will benefit society, without neglecting the persuasive role of marketing (Eshuis *et al.*, 2013; Kalandides, 2013). Place marketing practices are part of the place marketing effort, and entail both commercial and location benefits of places (Bennison *et al.*, 2010), implemented as a long-term strategic plan, in order to form the holistic place product (Warnaby *et al.*, 2005). Table 1 presents a variety of practices that have been identified in the literature. The variety of

practices show place marketing's potential to become a valuable instrument towards place change.

Table 1: Practices identified from the place marketing literature

| Practices identified from literature | Purpose | References |
|--|--|---|
| <i>PPPs, local communities partnership, public discussion/dialogue, community engagement, leadership, business partnerships</i> | To nurture conditions for cooperation of all place stakeholders and creation of strategic networks for sustainable development | van den Berg & Braun; 1999; Ind & Bjerke, 2007; Zenker & Seigis, 2012 |
| <i>strategic plan, benchmarking, action planning, implementation & control, vision</i> | To contribute to the long-term planning process of a place | Kotler et al., 1993,1999; Stubbs et al., 2002; Rainisto, 2003 |
| <i>marketing campaign, branding, logo/slogan, place image promotion, pr/communications, advertisements, word of mouth, publications</i> | To deliver a consistent place identity relevant to all stakeholders | Hankinson, 2004; Kavaratzis, 2004; Skinner, 2011 |
| <i>infrastructure development, housing development, public realm development, town centre/high street development, urban regeneration</i> | To create urban development and regeneration projects which contribute to place regeneration | Smyth, 1994; Gibb et al., 2001; Begg, 2002; Zenker & Seigis, 2012; |
| <i>public services, tourism services, retailing services, catering & nightlife services, cultural/event services, leisure services</i> | To promote tangible goods and intangible services of a place and deliver valuable experiences to target audiences | Hankinson, 2004; Warnaby, 2009; Berglund & Olsson, 2010 |
| <i>enhancing quality of life, sustainability, prosperity, employment, environmental practices, economic growth practices</i> | To improve the overall quality of living and prosperity of a place, maintain balance between economic growth, social harmony, employment, and environmental protection | Campbell, 1996; Maheshwari et al., 2011; Zenker & Martin, 2011 |

Target groups or place stakeholders?

Traditionally, place marketing can assist the development of a place that fits the needs and wants of its target groups (potential and existing citizens, visitors, tourists, investors, workers, etc.) (Eshuis et al., 2013). However, a target group affiliated with a place is also an important stakeholder group, which needs to be involved in place marketing processes, as it has specific roles and rights from the place, as well as distinct responsibilities to it (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). Therefore, it can be argued that the transactional relationship between people and places (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981) creates not only "consumers" of place, but also "co-

creators" and "co-owners" of it (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Thus, the multiple roles that people have in places can favour dialogical processes between a multitude of stakeholders concerned with marketing a place (bottom-up approach), rather than commercialised approaches that treat stakeholders as passive recipients of a place's marketing offer (top-down approach) (Houghton & Stevens, 2011). It remains unclear though if bottom-up approaches can be applied for all practices that might be part of a place marketing strategy.

Research Methods & Design

This study relied on basic content analytic procedures in order to identify which practices related with places can be categorised in the holistic place marketing framework. Content analysis (CA) is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other content sources) to the contexts of their use (Krippendorff, 2012). As media of communication, websites and webpages lend themselves "prima facie" to content analysis (Weare & Lin, 2000). In analysing websites and webpages, researchers can choose between an objective, quantitative description of the content of [web] communication (Baran, 2002) [web[content analysis]], and this closer to traditional CA approach was used for this study. CA was deemed appropriate for this study as it can help with identifying place marketing trends and practices that occur in different places.

Sampling, Categorising and Coding

A variety of place marketing initiatives and regeneration schemes have been taking place over the years in the North West England, in an attempt to move the region past its post-industrial image (Medway *et al.*, 2013). 49 web pages from organisations' websites that have an affiliation with a place in the region were selected. Websites were selected via purposive sampling. Neuman (2005) argues that a purposive sampling can be used when the researcher wishes to select cases that are particularly informative. Therefore, the author chose a variety of different place initiatives, ranging from marketing agencies to transition town movements. The author tried to assure that each unit will have the same chance of being represented in the collection of sampling units (Krippendorff, 2012).

36 categories based on the practices that were identified from the literature (Table 1) were set. In order for categories to become exhaustive and mutually exclusive, an extra category was set (Weber, 1990), increasing the total number of categories related to 37. Categories related to the overall place marketing approach (bottom-up or top-down) and the stakeholders targeted by each identified practice (citizens, visitors, investors & entrepreneurs, other) were also set. Only text content was used for the analysis; the chosen size of each unit of analysis was the paragraph; analysing short units of analysis minimises objectivity threats and eases the long coding process of CA (Neuerdorf, 2002). A limitation of the study's coding process is that no other coders (persons) were used in order to achieve inter-coder reliability for the content analysis due to time constraints. Table 2 presents the websites that were chosen for data collection and a brief description of their affiliation to places.

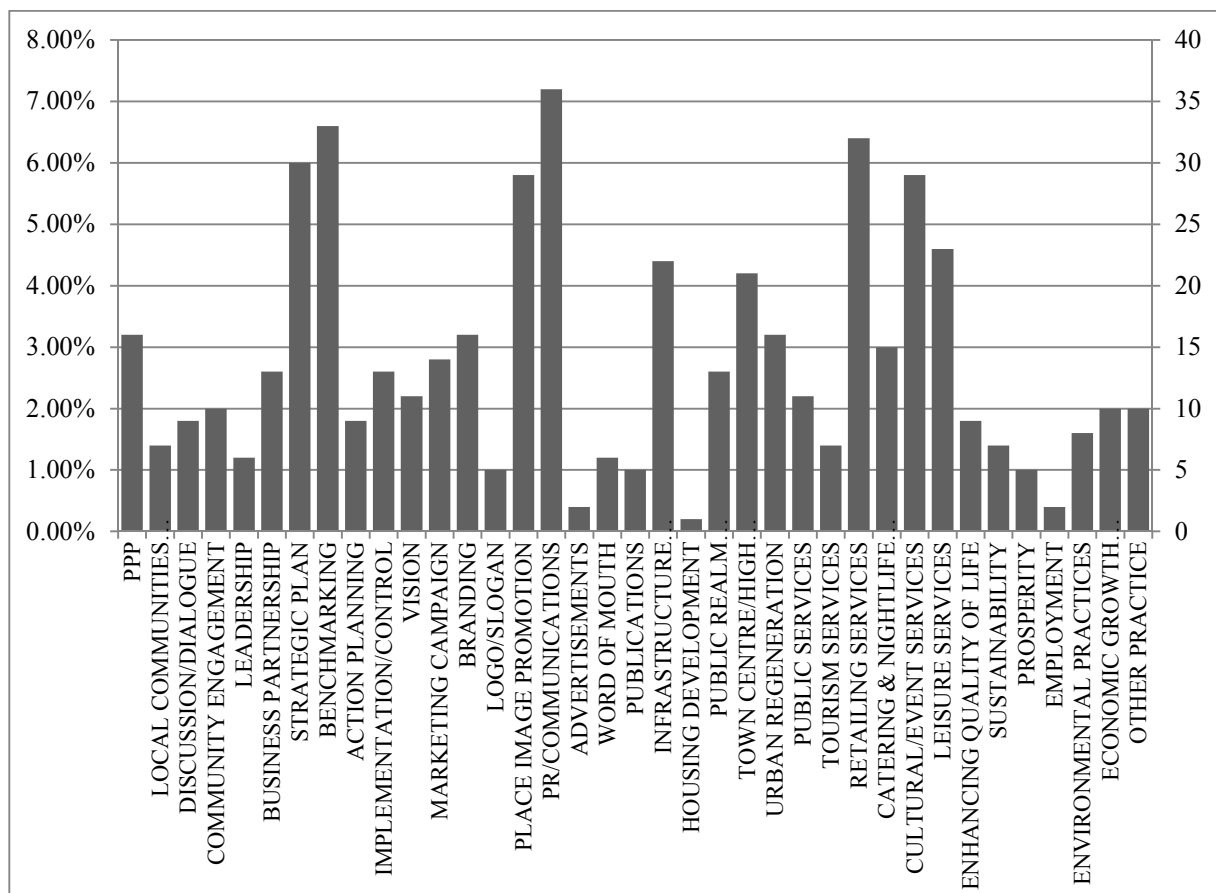
Analysis & Findings

From the 878 paragraphs analysed from 49 webpages, a total of 511 contained information about practices implemented in places, and therefore were selected for further analysis. The results in Figure 1 show that place communication, benchmarking, planning, retailing, place image promotion, and cultural/event practices were identified more often in web pages. In contrast, practices that can engage a variety of stakeholders for the common good of a place were less common (e.g. community engagement, local communities partnerships) or nearly non-existent (e.g. housing, employment, prosperity, sustainability).

Table 2: Websites chosen for collection of texts

| Name | Website | Affiliation with place | No. of pages |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---|--------------|
| Marketing Manchester | www.marketingmanchester.com | Place Marketing Agency for the city and region of Manchester | 9 |
| Liverpool Vision | www.liverpoolvision.co.uk | City Council funded Economic Development Company | 7 |
| Make It Macclesfield | www.makeitmacclesfield.co.uk | Macclesfield "Town Team", partnership between local government (MP) and citizens (volunteers) | 5 |
| Transition Town Buxton | www.transitionbuxton.co.uk | Transition Town Movement based in Buxton | 7 |
| City Central | http://citycentralbid.com/ | Business Improvement District (BID) representing more than 600 businesses in Liverpool | 7 |
| Altringham Town Centre | www.altrincham.org.uk | Trafford council promotion of Altringham town centre | 8 |
| Altringham Forward | www.altringhamforward.com | Partnership initiative from key stakeholders inside Altringham | 6 |
| Total no. of websites: 7 | | | Total: 49 |

Figure 1: Bar chart of counts and frequencies of place marketing practices



Regarding the marketing approach, 80.2% of all practices were categorised as top-down, whereas only 17.4% were categorised as bottom-up approaches (e.g. local communities' actions, local businesses actions, and some sustainable practices). Place marketing practices are not only targeting one group of stakeholders, therefore a multiple response variable was calculated in order to identify the total cases of stakeholders targeted. Citizens represented 73.2% of the targeted population from place marketing practices, visitors/tourists 58.9%, investors/entrepreneurs 62.9%, and other stakeholders 10.5%.

Chi-square tests for independence were used to explore the relationships between practices and stakeholders. The tests indicated significant associations, meaning that there are differences between place marketing practices and how these are targeting stakeholder groups. Cramer's V value was used for examining the effect of each association. As seen in Table 3, the relationship between practices and visitors/tourists is highly significant and its effect is large ($\phi_c > 0.50$), whereas all other associations have a moderate effect ($0.30 < \phi_c < 0.50$).

Table 3: Chi-Square tests for independence

| Association -relationship | Chi-square test |
|---|--|
| Practices * citizens | $\chi^2 (1, n=511) = 75.309, p < 0.001, \phi_c = 0.384$ |
| Practices *visitors/tourists | $\chi^2 (1, n=511) = 174.643, p < 0.001, \phi_c = 0.585$ |
| Practices *investors/entrepreneurs | $\chi^2 (1, n=511) = 58.450, p < 0.001, \phi_c = 0.338$ |

Discussion & Conclusion

The results from this exploratory study showed that marketing planning, promotions, and service marketing practices cover a sizeable amount of the overall place marketing effort. It can be argued that these results demonstrate that place marketing is favouring the 'place product' supplier or managers' view (Gower, 2008), which can also explain the dominance of top-down approaches in the sample. The small number of practices that engage stakeholders in the place marketing effort indicate that place marketers and managers probably give more emphasis to commercial and promotional strategies. As Roth (2007) points out, place managers should not plan for citizens or other place stakeholders if they plan without them. Therefore, a better understanding of the citizens' role in the process is needed, which can pave the way for effective and collaborative dialogue between place stakeholders (Kavaratzis, 2012).

Whereas most practices are targeting all stakeholder groups, the strong association between visitors/tourists and practices demonstrates slight disparities between stakeholder groups. The effect of visitors/tourists in the implementation of place marketing practices supports Parker's (2008; pg.10) view that "place marketing has often been seen as something you do to those outside a place, rather than those within it", and also stresses the need for re-evaluation of place marketing strategies by those in charge of managing places (Kalandides & Kavaratzis, 2009).

Overall, the study contributes to an understanding of how place marketing practices are implemented and understood by various organisations in North West England, by utilising a quantitative methodology and method (content analysis) in a predominantly qualitative field (Niedomysl & Jonasson, 2012), even though the outcome of the study is descriptive. Research results will be used for further exploration of the relationships between place stakeholders and place marketing practices, which can lead to a better understanding of how stakeholders can play an active role in the place marketing process (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Future studies can also implement similar content analytic techniques to examine visual media portrayals of places and their influence on stakeholders (e.g. logos/slogans, ads).

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