

**Manchester  
Metropolitan  
University**

---

[Ntounis, N](#) and [Kavaratzis, M](#) (2017) *Re-branding the High Street: The place branding process and reflections from three UK towns*. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 10 (4). pp. 392-403. ISSN 1753-8335

---

**Downloaded from:** <http://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/618698/>

**Version:** Accepted Version

**Publisher:** Emerald

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMD-12-2015-0056>

Please cite the published version

<https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk>



**Re-branding the High Street: The place branding process  
and reflections from three UK towns**

Journal:	<i>Journal of Place Management and Development</i>
Manuscript ID	JPMD-12-2015-0056.R1
Manuscript Type:	Academic Paper
Keywords:	Place Brands, High Street, Place Branding Process, Rebranding

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

# Re-branding the High Street: The place branding process and reflections from three UK towns

## Abstract

### Purpose

The main aim of this article is to develop a holistic understanding of place branding and reflect on its practical value and implications, by drawing evidence from the rebranding process of three UK towns (Alsager, Altrincham, and Holmfirth) that participated in the HSUK2020 project.

### Design/methodology/approach

A comprehensive place branding process that includes the interrelated stages of research, deliberation, consultation, action, and communication is presented. The practical value of this theoretical proposition is linked to the experiences of three UK towns that participated in the HSUK2020 project.

### Findings

The importance of research, the challenges of participation, and the role of communications in place branding processes were identified as primary issues in all towns. The results of the project demonstrate the significance of the initial research stage of the place branding process and show that the process as a whole is valuable in helping places deal effectively with identity issues.

### Research limitations/implications

Participatory place branding processes can flourish when place stakeholders are engaged in the right context and are encouraged to work together. In addition, place brands are important cues and empower stakeholders' participation in all stages of place brand processes.

### Practical implications

Knowledge exchange projects that have the potential to engage a plethora of place stakeholders should be considered by practitioners for future place branding strategies.

### Originality/value

The paper offers a refreshing practical grounding on participatory place branding concepts and theories. The value of knowledge exchange strategies for examining the field of place branding is also highlighted and can become a useful research approach for future research.

Keywords: *Place Brands, High Street, Place Branding Process, Rebranding*

## Introduction

One of the tasks that has captured the imagination of local authorities around the world is that of developing and maintaining a successful brand of the town or city (Lucarelli and Berg, 2011). Often it is considered that the city's branding process centers around "a cacophony of logos, slogans, events

1  
2  
3 and other types of interventions all aimed at promoting, selling and marketing places” (Giovanardi et  
4 al., 2013; p. 366). What this treatment of place branding implies is that the crucial elements in the  
5 formation of place brands are advertisements and visual identity tactics that can be designed and  
6 created by consultants or city officials behind closed doors. However, as repeatedly discussed in the  
7 literature (e.g. Govers, 2013; Oliveira, 2015) such a misunderstanding significantly limits the  
8 application and effectiveness of place branding. The brand of a place is not created in the design of a  
9 logo but rather in people’s encounters with the place and all its diverse aspects. In this sense, place  
10 brands have numerous co-creators who engage in a process of co-constructing them as they form  
11 and exchange ideas, experiences, feelings and opinions about the place (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013).  
12 The role of designers, consultants and local authorities is a role of participation in these processes  
13 and of facilitation of a dialogue that constantly re-creates the place brand. While the need for  
14 advertising and other promotional activities should not be disregarded, they are only a small part of  
15 the wider place branding process (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009). All places are complex entities  
16 that have multiple identities (Boisen et al., 2011), which do not allow an easy depiction in a single  
17 identity claim or a single logo as beautiful and appealing as this might be.  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22

23 In this article, we argue for a broader understanding of the place branding process. We  
24 highlight the importance of research as a foundation of the process, the crucial role of stakeholder  
25 participation in grounding the place brand in the place’s identity and the need for integration of  
26 actions to fully capitalize on the potential of the place brand to assist in place development. We link  
27 this theoretical discussion to illuminating examples from three towns in the UK. We start by  
28 describing the pillars of place branding and the interrelated steps of the place branding process. This  
29 is a process that makes the place brand more effective and links it to the local needs and specificities  
30 thus making it also more sustainable. This provides a theoretical basis and conceptual grounding for  
31 the description of the re-branding process as this was understood and implemented in three small  
32 UK towns that participated in the High Street UK 2020 project.  
33  
34  
35  
36

### 37 **The place branding process**

38 For place branding to contribute to the development of towns and cities, several preconditions need  
39 to be met. The foundations of the place branding process can be accurately described by the three  
40 areas of Analysis, Strategy and Participation (see also Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015). *Analysis* is an  
41 essential part of any place branding project. Internal and external market research is vital in  
42 achieving the necessary understanding of the place, its audiences, its potential and its aims all of  
43 which become the cornerstones of place brand development (Kotler et al., 1993). A solid grasp of the  
44 constituents of the place’s image (how it is perceived by people) and what the place means for  
45 people is crucial for the development of a sustainable place brand (see also Govers and Go, 2009), as  
46 is the evaluation of the place’s potential for the future in relation to the external environment. The  
47 understanding developed by the analytical stages of place branding lead to the development of a  
48 vision for the place and the *Strategy* that will be followed. Place branding actions implemented in  
49 isolation and not adhering to a wider place reputation strategic framework (Bell, 2016) are not likely  
50 to achieve long term effects for the place. Even the most appealing and creative promotional  
51 campaign or a well-organised event can only bring temporary results if they are not aligned with a  
52 strategic vision of what the place’s stakeholders aim for the future.  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Consequently, this highlights the significance of stakeholder *participation* for effective place brand development. Several groups of place stakeholders (see Stubbs and Warnaby, 2015) are important participants in the branding process. The need to involve them in this process stems from the nature of places and place brands themselves which is complex, multifaceted, dynamic and participatory (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015). It is often the case that place brands are developed without the participation of stakeholders (e.g. Bennett and Savani, 2003; Merrilees et al., 2009). As Zenker et al. (2017:17) critically note, “because branding is often understood as a process of reduction and concentration on core associations [...] practitioners and researchers alike tend to react negatively to complexity” and they avoid involving many stakeholders in the process. This, however, is unlikely to lead to sustainable place brands, because it minimizes the sense of ownership over the brand that is necessary for the brand to be endorsed and advocated by people (Aitken and Campelo, 2011). Current implementation of place branding seems to emphasise the development of a place brand that is chosen by the local authorities or consultants, which is unfortunate as it ignores the meanings of the brand for the people who live in the place and have invested interests in its development. In contemporary political environments, it is this aspect of participation that is most fragile, as it goes against the desire for fast and easy solutions, thus hampering the potential of place branding to represent in-depth local development policies (Bennett and Savani, 2003; Braun et al., 2013; Cleave et al., 2016).

To put it simply, what this means in practice is that effective place branding implementation consists of the five interrelated and overlapping stages of the participatory place branding process (Figure 1). The first stage is *research* where the analytical aspects of place branding projects discussed above come to the fore. This involves a detailed account of the resources available in the place as well as an investigation of the external and internal environmental factors that affect it. Perception studies of the current and potential image are also included and several other studies and methods that help evaluate the current situation of the place and its potential for future development. The second stage is *deliberation*. In this stage, the core group of stakeholders discuss and propose a strategic vision for the place. These stakeholders might include local authorities, tourism offices, the local chamber of commerce and/or industry, directly involved sectors (e.g. retailers, leisure, transportation etc.) and any external consultants or experts. The aim of this stage of the process is not necessarily to create a final vision of the future but rather to formulate and articulate a meaningful proposition of such a vision. This proposition will be used in the next stage of *consultation* to initiate a dialogue around the proposed vision and about the future. Extensive discussions and consultations with local communities are required in order to refine the vision and strategy. Furthermore. The stage of consultation includes the seeking of synergies with organisations, institutions and other places that might be mutually beneficial. The fourth stage is the stage of *action*, in which measures are taken and tactics are implemented. These actions will inevitably include infrastructure development and improvement, regeneration initiatives, and initiatives aiming at enriching the ‘opportunities’ offered to the several place audiences (opportunities for residence, work, leisure, education, investment and general quality of life). In this sense, this stage of the branding process relies on ‘place making’. It is important to note that the previous stages are also action-based in the sense that the activities undertaken brand the place equally actively by sending powerful messages about the place and its brand. The next stage is the stage of *communication*. There is a clear need, particularly in our information overloaded times, to actively engage in communication of the place’s benefits and improvement efforts. This stage wraps up all the above efforts and aims at making all interventions known to the wider public. In this sense, the previous stages of the process provide this last stage with the content of communication.

1  
2  
3  
4  
5 **INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE**  
6  
7

8 It is very important to note that the stages of the above described process are not  
9 independent of each other but they are overlapping and happen simultaneously. For analytical and  
10 planning reasons, it is useful to consider the different aims of the stages and the different activities  
11 they include. However, in the actual implementation of place branding projects and strategies, the  
12 stages are interdependent and overlapping to a great extent in both content and timeframe. This  
13 notion helps clarify two important implications. First, that all above mentioned activities and  
14 measures are indeed branding measures. All activities described above in essence send messages  
15 about the place's brand, which is what the process is about and are not meant to happen in parallel  
16 or after the branding process. Rather, they constitute the branding process. For instance, research  
17 does not happen 'before' branding starts but it is part of the branding process. The stage of  
18 consultation aims neither at clarifying the meaning of the brand before this is captured in other  
19 actions nor at getting people 'on board' the established brand. It is in and of itself an integral part of  
20 the branding effort in that it sends important messages about the nature and content of the place's  
21 brand. Place making' is also a part of the branding process and not a separate activity. The second  
22 implication of the overlapping and simultaneous stages of the process is that the vision for the  
23 future of the place and the strategy to achieve this vision are not finalised at the second stage but  
24 they are only propositions that need to be revisited at regular intervals. This is necessary in order to  
25 accommodate changes in the wider environment in which place branding takes place and also in  
26 order to account for the changes brought about by the branding process itself.  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31

### 32 33 **High Street 2020 priorities and the re-branding factors** 34

35 The High Street UK 2020 project involved retail experts, academics, town centre managers, and key  
36 high street stakeholders (retailers, town centre partnerships, local authorities, property  
37 owners/developers and residents) from 10 partner locations (Alsager, Altrincham, Ballymena,  
38 Barnsley, Bristol, Congleton, Holmfirth, Market Rasen, Morley and Wrexham) in a knowledge  
39 exchange process for building a framework for High Street intervention. The framework entails four  
40 main components ('repositioning', 'reinventing', 'rebranding' and 'restructuring') that were identified  
41 from the management and marketing literature. One of the main objectives of the project was the  
42 development of a series of sustainable centre plans on each one of these locations. After a series of  
43 workshops, discussions and consultations with the project team, retail experts, and academics, each  
44 partner location had to develop a plan by focusing on one of the four components above.  
45  
46

47 Partner towns were encouraged to focus on improving these factors that can exert the most  
48 influence on the High Street and can also be mostly influenced by the High Street itself. A systematic  
49 literature review revealed more than 150 factors that can influence town performance. After that,  
50 via the utilisation of the Delphi technique, a panel of academics and experts participated in a two-  
51 round exercise to identify the most important factors. The above outlined process led to the  
52 identification within the HSUK2020 project of the top 25 priorities and factors for the future of the  
53 High Street, which are considered as the most important areas of action (shown in Table 1).  
54  
55

56 Several, if not all, of the factors presented in Table 1 are closely related to place branding as  
57 understood here and described above. The priorities of high streets and town centres regarding their  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 future can be considered in branding terms and a place branding logic might help in achieving an  
4 integrated reaction to the challenging factors as will be shown below with the brief discussion of the  
5 three cases. In general terms, branding is very clearly related to the 'appearance' group of factors  
6 (cleanliness and design) and, of course, the promotional needs by assisting in disseminating  
7 information and persuading about the high street's features and benefits. Arguably, though, the  
8 'attractiveness' factor is to a great extent part of a holistic branding strategy, the 'experience' factor  
9 is influenced by the place brand and all factors related to the facilities (e.g. 'necessities' or 'anchor  
10 stores') and infrastructure (e.g. 'walking') and diversity of the offering also. The factors related to  
11 'networking' and stakeholder relationships are at the heart of a participatory branding focus as the  
12 brand can provide the common ground for these relationships to develop. Certainly, the 'vision and  
13 strategy' factors can benefit greatly by the brand as, in a holistic understanding, the brand becomes  
14 itself the vision for a town's future and the strategic guidance necessary for all other actions. Even  
15 factors that seem clearly unrelated to the brand such as the 'accessibility', can be positively  
16 influenced by an effective place branding process as this might minimise the psychological distance  
17 from someone's residence or might motivate people more to sustain access difficulties. This is just  
18 an example of the brand's contribution to the reputation of the place, which, in turn has an effect on  
19 many other development factors.  
20  
21  
22

23  
24 This briefly describes the way in which the place branding process covers a wide range of  
25 factors affecting the high street and it shows the potential of place branding to assist in city centre  
26 revitalisation and in securing a prosperous future for High Streets. It also makes clear why re-  
27 branding has been chosen as a main focus of the HSUK2020 project. This has been beneficial for the  
28 project as a whole and, particularly for participating towns that chose to focus their efforts on re-  
29 branding, as the next section describes.  
30  
31  
32

33 ***INSERT TABLE 1 HERE***  
34  
35  
36

## 37 **Reflections from the High Street**

38  
39 This section covers three case studies from HSUK2020 towns focusing on rebranding. The section  
40 does not report on a purposefully designed research process with set objectives and strict  
41 methodological guidelines. Rather, it is a description of how the three towns reacted to the need of  
42 re-branding and a reflection of how the re-branding theory has helped local stakeholders realise  
43 change in their towns. We draw evidence from the collaboration with our partners during the life of  
44 this project, as well as from workshops and meetings with town stakeholders. Each case includes a  
45 reflection on how the rebranding process relates to the theory and some commentary on what could  
46 have been done differently in each town. This serves the dual goal of placing specific practices and  
47 actions in a wider conceptual framework and of linking the place branding process to the specific  
48 context with its particular conditions.  
49  
50

### 51 ***Alsager: Reminiscing the 'Village' place brand***

52  
53 Alsager is a classic 'sleepy' town with a population of 12500. Originating as a farming Hamlet, it  
54 expanded during the Victorian Period when the Railway made it a popular and attractive place for  
55 the wealthy to live away from the potteries. Alsager has been undergoing major changes recently,  
56 with the closure of Manchester Metropolitan University Alsager campus, the loss of manufacturing  
57 businesses, improvements in and around the town centre (including the opening of a new anchor  
58  
59  
60



store), and plans for future housing developments. It became evident during the lifetime of the project that these changes might have led to confusion between local stakeholders about what type of town Alsager is and what town they want it to be in the future. This was reflected during workshops and meetings, in which it became evident that the town is in need of proper market research that will eventually inform the place branding process and will assist stakeholders in decision-making regarding the future of the town centre. For example, people in Alsager tend to agree that the centre lacks definition and has no real identity, which coupled with its linear structure poses a serious challenge for the centre's resilience. It can be argued that these agreements mainly stem from town heuristics ('rules of thumb' regarding town perceptions based on minimum knowledge) and place schemata (Kotler and Gertner, 2004) that determine what town heuristics will be integrated (Brewer and Treyens, 1981) in the place branding process. Even though these heuristics are not entirely intuitive and probably correct, they are usually based on very little information about a problem, in an attempt to reduce efforts and speed up decision making processes (Shah and Oppenheimer, 2008). However, a complex process such as place branding cannot be implemented without also weighting relevant information that might be unknown to place stakeholders and can corroborate public opinion. In Alsager, stakeholders agreed that future research and analysis regarding footfall, the catchment area, centre users' behaviour and shopping preferences, and residents' perceptions of the town centre, can reinforce the place branding process by elucidating town centre challenges and what type(s) of action is needed. This is something that highlights the necessity of research as the starting point of any branding initiative. Even if there is consensus between decision-makers as in the case of Alsager, extensive research can engage more stakeholders during the process (businesses, landlords, investors) and will not jeopardise further conflicts between groups/individuals who have different associations about the place (Zenker and Beckmann, 2013).

Even though without proper research, people in Alsager seem to come to an agreement when it comes to place perceptions and what the town means to them. In their view, Alsager is a big village rather than a small town, with great community spirit, village feel, and dynamic people who are proud of their town, and they agreed that a strategic vision for the town centre needs to put community spirit and friendliness in the forefront. These place associations can act as a guide towards dialogues and discussions between local stakeholders, an element of the place branding process that was identified as problematic in Alsager at the start of the project and was exemplified by a "tell us what to do" attitude that is directly opposed with the participatory view of place branding and co-creation (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015). This links directly to the participatory aspect of place branding projects as suggested earlier and it was comforting to see that during the last months of the project people in Alsager were highly engaged with the rebranding process, as they felt that the place brand was embedded in their own personal values, and that was something that they could communicate easier. Consequently, this process reminisced the Alsager brand in the minds of stakeholders, a brand that needs to be communicated effectively and to remind residents of the town's assets and values. Almost half of the negative associations that people linked with the town centre were related to communication, place promotion, and marketing of events. It was deemed important by the participating stakeholders that more effort should be made in encouraging more stakeholders to take an active role in promoting a positive image for the town. "It's All about Alsager", an on-going initiative to promote Alsager, its community, events and news, was praised for its social media presence and its role in engaging with stakeholders. However, it was felt that communicating the present place brand can only have a short-term impact on vitality and viability of the town centre, which links back to the absence of proper research in the town centre.



### ***Altrincham: From 'Ghost Town UK' to 'Modern Market Town'***

Back in 2010, Altrincham was labelled as the UK's bleakest ghost town by the media with 37% of its shops lying empty. The town's close proximity to both a major city centre (Manchester) and a retail park (Trafford Centre), coupled with the economic downturn, contributed to the decline of Altrincham's town centre, an image that didn't reflect the town's history as one of the first market towns in the country and its affluent status. In 2011, the Altrincham Forward initiative brought together the town's key stakeholders in a single partnership to drive forward change and help to turn around the fortunes of the town centre by implementing a collaborative approach towards the redevelopment of Altrincham. Good things are already happening in Altrincham, with the recent revamping of the Altrincham Market and the Historic Market Quarter, new developments such as a new transport interchange and a hospital and plans for improving the public realm and linkages in town. The biggest challenge though for the partnership is to reverse the negative perceptions that are still evident in the town. During workshops and meetings, local stakeholders acknowledged the positive energy and momentum from town developments, but also admitted that more needs to be done in communicating positive messages for the town.

The current Altrincham brand is based on the concept of "Modern Market Town", a vision that is shared amongst local stakeholders, emphasises the history and character of the town and places the heart of the brand back into the market. Markets, as key elements of the market town 'brand', can act as catalysts for change in towns (Hallsworth et al., 2015) as they can transform a place to a unique, multifunctional social centre that is relevant to the needs and interests of local people and visitors (Action for Market Towns, 2011). These aspirations need to be nested in all stakeholder groups and that can be achieved through co-ordinated leadership, an element of place branding that Altrincham Forward is constantly exercising, most recently by working and engaging with local businesses and developing a proposal for Altrincham Business Improvement District.

The central role of the market in the case of Altrincham is a good example of how certain place branding tools (in this case the market) cut across the different stages of the place branding process described above. The market is obviously linked to all parts of the 'Action' stage of the process as 'infrastructure' for necessary town functions, as a distinctive feature of the 'cityscape' and as an 'opportunity' for locals and visitors alike. However, it can be also used for parts such as 'local communities' (with its clear community gathering function) or synergies (with its several links to suppliers and potential clients from outside the town). Furthermore, as the basis for the place brand it has provided the core of the vision and strategy ('Deliberation' stage) and it also becomes a vehicle of communication of the brand ('Communication' stage). Co-ordination of all planning activities in town is of crucial importance to people in Altrincham, who try to make sure that all plans regarding the place brand, including the Business Neighbourhood Plan, the BID, and the work of Altrincham Forward, are aligned to the vision. In addition, the majority of workshop participants saw collaborative leadership as a way to move things forward and tackle high vacancy rates by developing new actions for the town centre, such as transforming retail units to artistic and residential, as well as nurturing start-ups and supporting new businesses.

However, the transition from "Ghost Town UK" to "Modern Market Town" is not smooth sailing as was pinpointed during the HSUK2020 project. Despite town regeneration and the revamping of the town centre and market, local people are not engaged and are not aware that Altrincham is changing. This is particularly interesting from a place branding theory perspective as it is evident that the role of residents in the place brand as ambassadors and as citizens (Braun et al.,

2013) is somewhat dysfunctional. Local support is low and the place brand is downplayed in tertiary communications, such as word-of-mouth between local people, retailers, and potential investors in the case of Altrincham. Poor perceptions coupled with vacancy rates are still deterring anchor stores and young entrepreneurs from investing in the town centre. Therefore, the rebranding process in Altrincham needs to emphasize communications and promote town events and festivals in the town centre to bring local communities closer and to support the town. This was identified by Altrincham Forward members who believe that communication is key, and are working on social media activity and other approaches for engaging residents. Communications about successful stories can also attract new businesses and investors in the town centre, which have to be coupled with new data and evidence from the street in order to strengthen the appeal of the place brand.

### ***Holmfirth: Reshaping the Town's identity***

For most people, Holmfirth, a small town in Holme Valley, is known as the setting of *Last of The Summer Wine*, a long-running TV sitcom that showcased the beautiful rural setting that is surrounding the area. The show's popularity drew in thousands of tourists every year, but since its cancellation in 2010, these numbers continue to shrink, emphasising the need for a diversified economic basis but also for ample creativity in choosing the focus of the place brand. The show's decline as the main attraction, coupled with poor retail diversity and lack of confidence from local people in their town, are major challenges for the place brand. Therefore, town stakeholders such as Keep Holmfirth Special, a partnership with a mission to contribute to the wellbeing of the town, are firm believers of reshaping the town's identity. It became evident during conversations with local people in Holmfirth that it will take more than just marketing and communications in order to bring forward a new identity that is not heavily influenced by the distinctiveness of *Last of The Summer Wine*. On top of that though, the biggest challenge for Holmfirth is how to bring more people in and engage different stakeholder groups.

Research in Holmfirth prior to HSUK2020 revealed that people understand what is going on in the town, which needs to become more appealing to future businesses and young people by reinventing the town centre, as well as investing in events, sports and leisure facilities, and links to the national park. Despite these agreements and residents' sense of belongingness with the place, workshop participants were quite pessimistic on the chances of implementing a participatory place branding approach in Holmfirth. This links back to the fragility of participation in the construction of the place brand, as frequently the majority of a place's residents remain silent and uninterested in a place branding process that they feel they do not own. Several residents in Holmfirth also recognised that they were not aware about the existence of a town partnership until they were invited to HSUK2020 workshops, further supporting communication and participation barriers in the town and lack of resources to raise awareness and interest for participation in the place branding process. This is something that reinforces the significance of the third stage of the place branding process as outlined above, where a culture of consultation and 'listening' to stakeholders is suggested. Whereas there is no clear vision for the Holmfirth brand due to many scattered groups and individuals in town, there is a great need for the partnership to identify people's trust points, be open, and try to engage with local retailers, the council, residents and young people in order to refine the vision and the strategy for the brand. Workshop participants recognised that the need to inform, educate, and map different stakeholder groups is essential for the development of networks that can reinforce the place branding process (Hankinson, 2004; Hanna and Rowley, 2011).

1  
2  
3 For all towns, the hands-on approach to knowledge exchange that HSUK2020 adopted,  
4 helped participants to understand the complexities of places and, in the case of rebranding towns,  
5 how place brands can be influenced. In Holmfirth, the project team encouraged participants during  
6 the last workshop to work together in groups and answer what makes Holmfirth special. Once again,  
7 the level of agreement regarding the town's assets was particularly high and the exercise worked as  
8 a preliminary place brand formation process, something that highlights the integrative effect  
9 achieved when the place branding process is understood as a series of overlapping steps that  
10 collectively produce their common outcome. What was striking though, was the high level of  
11 involvement and the connection between participants when thinking about their place and how it  
12 can become better. This example illustrates the important role of engaging stakeholders in the right  
13 context (the workshop event in this case), and being able to do it on a regular basis in order to  
14 engrain place brand values that stem from local people's constructions during these  
15 communications.  
16  
17  
18  
19

## 20 21 **Concluding Remarks**

22 The experience of the towns participating in the HSUK2020 project serves as evidence for the  
23 usefulness of the foundations of place branding (i.e. analysis, strategy and participation) and the  
24 place branding process as presented in this article. The results and experience of the project clearly  
25 demonstrate the link between place branding and town development. Approaching place branding  
26 in the way proposed here has proven helpful to the town authorities in their effort to deal with  
27 several of their imminent problems. Thinking about the place branding process in the above outlined  
28 manner has particularly helped face place identity issues that can be detrimental to any  
29 development effort. A general strategic guidance is also evidently provided by the place branding  
30 effort. The results of this project also show that the holistic view of place branding is helpful, much  
31 more so than a promotional view. Limiting place branding to the development of a new slogan for  
32 the towns or to the design of a new visual identity system for the town's communications would not  
33 have been able to assist any of the towns examined here as it wouldn't offer a viable solution to the  
34 roots of their problems. However, this wider and more comprehensive view of what actually  
35 contributes to branding a place, was able to offer more solutions and a wider set of tools that towns  
36 could use. Additionally, the reflections on the three towns demonstrate that the holistic place  
37 branding process provided an appropriate context and a useful opportunity to engage local  
38 stakeholders in the rebranding efforts. The HSUK2020 experience has also made clear the value of  
39 academics and practitioners working together. Both parties have agreed that there was a useful and  
40 rather surprisingly seamless transfer of knowledge and experiences that was beneficial for everyone  
41 involved and this is something that we hope will be a major legacy of the project.  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46

47 Clearly, there are several challenges but with cooperation between stakeholders and their  
48 participation in the development of the place brand, it can be a valuable tool to understand the  
49 place's identity and to guide strategic vision. As witnessed in the HSUK2020 project, place brands  
50 can 'talk' to local people's emotions and thus inspire them to engage in public discussions and  
51 consultations regarding the future of their town. This is a very encouraging first step towards the  
52 establishing of participatory place branding processes in towns as a vital part of town strategies.  
53  
54

## 55 **Acknowledgements**

56 The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the Economic and Social Research Council and  
57 the High Street UK2020 Grant (ES/L005182/1) which has funded this research.  
58  
59  
60

## References

- Action for Market Towns. (2011), *Twenty-First Century Town Centres*, London.
- Aitken, R. and Campelo, A. (2011), "The four Rs of place branding", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 27 No. 9-10, pp. 913-933.
- Ashworth, G. and Kavaratzis, M. (2009), "Beyond the logo: Brand management for cities", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 16 No. 8, pp. 520-531.
- Bell, F. (2016), "Looking beyond place branding: the emergence of place reputation", *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 247-254.
- Bennett, R. and Savani, S. (2003), "The Rebranding of City Places: An International Comparative Investigation", *International Public Management Review*, Vol. 4 No. 2, pp. 70-87.
- Boisen, M., Terlouw, K. and Gorp, B. van. (2011), "The selective nature of place branding and the layering of spatial identities", *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol. 4 No. 2, pp. 135-147.
- Braun, E., Kavaratzis, M. and Zenker, S. (2013), "My city – my brand: the different roles of residents in place branding", *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 18-28.
- Brewer, W.F. and Treyens, J.C. (1981), "Role of schemata in memory for places", *Cognitive Psychology*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 207-230.
- Cleave, E., Arku, G., Sadler, R. and Gilliland, J. (2016), "Is it sound policy or fast policy? Practitioners' perspectives on the role of place branding in local economic development", *Urban Geography*, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2016.1191793> (assessed 8 May 2017).
- Giovanardi, M., Lucarelli, A. and Pasquinelli, C. (2013), "Towards brand ecology: An analytical semiotic framework for interpreting the emergence of place brands", *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 365-383.
- Govers, R. (2013), "Why place branding is not about logos and slogans", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 71-75.
- Govers, R. and Go, F. (2009), *Place Branding: Virtual and Physical Identities, Glocal, Imagined and Experienced*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, England.
- Hallsworth, A., Ntounis, N., Parker, C. and Quin, S. (2015), *Markets Matter: Reviewing the Evidence and Detecting the Market Effect*, Manchester.
- Hankinson, G. (2004), "Relational network brands: Towards a conceptual model of place brands", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 109-121.
- Hanna, S. and Rowley, J. (2011), "Towards a strategic place brand-management model", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 27 No. 5-6, pp. 458-476.
- Kavaratzis, M. (2004), "From city marketing to city branding: Towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands", *Place Branding*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 58-73.
- Kavaratzis, M. and Hatch, M.J. (2013), "The dynamics of place brands: An identity-based approach to place branding theory", *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 69-86.
- Kavaratzis, M. and Kalandides, A. (2015), "Rethinking the place brand: the interactive formation of place brands and the role of participatory place branding", *Environment and Planning A*, Vol. 47 No. 6, pp. 1368-1382.
- Kotler, P. and Gertner, D. (2004), "Country as brand, product and beyond: a place marketing and

brand management perspective”, in Morgan, N., Pritchard, A. and Pride, R. (Eds.), *Destination branding: Creating the unique destination proposition*, Butterworth-Heinemann Oxford, Vol. 2, pp. 40–56.

Kotler, P., Haider, D.H. and Rein, I. (1993), *Marketing Places: Attracting Investment, Industry, and Tourism to Cities, States, and Nations*, The Free Press, New York.

Lucarelli, A. and Berg, P.O. (2011), “City branding: a state-of-the-art review of the research domain”, *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 9–27.

Merrilees, B., Miller, D. and Herington, C. (2009), “Antecedents of residents’ city brand attitudes”, *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 62 No. 3, pp. 362–367.

Oliveira, E. (2015), “Place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument”, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 18–33.

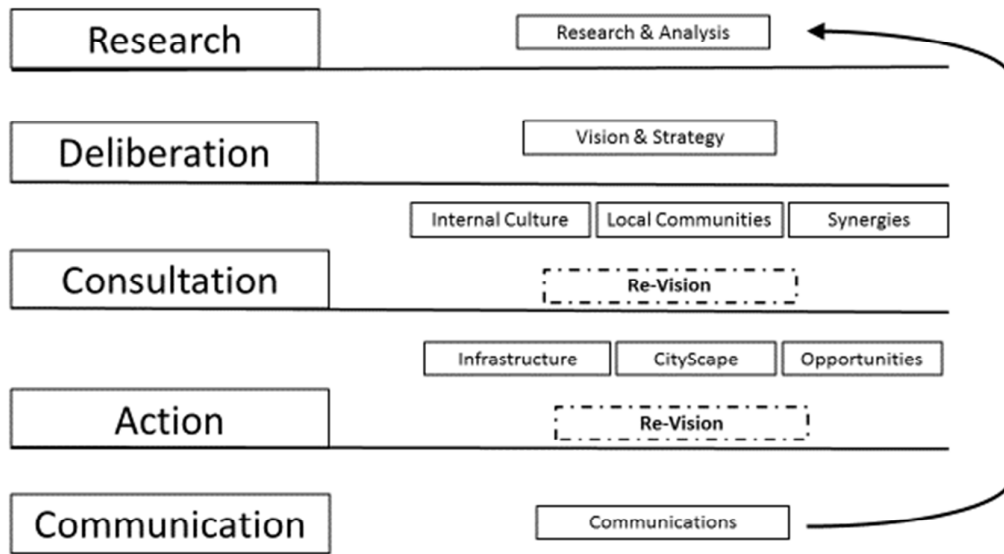
Shah, A.K. and Oppenheimer, D.M. (2008), “Heuristics made easy: an effort-reduction framework.”, *Psychological bulletin*, Vol. 134 No. 2, pp. 207–22.

Stubbs, J. and Warnaby, G. (2015), “Rethinking Place Branding from a Practice Perspective: Working with Stakeholders”, in Kavaratzis, M., Warnaby, G. and Ashworth, G.J. (Eds.), *Rethinking Place Branding: Comprehensive Brand Development for Cities and Regions*, Springer, Berlin, pp. 101–118.

Zenker, S. and Beckmann, S.C. (2013), “My place is not your place – different place brand knowledge by different target groups”, *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 6–17.

Zenker, S., Braun, E. and Petersen, S. (2017), “Branding the destination versus the place: the effects of brand complexity and identification for residents and visitors”, *Tourism Management*, Vol. 58, No. 1, pp. 15–27.

Figure 1: The participatory branding process



Adapted from Kavaratzis, 2008



Table 1: Top 25 Priorities for Change and Factors

PRIORITY	FACTORS
Activity hours	Opening hours; shopping hours; evening economy
Appearance	Visual appearance; cleanliness
Retailers	Retailer offer; retailer representation
Vision & strategy	Leadership; collaboration; area development strategies
Experience	Service quality; visitor satisfaction; centre image; familiarity
Management	Centre management; shopping centre management; TCM; place management
Merchandise	Range/quality of goods; assortments
Necessities	Car-parking; amenities; general facilities
Anchor stores	Presence of anchor stores, which signify importance
Networks & partnerships	Networking; partnerships with council; community leadership
Diversity	Attractions; range/quality of shops; non-retail offer; tenant mix; retail diversity; availability of alternative formats
Walking	Walkability; pedestrianisation/flow; cross-shopping; linked trips
Entertainment & leisure	Entertainment; leisure offer
Attractiveness	Place attractiveness; attractiveness
Place assurance	Atmosphere; BIDs; retail/tenant trust; store characteristics.
Accessibility	Convenience; accessibility; public transport
Place marketing	Centre marketing; marketing; tenant/manager relations; orientation/flow; merchandising; special offers
Comparison/convenience	The amount of comparison shopping opportunities compared to convenience (usually in percentage terms)
Recreational space	Recreational areas; public space; open space
Barriers to entry	Obstacles that make it difficult for retailers to enter the High Street's market
Chain vs independent	Number of multiples stores and independent stores in the retail mix
Safety/crime	A centre KPI measuring perceptions or actual crime including shoplifting
Liveability	Multi/mono-functional; connectivity; liveability
Adaptability	Retail flexibility; retail fragmentation; flexibility; mixed-use; engagement; functionality; store/centre design; retail unit size
Store development	The process of building, upgrading, remodelling or renovating retail stores