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Taking a Territorological Perspective on Place Branding?

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Introduction

When asked to write a commentary on this special issue, I was concerned to identify a theme that could potentially unite the variety of spatial contexts, research approaches, disciplinary perspectives, and specific place branding issues addressed therein. On reading the papers, it seemed that an important spatially-oriented topic – addressed to a greater or lesser extent throughout the special issue – was that of *territoriality*. Agnew (2009: 744) defines territoriality in terms of "the organization and exercise of power, legitimate or otherwise, over blocs of space or the organization of people and things into discrete areas through the use of boundaries". Kärrholm (2012: 9) notes that territoriality "is a rich area of research and it has, over the last century attracted the attention of a long line of different academic disciplines", stressing the multitude of subjects which have employed the concept by way of attempted explication.

Given the inherent spatiality associated with the application, and consequent modification, of mainstream marketing theory in the context of place branding, perhaps the time is ripe for an appraisal of the relevance of the concept of territoriality to these particular circumstances? Here, I draw on Brighenti's (2010) advances towards a general science of territory and territorial phenomena - termed *territorology* – to explore its potential contribution to our understanding of place branding. In so doing, I will use the papers within this special issue as illustrative examples of issues arising.

Taking a territorological perspective

As noted above, 'territory' has been traditionally imagined in terms of a distinct, boundaried space affected by a certain control or a regular set of behaviours (see Kärrholm, 2007, 2012, for a review). However, Brighenti (2010: 61) argues that territory is "not an absolute concept. Rather, it is always relative to a sphere of application or a structural domain of practice" (such as in this case, place *branding*). Thus, territories potentially arise through - possibly contested - processes of producing, maintaining and assigning spaces with meaning (Kärrholm, 2007, 2008). Indeed, counter to some stereotypical perspectives, Brighenti (2010: 53) argues that a territory is "better conceived as an act or practice rather than an object or physical space", and that it has both expressive and functional components. In other words, a territory is a product of human and institutional relations, having both *spatial* and *relational* implications, which have some resonance with place branding activities, as discussed below.

Spatial implications

Inherent in traditional ideas of a territory is the extent of its spatial remit. This is evident in relation to place branding, with organisational mechanisms for implementing branding activity usually bounded in terms of political administrative districts, which may nested within a variety of spatial scales from neighbourhood to nation (see Boisen et al., 2011). Brighenti highlights the importance of *boundaries*,

which he argues, "are a constitutive prerequisite of territory" (2010: 60). The making of a territory is, he argues, "inherently related to the drawing of certain boundaries" (2014: 2). These boundaries can, according to Brighenti (2010), be described and identified (or 'drawn') in terms of the answers to a number of questions, namely:

(1) **who** *is drawing* the boundary - in that territory cannot be conceived of outside of its relationship with the agents undertaking the territory-making activity;

(2) **how** *the drawing is made* - i.e. what 'technologies' - material and/or behavioural - are used to inscribe the boundary;

(3) **what kind** *of drawing is being made* - linking to the notion that territory can be expressed by various means and is always 'qualified' in some way; and,

(4) **why** *the drawing is being made* - i.e. relating to the status of the boundary as an expressive and functional device.

In the context of place marketing and branding, the answers to these questions (which, arguably, could legitimately form the basis of developing a place branding *strategy*) have implications, not only for delineating the nature of the spatial entity that is the subject of branding initiatives, but also the locus of responsibility for these activities. Two of the contributions to this special issue are city case descriptions of Auckland in New Zealand (Insch) and Leicester, England (Hassen and Giovanardi), where the spatial remit of the branding activities discussed are obviously related to the tightly defined jurisdictional area of the city in question.

However, for other spatial entities that are the subjects of branding initiatives, administrative and jurisdictional boundaries are much more amorphous – what Warnaby, Medway and Bennison (2010) term 'fuzzy' places. Echoing the work of, for example, Paasi (2002, 2010) and Hospers (2006), Warnaby et al. (2010) highlight the *regional* as a spatial scale that may, in particular, be shaped as much by symbols, social practice and consciousness as by 'hard' territorial boundaries. The consequent *discourses* that can constitute an inherent aspect of regional place branding are discussed in this issue by Lucarelli in the context of 'Greater Stockholm'. Here, "a new spatial layout (i.e. brand region) which is not recognized legally by the legislator, yet it functions and is structured as a new geographical entity" (Lucarelli, 2017: 2) can potentially be created by place branding initiatives. There are numerous examples, of such 'created' or 'imagined' places that are mediated through - or indeed, may not exist at all without – place branding activities. Brighenti notes that territorial boundaries can "become the object of an on-going work of enactment, reinforcement, negation, interpretation and negotiation" (2010: 62), leading to the notion that the creation of territory is an active and dynamic endeavour. This, again, has resonance with place branding, which as Lucarelli states in this issue, is always "in change", both temporally and spatially (see also Boisen et al. 2011).

Relational implications

If, as Brighenti (2010) notes, territory can be conceived of as an act or practice, this begs the question of who is involved in the development of place branding strategies. This issue is a long-established theme in academic inquiry into place branding. It is manifest in, for example, van den Berg and Braun's (1999: 995) notion of *organising capacity*, defined in terms of "the ability to enlist all actors involved and, with their help, to generate new ideas and to develop and implement a policy designed to respond to fundamental developments and create conditions for sustainable development". Van den Berg and Braun identify various factors contributing to organising capacity, including the

administrative organisation (i.e. the formal institutional governance framework, which will most likely be territorologically structured in the spatial terms mentioned above, relating to administrative jurisdictional areas etc.). However van den Berg and Braun also note the existence of more relationally-oriented entities such as *the strategic network* – conceived of as "patterns of interaction between mutually dependent actors that evolve around policy problems or projects" such as, in this context, place branding activities (ibid: 996). They also identify other 'relational' factors such as *leadership*, *vision and strategy*, and *societal* and *political support* as contributing to organising capacity, and thereby helping to achieve place competitiveness. Such issues are explicitly developed in a place branding context by Hankinson with his conceptualisation of *relational network brands*. Here, Hankinson suggests a place brand is represented by a core brand (incorporating *personality*, *positioning* and *reality*), and four dynamic categories of brand relationships (i.e. between the brand and consumers, media, infrastructure elements and primary service providers, "which extend the brand reality or brand experience" (Hankinson, 2003: 114).

Such discussions reflect the complexity – both of the place 'product' being marketed/branded, and the organisational mechanisms/processes by which this occurs – identified as a defining characteristic of the place context (see Warnaby, 2009). Thus in this context, classifying relevant stakeholders, understanding their (possibly competing) perspectives and motivations, and analysing how they actually collaborate to plan and implement place-based strategies has been a focus of research, both in this journal (e.g., Forsberg et al., 1999; Le Feuvre et al., 2016), and elsewhere (e.g., Merrilees et al., 2012; Stubbs and Warnaby, 2015). Indeed, the sheer variety of stakeholders involved in place marketing (Le Feuvre et al., 2016), and particularly in the context of 'fuzzy' place entities (Warnaby et al., 2010) can result in different stakeholders having very different conceptions of the place within which they exist (Baxter et al., 2013). This has implications for the extent of the control that place branders may have about how 'their' place is portrayed to target audiences, and also opens the possibility for contestation between place stakeholders in relation to that portrayal (see for example, Ward, 2000), linking to the territorological questions relating to boundaries (see Brighenti, 2010) outlined in the previous section.

One stakeholder group that is assuming greater importance in more recent academic inquiry is the *residents* of the place in question, consistent with a more 'bottom-up' approach to place marketing/branding (see Warnaby and Medway, 2013). Braun, Kavaratzis and Zenker (2013) discuss the roles that residents can play, including, for example: (1) an integrated part of the place brand through their characteristics and behaviour (which can be bad as well as good – as evidenced in the special issue paper from Vallaster et al.); (2) ambassadors for their place brand, who grant credibility to (or potentially undermine) any communicated message; and (3) as citizens and voters who are vital for the political legitimization of place branding. This emphasis on residents (of all types) is reflected in the contributions to this special issue, which identify their potential importance in contributing to the nature of the place 'product' being branded (see Hassen and Giovanardi; Vallaster et al.).

Indeed, urban areas are increasingly multi-cultural: as Sudjic (2016: 68) notes, cities "have accommodated ethnically diverse groups almost from their beginnings along the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia 26 centuries or more before Christ". This cultural heterogeneity can, in marketing/branding terms, be a source of positive place differentiation. Hassen and Giovanardi, in this issue, discuss the attempts of the UK city of Leicester to capitalise on its post-industrial identity in terms of multiculturalism, tolerance and inclusivity as part of its branding activity, and its "provision of services for attracting and retaining foreign businesses and the creation of an open urban *milieu* where various ethnic groups are free to express and celebrate their own cultures through festivals and events" (2017: 1).

Alternatively, the diversity of residents may have more negative perceptual consequences, as discussed by Vallaster et al. in this issue, in the context of the influx of refugees into the European Union, and in particular to the German city of Munich. Drawing on a recent, relationally-oriented theme in the literature addressing the notion of the *co-creation* of the place product/brand (e.g. Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Warnaby and Medway, 2015), Vallaster et al. also highlight the potential for *co-destruction* as a threat to the success of place branding activities, emanating from the 'bottom-up'. In addition, within the formal (and spatially bounded) governance mechanisms for planning and implementing place branding activities, Braun, Eshuis, Klijn and Zenker, in this issue, demonstrate the importance of more relational aspects such as networks and the extent of stakeholder involvement to factors such as place brand adoption. These issues, discussed in the three papers in this special issues mentioned above, highlight Brighenti's (2010: 57) notion of territory as defining spaces "through patterns of relations", both among the broader groupings of places stakeholders, as well as within the 'strategic network' (van den Berg and Braun, 1999) of place marketing actors.

Conclusion

This commentary has attempted to demonstrate the utility of the concept of territoriality, widely discussed in other academic disciplines (Kärrholm, 2012), to the study of place branding, using the papers comprising this special issue as illustrative examples of its potential applicability. In so doing, it could be regarded as an attempt to extend the 'territory' of territoriality into the area of place branding. While future readers may contest some of the claims made in this commentary (which are of course, open to further, more substantive empirically grounded investigation), the consideration of the concept of territoriality as a potential theoretical underpinning to the study of a subject that Boisen, Terlouw, Groote and Couwenberg, in this issue, suggest has been subject to "conceptual confusion". Such confusion arises not least in terms of nomenclature - place *promotion,* place *marketing*, place *branding*, anyone? Indeed, these terms have often been used as synonyms, and Biosen et al. seek to distinguish between the three terms in order to clarify (drawing on a territorologial term) the *boundaries* of these different terms. In their contribution, Boisen et al. call for a more integrated approach to place promotion/marketing/branding. Focusing on spatial concepts such as territoriality, which have gained a broad currency in other academic disciplines could perhaps be one way of accomplishing this?

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