The role of uniqueness in destination branding. The case of historical Portmouth harbor[†]

Alexandros Apostolakis[*], Shabbar Jaffry[a], Faye Sizeland[a], Adam Cox[a]

[*]*Corresponding Author, Tel.: 00302810 379621, Email: aapostolakis@staff.teicrete.gr*
Department of Business Administration, School of Management and Economics,
Technological Educational Institute of Crete (TEI Crete)
[a]*Department of Economics and Finance, Portsmouth Business School, University of*
Portsmouth, UK, Richmond Building, Portland Street

Abstract:

This paper examines the potential for utilizing a unique resource, such as the Historic Portsmouth Harbor, in order to differentiate the local brand. The objective of the paper is to examine the role of unique local resources and attractions as a source of competitive advantage through destination branding. The main findings of the paper indicate that policy makers and destination managers should more proactively utilize the unique elements of the Historic Portsmouth Harbor 'brand', as opposed to the commonplace 'waterfront city' brand. This could be achieved by staging events of international significance or through a bid for gaining world heritage status. In addition to that, the paper argues that in order for this branding initiative to have a higher impact, a prominent high profile individual should be appointed. This individual could act as a leader or 'brand ambassador' in order to attract stakeholder interest and participation.

Keywords: culture, heritage, branding, competitive advantage, Portsmouth

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Introduction

Destination branding has recently undergone a significant transformation in its operations. Jansson and Power (2006) have argued that tourism destination branding is no longer reliant upon material attributes to create unique and differentiated destinations. Competitiveness is no longer solely dependent upon costs of production and labor or even the existence of resources (natural or manmade) alone. Instead, cities are attempting to create attractive propositions for stakeholders (actual and potential visitors, residents, business people) regarding where to go, visit, invest and live. This is also reflected on Kavoura (2014) when arguing that the presentation of a destinations unique identity and profile depends upon both tangible as well as intangible characteristics.

According to Kavoura (2014) and Garcia et al. (2012), the focus in destination branding has shifted somewhat lately away from the product (the destination) and towards the customers (internal stakeholders). This trend aligns with the general move in marketing away from a product focused approach to a customer focused approach in destination branding (Boo et al. 2009, Pike 2010).The focus nowadays is on the improvement of competitiveness through the destination's immaterial or intangible attributes and assets (Florida 2004, Santagata 2002, Evans 2003, Hannigan 2003, Scott 2006, Vanolo 2008). The reference to tangible assets relates to the 'traditional' resources at a destination, such as monuments, sites of natural beauty or historical significance. on the other hand, the reference to the intangible assets relates to the set

of relationships between 'internal stakeholders' (Kemp et al. 2011, Andereck and Nyaupane 2011), spokespeople associated with the destination personality traits (Pereira et al. (2012), and religion, tradition, folklore, language etc (Mitsche et al. 2013).

At the same time, destinations have to operate under a more internationalized and globalized environment (Cooke and Leydesdorff 2006). Indeed, Begg (1999) and Jansson and Power (2006) suggested that to compete at an international level, rather than a regional or local one alone requires branding of cities to be pioneering and ensure close cooperation between stakeholders. Thus, the main thesis of the paper is that the successful branding of destinations at a global scene relies on 'locally generated' comparative advantages, such as the utilization of local cultural resources and heritage, as well as the set of formal and informal relations between local stakeholders. Indicatively, Jensen (2005) and Borja (1997) suggested that cities that aspire to make a standing on a national and international arena need to 'exploit' their unique attributes and features.

The failure on officials' and managers' part to appreciate the full scale of competition has led many local and regional authorities to fall victims of the '*global – local marketing paradox*'. According to this thesis, cities that are competing successfully at different scales and geographical settings use locally oriented sources of competitive advantage (Rainisto 2003). In this respect, destinations or places that can utilise their unique cultural heritage and traditions are considerably better placed to improve their competitive standing (Florida 2004, Anholt 2007, Hospers 2006, Hudson and

Hawnins 2006, Belloso 2010, Chang et al. 1996). The 'global – local' marketing paradox essentially illustrates that marketing and branding managers often tend to overlook the point that successful destinations have almost always a unique story to tell and a unique selling proposition, either natural or man - made (Prytherch and Maiques 2009).

On a similar note, the literature criticizes marketing practitioners on the basis of providing one cure for every problem. This is where Pike (2004), Gold and Ward (1994), Klenosky and Gitelson (1997) concentrate their criticism of contemporary destination and place branding. The literature draws attention to the tendency for current branding efforts to appear more and more disconnected from the destination's or place's history and past (Vanolo 2008). Largely, this failure to capture the local culture and heritage leads naturally to limited buy – in from local stakeholders (Kerr 2006).

This paper maintains that urban tourist destinations vying in a climate of fierce competition for visitors, investment and financial resources should emphasize on branding strategies and solutions that convey a unique message/proposition (Hospers 2008). Any success of past and present efforts that relied upon the standardization of destination brands under a common theme (e.g., 'techno – city', or 'innovation city') is unsustainable (Vanolo 2008). Instead, the paper maintains that destinations could be more prolific in utilizing their unique elements and resources. In other words, the paper argues that a branding strategy based on the unique nature of the place should be chosen, over a strategy that relies upon common and undifferentiated attributes. We maintain that unique and authentic brands will be able to set destinations apart

from the rest of the competition. Unique local tangible as well as intangible assets could facilitate the creation of an advantageous position over rival destinations.

Making use of insights from tourism and marketing fields we tackle the main research question of what destinations can do to enthuse a competitive edge to their propositions, with a particular focus on the branding of Portsmouth's Historic Harbor. This is an important exercise as it could improve the competitiveness of the area as a tourist and business destination, encouraging inward investment, while at the same time developing and enhancing the image of the area as an attractive place to work, study, visit and live. In other words, providing a vision for the area through the utilization of Portsmouth Harbor's unique culture could enhance the tourist, potential of the city. One method of differentiating the Historic Portsmouth Harbor area and establishing a clear identity is through the promotion of its diversity in providing a range of its intrinsic attributes. The Historic Portsmouth Harbor brand represents a more promising branding strategy, as compared to the 'waterfront city' brand because it relies upon the unique cultural heritage and maritime tradition of the place.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: section 2 provides a short bibliographic summary of recent published work regarding destination branding. Section 3 presents the case study, a short background of the destination and where it currently stands in terms of efforts to promote and brand the city. Section 4 puts forward the main proposition of the paper regarding a more successful and effective branding strategy for the case study area. Finally, the discussion concludes with section 6.

Destination Branding

Notwithstanding the points raised above, there has lately been an alarming suggestion that traditional marketing and branding practices have represented places and destinations rather ineffectively (Power and Hauge 2008, Pike 2009, Kerr 2006). The practices that have emerged do not necessarily result in an improvement of the competitive stance of the relevant geographical units. *Inter alia,* the literature in the field (Watkins and Hubbert 2003 and Casteran and Roederer 2013) puts forward two main reasons to explain the current failure of destination branding to deliver its economic and social mandate: the apparent homogeneity of the message, and the lack of connectivity with the area's culture and history.

The current paper will address both of these points by looking at possible remedies to reverse this situation of 'marketing and branding homogeneity' and limited stakeholder interest and buy – in among destinations. In this respect, the paper focuses on the unique nature of the local culture and heritage as a critical tool concerning the branding process. This is because the reliance of a destination on its unique attributes could help it connect with its customers on an emotional level, and thus make it more likely to achieve strong customer loyalty. The paper maintains that in order for an urban area to differentiate itself from the competition, it has to tap onto the unique and authentic attributes of the place. As part of this suggestion, the need for tourist destinations to develop a successful brand identity, brand awareness and product positioning based upon the unique and distinctive elements of the destination is considered to be a critical success factor in destination branding (Baker and Cameron, 2008). In particular, distinctive, time-resistant and truthful images that are relevant to different interest groups and can be delivered as part of a vacation experience are necessary features to consider (Berry 2000, Gu and Ryan 2012).

Consequently, if a destination brand is relying on the intrinsic aspects of the destination's macro environment (cultural heritage, tradition) as opposed to extrinsic ones (e.g., access to water, waterfront location), then its impact is likely to be more successful (Steiner and Reisinger 2006, Hudson and Hawkins 2006, Morgan et al. 2002). In light of this observation, branding efforts capitalizing on unique local assets could enable destinations to maintain a competitive advantage over their rivals (Vivant 2010). For this to be a reality, destinations needs to develop a message to be supported by, and be relevant to all stakeholders in the area (Milne and Ateljevic 2001). This is because a 'constructed brand' sometimes represents something that does not relate to the majority of stakeholders, or that stakeholders fail to relate to a brand imposed on them. In other words, they feel that the brand does not express and define them. In addition to that, a brand that appeals to stakeholders' (especially local ones) psyche is more likely to create emotional links with them and thus, increased levels of loyalty.

Destinations can build an identity by playing on their own key and unique strengths, rather than following a homogeneous approach. In a discussion regarding the development of best practices for authentic tourism experiences, Casteran and Roederer (2013). (1996) showed how Strasburg capitalized on local resources and in doing so promoted its unique identity. Examples of locations adopting a similar practice include the city of Manchester's focus on industrial archaeology (Law, 1993), Sydney's focus on culture (through the utilization of the Opera House), or the promotion of a West Asian community in Bradford (Urry, 1990). On the same note, Watkins and Hubbert (2003) considered Swansea's cultural past and literally

connections to Dylan Thomas in order to create a unique brand for the city and the local area. A significant section of the relevant literature suggests that the homogeneity of the message is one of the primary reasons to explain the failure of place and destination marketing (Hoyle 2000, Blain et al. 2005, Seisdedos 2006, Vanolo 2009, Pike 2009). Effectively, the failure of destination branding to serve its mandate is because of the inability of such strategies to differentiate between competing places.

The Case Study

Description

The paper considers the city of Portsmouth, and more particularly the area surrounding the Historic Portsmouth Harbor as the case study. Situated on the South coast of England, Portsmouth Harbor is a large natural harbor. The Portsmouth Harbor region to be assessed incorporates an area spanning from Southsea Castle up to the Historic Dockyard and Port Solent, across to Fareham Marina and back down past Gosport as far as Haslar Marina and across to adjacent areas of the Isle of Wight (see Figure 1 below). Recently, and as a result of the forthcoming contraction of the Royal Navy's role in the area, the need has emerged to re-invent the vision for Historic Portsmouth Harbor away from a military establishment into a destination that would be able to compete successfully with rival waterfront destinations world-wide.

[Figure 1 – About Here]

The City of Portsmouth and the Historic Portsmouth Harbor area enjoy a strong and long maritime cultural history and tradition that bind them together. The Historic Portsmouth Harbour has been shaped by its strategic military location, which has

made it a stronghold to attack and defend from. Providing access to the Solent, the Harbour boasts an ideal geographical position for defense and as such has attracted military developments in the water and on the surrounding land from Roman times (McGowan, 2005).

Realizing the potential behind Portsmouth harbor, the Royal Navy developed the area as a military and defense installation. In a sense, one could argue that the vision for the development of the area could be initially traced and attributed to the Royal Navy. Investment and development of the surrounding land has been heavily influenced by war. As a result of this activity, Portsmouth became a centre for innovation boasting the world's first mechanized factory. Marc Brunel's Block Mills, the first dry dockland steam dredger, were among several pioneering engineering achievements. This reputation for being at the leading edge of new technology continues today with the growth of private sector companies in the harbor area supporting the defense and space industries, for example BAE Systems, Astrium, and Raymarine.

Current Standings

Portsmouth's status as a 'waterfront city destination' was exemplified during the post – war period, when the city and the area provided a close gateway to the seaside for the first wave of mass tourists. The 'waterfront city' image was further cemented during the late 90s, early 00s' with the development of the Gunwharf Quays development and the Spinnaker tower. The establishment of a waterfront image and status for Portsmouth has been one of the local council's primary objectives in order to deal with issues of competition for capital development, tourist receipts as well as local politics. In this respect, the development of Gunwarf Quaysand the Spinnaker

Tower represented an effort by local politicians and planners to market the destination as a waterfront city, rather than developing a product that could fit and complement the city as a tourist destination. The current Portsmouth City Council's regeneration strategy argues that the city council's vision is to become a 'great waterfront city' with a globally competitive knowledge economy (Portsmouth City Council, 2010). Thus, to some extent branding a city as a waterfront destination was seen as a panacea for urban development (Marshall 2001) and economic regeneration (Roberts 2000).

However, the recent evidence that is coming through is not particularly encouraging. Current data collected from 'Visit Britain' web site indicates that Portsmouth as a destination fares relatively good in terms of visits over the 1991 to 2013 time period. On the other hand though, the evidence regarding expenditure patterns presents a very different picture. According to the Figure 2 (below), the gap between visits and tourism receipts at the destination follows a different path from 2008 onwards. Whereas up to that period the gap seemed to be stable or even contracting for some years, from 2008 onwards this gap seems to be expanding. At the same time, a more careful look at the tourism receipts trend indicates that this has fallen at one of the lowest levels since 2001 (reaching approximately £1.4m.), approaching the lowest point for the 1999 – 2013 period of £1.3m. in 2011.

Although one cannot really claim that the current 'waterfront city' branding should be blamed for these figures, there is indeed a feeling, at least among local stakeholders (Portsmouth Society News, 2007), that the current branding strategy of the city has not done justice to what Portsmouth has to offer as a destination. Reports commissioned by the Portsmouth City Council (Blue Sail, 2007) indicate that tourists

and visitors do not seem to align very much on the waterfront image of the city. Whereas on the other hand, they do seem to identify intangible assets of the city such an naval history, cultural heritage more highly in their responses. this conflict between images (waterfront city versus the Historic Portsmouth harbor image) has been identified in either other occasions specific to the case study (Cook 2004, Murphy 2011), or other settings (Pasquinelli 2009).

[Figure 2 – About HERE]

The current case also illustrates an example of city officials opting to adopt only a part of the destination marketing process by focusing on the development of a tourist slogan for the city rather than a complete and thorough branding strategy (Karavatzis and Ashworth 2007, Ashworth and Karavatzis 2009). This deficiency is evident in a report commissioned by Portsmouth City Council (Blue Sail, 2007) articulating on the fact that the city was lacking an attractive distinguishable brand name to attract visitors. In addition to that, the report paid limited attention to 'internal stakeholders' and decided to focus instead on visitors and incoming tourists. A fully integrative branding strategy would have involved an identification of local strengths and unique features, flexibility (in terms of thinking wider than the city area), the future potential of the destination (in terms of demarcation of Royal Navy land) (Seisdedos 2006), and the adoption of a more integrative perspective in its consideration.

One issue that emerges when making an effort to brand Portsmouth as a waterfront city destination is the substitutability of the offering (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009). A cursory research over the World Wide Web identified at least five cities in the UK (Portsmouth, Swansea, Hull, Liverpool and Leeds) and eight cities internationally

(Sydney, Melbourne, Waterfront city Dubai, Dong Nai Waterfront city Vietnam, Vancouver, Berkeley and Lebanon waterfront city) using the 'waterfront' feature as their primary branding and promotion tool. To this extent, Hoyle (2000) argued that waterfront locations are in danger of over-emulation and must therefore differentiate themselves. Hence, marketing and branding strategies capitalizing on this particular extrinsic (or push) attribute are victims of the so – called McDonaldization argument (Pike 2004, Gold and Ward 1994, Klenosky and Gitelson 1997). Jansson and Power (2006) agree with this ''MaDonaldization' thesis and argue that the challenge for places and destinations in Europe and elsewhere is that they offer places with identical attributes.

Thus, whilst the 'waterfront city' slogan may be adequate in terms of intra-regional competition, it may already be considered as outdated on an international (or even national) platform. Thus, by adopting the waterfront city brand, Portsmouth does not really connect to its naval culture and heritage. In other words, current plans to emphasize on the waterfront attribute of the city tend to promote the need for greater tourist numbers, as opposed to implementing a strategy that would cater to a wider span of stakeholders and their well-being (Cook 2004). This can also be identified through the examination of current Portsmouth City Council's marketing material (Visit Portsmouth, 2014), where the focus is on the waterfront nature of the city and on visitor numbers.

A Way Forward for Tourism Destination Branding

The analysis in earlier parts of this report indicates that local and regional authorities often fall victims of the 'global - local' paradox in terms of destination branding.

According to Seisdedos (2006), while there is great demand for city branding and marketing, these efforts often fail to lead to an improvement in the fortunes of the area. This is because spatial areas, through the utilization of standardized practices and tools, are becoming a forest of logos and slogans that do not necessarily contribute much to the true identity of the place (Pasquinelli 2009, Morgan et al. 2002, Morgan et al. 2003). To this end, the paper offers a set of policy recommendations in order to overcome this shortcoming. In particular, the paper puts forward three policy recommendations that could facilitate the transition from a homogeneous to a unique / differentiated city brand. First, the organization and staging on international events. Second the provision of a more 'contemporary' status to the resource (through the bidding for world heritage status and making an effort to link with Royal Navy's vision for space exploration. Third, the appointment of a leading/patron figure to provide direction and an entrepreneurial vision to local businesses and stakeholder groups.

A shift from a homogeneous local brand to a unique internationally recognisable 'local' brand could provide substantial savings in packaging and communication costs (Bartlett and Ghosal, 1986; Schuiling and Kapferer, 2004). In addition, an international local brand based on the unique nature of the destination could also entail the possibility of synergies when a unified local image is consistently projected to the external world (Therkelsen and Halkier, 2004). This point is also put forward by Kolb (2005) when maintaining that both local businesses and not − for − profit organizations should adopt a common branding package to be sold to potential visitors. *Inter alia*, scope economies can potentially be derived from collectively marketing multiple destinations or attributes under one unifying and encompassing

brand. Thus, a Historic Portsmouth harbor could encapsulate the required continuity that iconic products and destinations are vying for. Under the Historic Portsmouth Harbor brand one could bring together the rich culture and maritime tradition (past), the gateway to the continent (present) and space exploration with the help of the defense industry developed in the vicinity (future). The idea is to create synergies derived from branding of shared qualities and attributes embedded in the place of origin.

Vanolo (2008) and Power and Scott (2004) argue that building a unique and differentiated local brand would lead to competitive advantage, through the utilization of local culture and tradition. In turn, the existence of competitive advantage could generate spatial monopoly power through entry barriers to other places and destinations. Molotch (1996) claimed that "favorable images create entry barriers for products from competing places" (Molotch 1996: 229). Clearly, the creation of insurmountable entry barriers cannot be generated through a series of homogeneous and undifferentiated brands.

Following from the discussion above, the paper proposes that the local authorities and city councils around the Portsmouth Harbor could organize and stage international mega events or activities on a more regular basis. This is a tried and tested approach in the management of many other cultural and authentic resources (examples include the Sydney Opera House, the British Museum and its increased interest towards up-market catering facilities and staging of temporary exhibitions). Thus, the sub – region could combine the strong maritime legacy of the Portsmouth Harbor along with its literary tradition (Jane Austin, Charles Dickens, John Pounds, birthplace of

Sherlock Holmes – Arthur Conan Doyle gave birth to the fictionary hero when living in Portsmouth). Staging a 'mega' or high impact literary event around the Historic Portsmouth Harbor, and capitalizing on it, would increase the visibility of the area/sub-region, provide a much needed vision to the locals, while at the same time raise the economic profile of the area (Kavetsos and Szymanski 2010). Herrero et al. (2011) explicitly argue that cities with important cultural and heritage attributes should utilize their unique features towards organizing complementary activities (such as festivals and mega events) in order to differentiate themselves from the rest of the competition and raise revenue.

Admittedly though, following the tested strategy of putting together a mega – event in the case study area, would not really provide much ground in terms of differentiating it from the competition and thus achieving its mandate. Indeed, Ostrom (2005) and Matheson (2006) maintained that the development of a mega event without taking into consideration local stakeholders (primarily residents, but also those making a living locally) does not really contribute that much to the local economy. This is because usually the development of mega events is not targeting locals, leading to crowding out phenomena (Changzhi 2009) whereby local residents are been excluded from events and developments due to inflated costs. At the same time, the end product ends up being primarily a profit making exercise rather than something to carry local values and attributes.

What the current paper proposes is for mega events to be sustainable and at the same time effective in terms of achieving its mandate, is to focus and rely on things local. The proposed strategy envisages mega events relying primarily on local resources

(tangible and intangible) such as local residents, and local stories as opposed to mass undifferentiated and uninspiring events and venues. In the current case study, this could manifest through an effort to bring all the main communities affected by the Historic Portsmouth Harbor together. This could be a project such as the long anticipated 'World Heritage' status where local communities through the use of crowd-sourcing facilities and campaigns could amass an extremely versatile or raw information to support this local cause (Murphy 2011).

A bold idea would be for city officials in the sub-region to join efforts in order to bid for 'Cultural Capital' of Europe status. The combination of mega events around the Historic Portsmouth harbor alongside the bidding for cultural capital of Europe status could serve two purposes. On the one hand it could raise awareness and feelings of local pride for the new marketing campaign among visitors, residents and entrepreneurs. Correspondingly, this could lead to greater degree of commitment and buy – in from all relevant stakeholder groups. This could bolster the unique marketing message and thus, the strengthening of the destination's competitive advantage. On the other hand, the combination of mega events and other important initiatives under the banner of a 'European Cultural Capital' could bring together all the piecemeal efforts and initiatives. A connecting sub-regional strategy highlighting all the many issues and initiatives underpinning the sub-region in particular: maritime tradition, cultural heritage, sporting and contemporary events, local pride could possibly be considered a more versatile instrument to bring everyone together under one vision.

Recent developments in the area (Gunwharf Quays, redevelopment of Gosport marina, potential plans for further decommissioning of Royal Navy land) represent

steps towards the same direction; adding a more active and contemporary dimension to the destination (Roodhouse and Mokre 2004). Providing a more 'contemporary' approach to the resource could easily add value to the brand. For example, the local heritage (literary) and naval tradition encapsulated within the Historic Portsmouth Harbor could easily be associated with the hosting of great sporting events (Olympics, the Great South Run, hosting a Tour de France leg etc). Such initiatives would highlight Portsmouth's competitive advantage stemming from its unique naval heritage, the literary tradition and at the same time extend the resource's reach by making the link between past and future. This could provide a first class opportunity to strengthen visitors', residents', and the business community's links with the resource and what it can contribute to the city (Kolb 2005). Such a development could potentially help local policy makers and planners to provide a holistic management of the destination, as opposed to cater for the image of the city alone.

Indicatively, a recent Oxford Economics (2010) study indicated that Portsmouth has a overwhelming advantage as far as the marine sector is concerned (in particular the industry's location quotient in this industry in the area is approximately 9 times larger than the regional location quotient). This observation, coupled with the fact that Portsmouth has an already strong image as far as its naval tradition and the 'Home of the Royal Navy' heritage (Blue Sail, 2007) suggests that sporting events that try to merge the dichotomy between the 'waterfront city' and 'Historic Portsmouth Harbor' images could generate significantly more benefits as compared to just the financial / economic ones. The organization or hosting internationally renowned events with a strong local 'flavor' (i.e., the Cowes Week regatta, in the Isle of Wight) could be

enriched with events and activities on shore to strengthen the event and incorporate more local residents.

Thus, apart from the economic benefits arising from hosting one of the oldest regattas in the world, the destination could at the same time enthuse an even stronger image of the city as a centre of naval tradition and excellence to local (i.e., internal) stakeholders. An initiative such as the one describe above could successfully bridge the gap between the waterfront nature of the city and the strong naval tradition it carries within. However, in order to do so, city officials and destination management officers would have to accept the fact that the Historic Portsmouth Harbor is a brand that surrounds the whole of the sub – region and appeal to a great number of communities (thus, act inclusively) and not just the area around Portsmouth.

One could also explore the idea of a prominent (high profile) individual to be associated with the area's efforts to create a marketing plan around the Historic Portsmouth Harbor. The individual (or group of them) should act as a patron figure to the proposed marketing and promotion initiatives and be able to attract media attention and appeal. According to Deming (1994) and the European Foundation for Quality Management (2003), leadership and the existence of a leading prominent figure in an organizational structure could contribute massively towards   local entrepreneurship and competitiveness. This is because the individual who will take on such a responsibility will be able to interact with potential clients (visitors), local stakeholder groups in order to cultivate a spirit of entrepreneurship and managerial innovation. In this way, the agenda they are serving could be broadcasted more widely and obtain legitimacy in the eyes of the public and the business community.

Nevertheless, at this point it is fair to mention that Portsmouth City Council has already adopted the 'Ambassadors' idea for quite some time now. The argument the city council is putting forward was to create a group of individuals with the duty to promote the city both internally (local residents), as well as to an outside audience (visitors, investors and businesses). The idea the paper is putting forward is slightly bolder. The idea of 'appointing' a prominent figure as an ambassador of the city implies that this individual (and not a team of people, each one carrying a separate portfolio of responsibilities) should have the capacity and skills to appeal to outsiders (investors and businesses), locals (residents and those with a link with Portsmouth), as well as acting as a lobbyist for corporate and legal matters. In other words, the person appointed as a 'brand ambassador' for the city should have the required skills to motivate and inspire the locals providing a vision to them, acting as a warranty of quality for outsiders and as a prominent spokesman for everyone. Such an individual figure would be a perfect fit to enthuse the 'resident pride' feeling that the latest Portsmouth City Council destination marketing survey is vying for.

Hudson and Hawkins (2006) experimented with this idea of a patron in their review of Liverpool's branding strategy. In their work, they highlighted the role of 'brand ambassadors' for a city. These high profile individuals (or groups of individuals) were able to overcome the challenges and restrictions faced by public-private cooperation in an area where there were six local authorities, four residual bodies and development quangos. At the same time, the local community and stakeholders were able to connect with these prominent figures and consequently with the cause. The authors argued that the influence of these patrons or 'brand ambassadors' to facilitate

buy – in from the local community and local stakeholders was invaluable. This is because the success of authentic place marketing and branding rests in the relationship between stakeholders (Kotler et al., 1993). In addition to that, patrons could potentially minimize organizational fragmentation arising from different sectors (public and private) which develop distinctive and opposing brand strategies. A patrons' role would be to improve coordination (Roodhouse and Mokre 2004), create a framework for destination branding (Hankinson 2006) and ensure consistency among stakeholders.

Conclusion

The paper represents an attempt to overcome one of the deficiencies of contemporary destination branding; namely the reliance on homogenous attributes and practices to promote a destination. Instead, the paper maintains that destination branding should rely on the unique and authentic attributes of the destination. The analysis of the relevant literature tends to confirm the point that *inter alia*, local culture and heritage could generate a competitive advantage for a destination. This is due to a significant transformation in the operations of destination branding and a related movement away from traditional branding practices, towards more contemporary practices relying on intangible attributes and innovative processes.

The present exploratory research on the role of unique local assets in generating a competitive advantage through destination branding suggests that the utilization of local culture, culture and heritage could generate spatial monopoly power through 'conceptual' (as opposed to cost induced) entry barriers.

The paper offers a number of policy recommendations and initiatives to policy makers and destination managers that could generate these 'conceptual' entry barriers through focusing on the destination's unique, attributes and assets. More particularly, the examination of the relevant evidence from the literature indicates that staging of international or 'mega' literary events around the Historic Portsmouth Harbour or bidding for European cultural capital status could raise awareness while at the same time stress the unique message and nature of the resource. Another managerial initiative could be the decision to complement the unique element of the resource with a contemporary dimension. This is a tried and tested approach in the management of many other cultural and authentic resources (examples include the Sydney Opera House, the British Museum and its increased interest towards up-market catering facilities and staging of temporary exhibitions).

Finally, the paper notes the significant role that a local patron or brand ambassador could play towards the success of the Historic Portsmouth Harbor as a destination brand. This is because successful destination branding and promotion can only be achieved through mutually agreed solutions among stakeholders, rather than the (political) will of local or regional councils. Those responsible for taking this project forward in the future would have to evaluate individual preferences for relevant decision making. Reducing 'organizational fragmentation' while at the same time improving coordination among local stakeholders, brand ambassadors could potentially facilitate buy – in from the local community and private investors.

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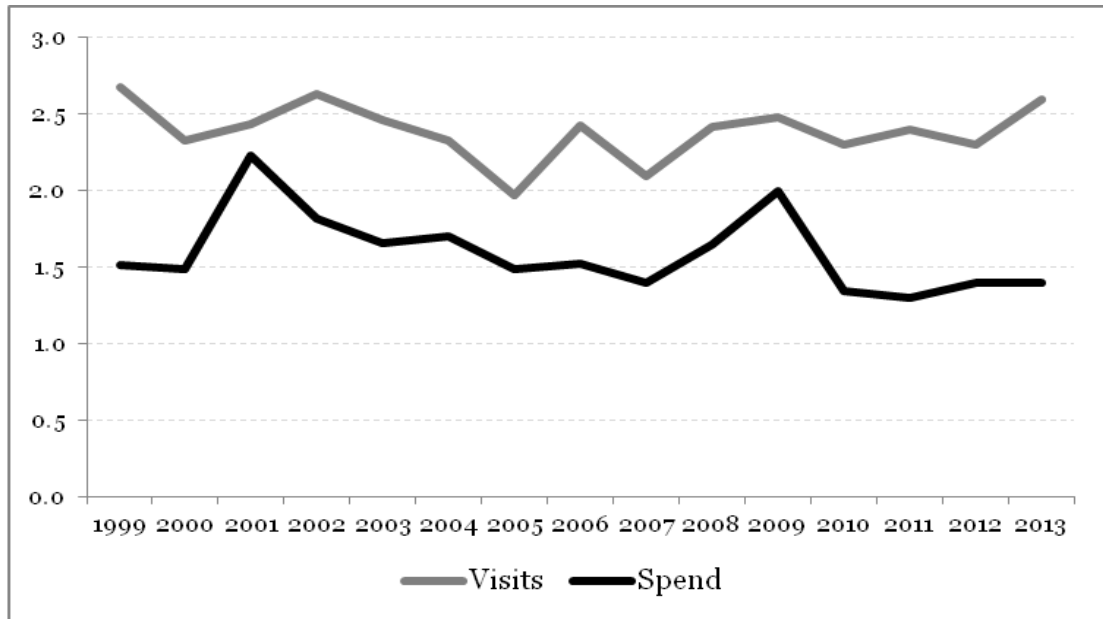
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Figure 1: The Portsmouth Harbor Area
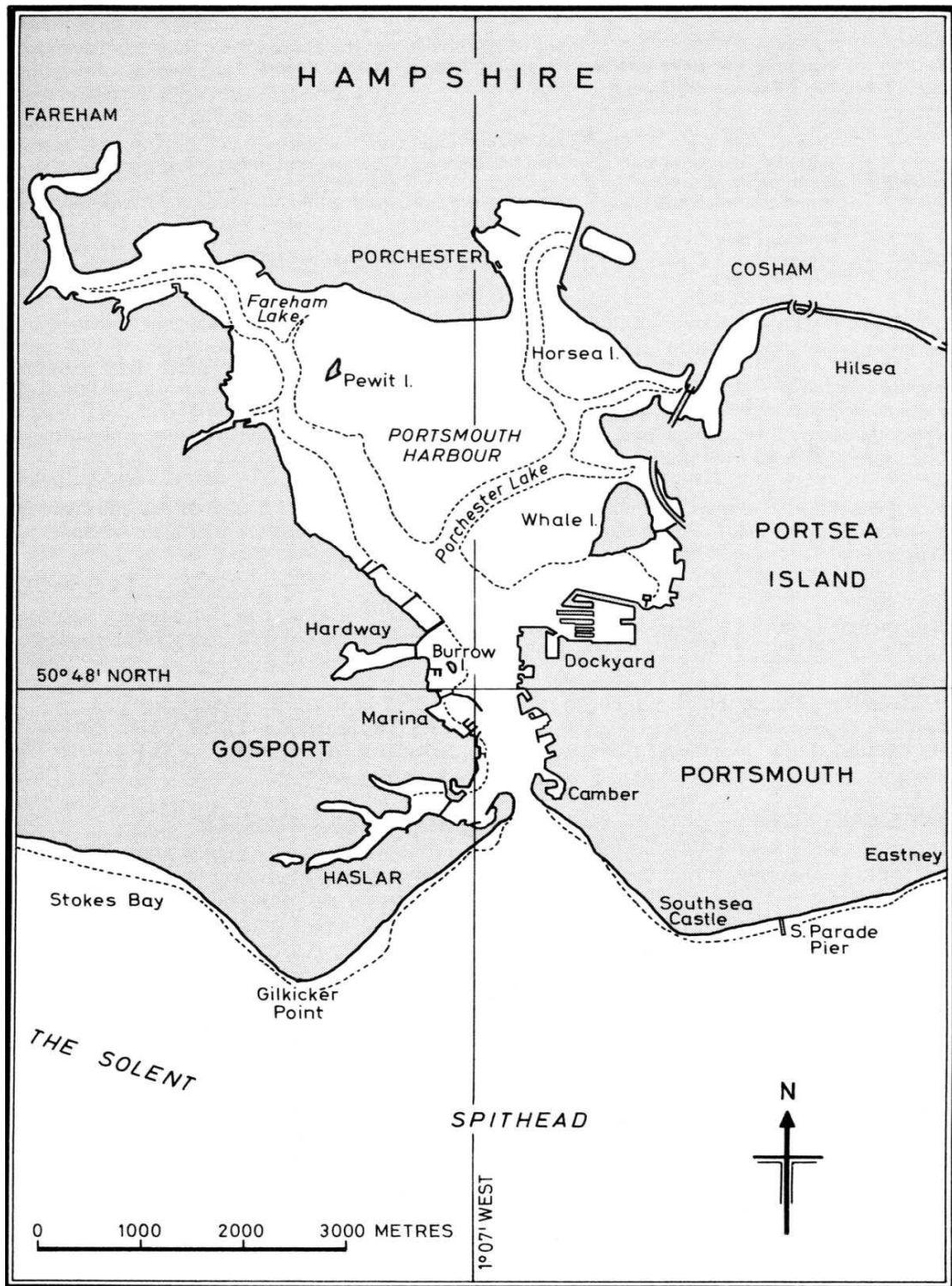
Source: *1993 - 2012 The Probert Encyclopaedia, Southampton United Kingdom*

Figure 2: Visits and Tourism Receipts in Portsmouth (1999 – 2013)

Source: Visit Britain (Various Years)