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Toponyms and place heritage as sources of place brand value

1. Introduction

Commercial producers have long seen the advantage of branding their products, and the idea of discovering or creating uniqueness also attracts the leaders and governments of countries, states and cities (ASHWORTH 2009). However, traditional product marketing framework has proved to be inadequate for places; therefore, place branding has rather leaned on corporate branding. Place branding is a long-term, strategic process that requires continuity, and these actions take time to be recognised (KAVARATZIS 2009).

As generally recognised not only in onomastics but also in marketing, a name can be seen as the core of a brand. Therefore, a place name is the core of a place brand. Having a name is having an identity. A brand name has functions that can be regarded as sources of brand equity, and name changes have proved to cause discomfort and distress amongst consumers (e.g. ROUND–ROPER 2012, BROWN 2016).

The name of a place – having stayed unchanged – has traditionally represented permanence and stability and could be regarded as the place's memory (BASSO 1996, HELLELAND 2009). Referring to LAURA KOSTANSKI (2016) and her theory of toponymic attachment, place names carry strong emotional and functional attachments. This theory is very important also regarding place branding.

According to GRAHAM et al. (2000), *heritage* can be defined as the past and future in the present. Accordingly, *place heritage* is heritage which is bound up with physical space that is a place. As for the concept of *place,* it is a named space (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1962). Place heritage is created and transferred by means of language (e.g. if we think about the heritage of Paris, French is focal), socio-cultural practices (e.g. meeting friends in cafés, buying French bread in the mornings, relaxing in parks), and tangible artefacts (e.g. buildings such as the Eiffel Tower, bridges, fashion stores). It is significant in distinguishing places, building identities of places, and building identities of the individuals and communities within places. (See GRAHAM et al. 2000.) All of these are important functions of toponyms as well.

Herein, we will introduce the conceptualisation of place heritage, a place name being one of its focal components, and measure the place heritage value of 28 municipalities in Southwest Finland (HAKALA et al. 2015). These results will

be compared to the results of our comprehensive survey on municipality name changes, which was conducted amongst the residents of these municipalities (Sjöblom et al. 2014, 2016). This article will give special attention to the importance of a municipality name and collective identity in comparison to place heritage. Finally, we will present an example of utilising place name and heritage value in place branding.

2. Measuring place heritage

We divided the concept of place heritage into components that could be measured (Hakala et al. 2015). Our aim was to find a method of defining the value and the strength of a place's heritage. We reviewed scholarly literature on heritage and arrived at four components: place history, place essence today ("personality"), residential permanence and place symbols (Fig. 1). We chose certain features for these four components that were possible to be calculated. In searching for and defining the value of the components, we used the municipalities' websites and Internet search engines as well.

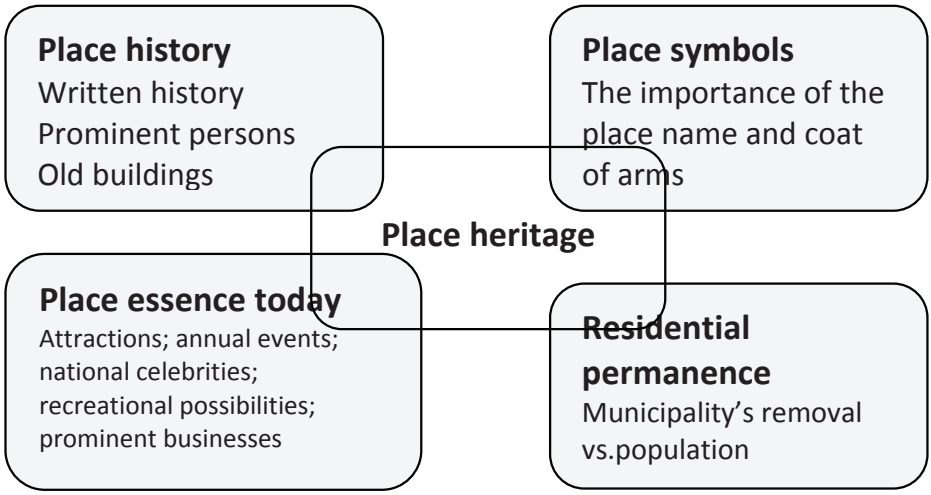

Figure 1: The components of place heritage (Hakala et al. 2015)

First, a known history is essential in terms of heritage. The further back the marks of history can be traced and seen in the place, the stronger its heritage is. The problem, herein, was how to give a value to place history. We paid attention to tangible buildings, especially churches and their age, to prominent people from the past rooted in the place, and to the written history of the place. We

did not take prehistory into account. We created five categories for the places according to their notable history and gave values accordingly: 0 = only from the 20th century, 1 = from the 19th century, 2 = between the 17th and 18th centuries, 3 = between the 14th and 16th centuries, 4 = between the 12th and 13th centuries (there are no older traces of Finnish history prior to these dates; instead, earlier eras can be only be followed by archaeological research findings).

Secondly, given that heritage is not only about the past, we also included the present place essence, that is "personality", in the concept of heritage. These are elements that are special to a place and can be used in branding: ASHWORTH (2009, 2010) notes them as recognisable buildings and design, distinctive events and personality association. The elements we included reflect these instruments to some extent, but not as such. We looked not only at buildings, but at attractions in a wider scope, for instance, annual events which can promote a place brand. In terms of personality association, we consider nationally recognised celebrities, local heroes, who are, in some way or another, strongly associated with the place. In addition to these, we looked at the recreational possibilities both offered and highlighted by the municipality on its website, as well as its prominent businesses, which at best can lend their successful brand for supporting the place brand, creating linking value (HAKALA–LEMMETYINEN 2013). After discovering these factors through official municipality websites, we created four categories: 0 = no significant features, 1 = features on the local level, 2 = features on the national level, 3 = internationally recognised features (as interpreted by us).

As to the third component, we argue that the more stable the residence base in a community is, the stronger the place heritage. To give a value to residential permanence, we counted the ratio of every (28) municipality's removal (numerator) to their population (denominator) during a 10-year time span (2004–2013), and then counted the average (Statistics Finland 2013). In Table 1 we give an example of two municipalities, Aura and Pargas, of which the latter is mostly Swedish speaking. Perhaps surprisingly, the residential base is less permanent in the rural Aura than in the more urban town of Pargas, in Finnish *Parainen*. This may be explained by the geographical location of the municipalities and their demographics: the Swedish-speaking Pargas is located in the Archipelago Sea, where the culture and way of life are long-rooted in maritime history and close relationships within the community.

Municipality	Year	Removal	Population	Ratio %
Aura	2004	191	3,620	5.28%
	2005	243	3,699	6.57%
	2006	228	3,750	6.08%
	2007	252	3,823	6.59%
	2008	238	3,852	6.18%
	2009	253	3,840	6.59%
	2010	222	3,911	5.68%
	2011	251	3,975	6.31%
	2012	234	3,971	5.89%
	2013	211	3,962	5.33%
	Mean	**232**	**3,840**	**6.05%**
Pargas/Parainen	2004	456	15,283	2.98%
	2005	553	15,298	3.61%
	2006	561	15,368	3.65%
	2007	601	15,373	3.91%
	2008	520	15,405	3.38%
	2009	523	15,490	3.38%
	2010	491	15,501	3.17%
	2011	508	15,505	3.28%
	2012	531	15,561	3.41%
	2013	552	15,507	3.56%
	Mean	**530**	**15,429**	**3.43%**

Table 1: The value of residential permanence of Aura and Pargas/Parainen

People born in a specific area or who have lived there for most of their lives may have particularly strong feelings about its toponyms, which also produces a feeling of social belonging to the area. Finland has previously been a very homogenous country demographically, and particularly people have tended to stay in their birthplaces in the southwestern area. Hence, newcomers, and especially foreign people, might have an effect on the heritage, for example

confuse the permanent residential base. This is, however, something that we did not take into account. If more people move in than out, it tells us about the overall attraction of the place and its name, not necessarily about its heritage. (See HAKALA et al. 2015.)

Finally, place symbols, such as names, slogans, flags and coats of arms are integral to the heritage of a place (cf. URDE et al. 2007). The old names of the municipalities as well as the heraldic age of the coat of arms in Southwest Finland are especially important. We looked at these two symbols and gave the values 0 through 4, based on their age: the older the name and the coat of arms, the more valuable they are. Regarding the age of a place name, the following values were given: originated between the 20th and 21th centuries = 0, between the18th and 19th centuries = 1, between the 16th and 17th centuries = 2, between the 14th and 15th centuries = 3, older = 4. As for the coats of arms, most of them are quite young in Finland – having originated between the 1950s and the 1960s – thus they received the value 0. Only a few are older, and they were given the value 1. In addition, we gave a value between 0 and 3 if a place's coat of arms was displayed on the municipality's website and the history of the name described: neither = 0, only one = 1, both = 2, both very visibly = 3. The total sum of these values varied between 0 and 8, one city (Raisio) being the only one to receive an 8.

As generally accepted in onomastics, the longer the history behind a name, the more meanings it conveys as a word. Some current meanings of names arise from the individual emotions embedded in them, and some are a part of folklore. All of these meanings accumulate in the place name over decades and even centuries, and are thus transferred to the next generations (HELLELAND 2009, KOSTANSKI 2011). People born in a specific area, or who have lived there for most of their lives, may particularly have strong feelings about the historic ties of its place names, which also produce a feeling of social belonging (HELLELAND 2009). Toponyms transfer messages and stories about the earlier life, behaviour and history of the dwellers in an area. Contemporary users may sense the historical content of the name, even if they do not specifically know or consciously think about it.

3. Place heritage value of 28 Finnish municipalities

Previously in 2013, we had conducted a survey covering all 28 municipalities in the region of Southwest Finland as a part of our study on the impact municipality name change has on place branding (HAKALA–SJÖBLOM 2013). The questionnaire comprised 52 statements in total and was sent by post to 5,020 randomly selected residents in these municipalities. The final sample contained 1,380 responses. The data were weighted for the purpose of sample

adjustment and were statistically analysed. (SJÖBLOM et al. 2014.) We decided to exploit some parts of this study in testing the correlation between the place heritage value and the importance of the municipality name. Therefore, we had to define the place heritage value of the 28 municipalities included in the survey.

We put the framework into practice and measured the four components of heritage amongst the 28 municipalities in Southwest Finland. To illustrate the strength of the municipality's heritage, we drew a radar graph (see Fig. 2). The heritage values for each municipality were reached by totalling the values cumulatively in the following order: history, symbols, place essence today and residential permanence.

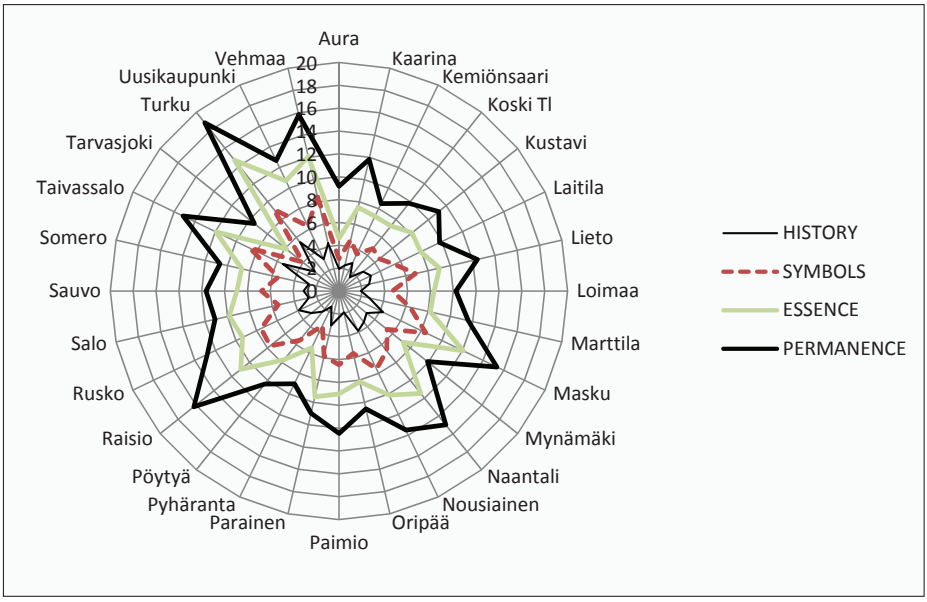

Figure 2: The strength of place heritage amongst Southwest Finland municipalities (HAKALA et al. 2015)

4. The place heritage value and the importance of the place name

One of our interests was to investigate how the strength of the heritage a place carries relates to the collective identity of the residents and to the importance of the place name amongst those residents. Our survey (HAKALA–SJÖBLOM 2013) involved 52 different statements, mostly concerning attitudes towards municipality names and name change. For the present study, we calculated correlations between the two statements *The name of my place of domicile is important to me* (Statement 1) and *A name change will weaken the sense of community and solidarity in the municipality* (Statement 2) and four

municipality groups, the latter being categorised by using the aforementioned heritage values. Thus, the groups were divided up according to the strength of the place's heritage (see Fig. 3).

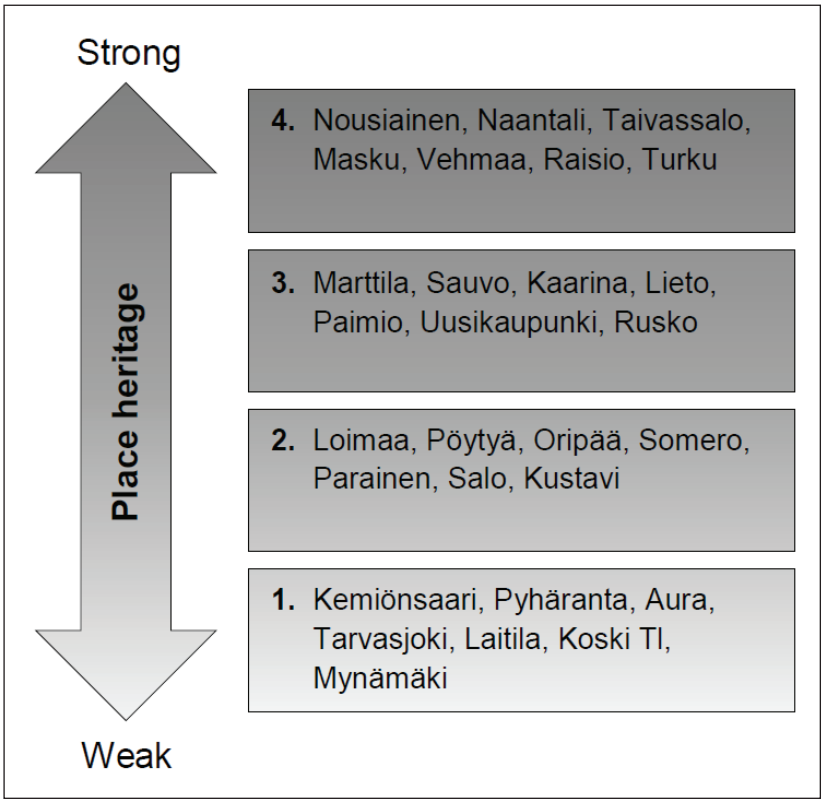

Figure 3: The four municipality groups according to their place heritage strength (HAKALA et al. 2015)

Based on our analysis, and as it was partly expected, the strength of place heritage correlates positively with Statement 1, that is the importance of the municipality name (rho 0.080; *p* 0.001). However, the effect of a name change on collective identity (Statement 2) correlates negatively with the strength of the place heritage (rho 0.057; *p* 0.001). These correlations are statistically significant.

Based on these results, we made two conclusions: the stronger the place heritage is, the more important the place's name is and also the stronger the sense of collective identity amongst its residents is. This is, of course, already a well-known supposition among onomasticians, but it has not been empirically proven before.

5. Case example: using the heritage in branding the City of Turku

The City of Turku is the central municipality in our region of research. With its population of approximately 183,000, it is the sixth largest city in Finland. It is known for its medieval castle and cathedral, and as it was founded in the late 13th century, it is the oldest city in Finland. For hundreds of years, it was the most important city in the eastern region of Sweden. After Finland became a part of the Russian Empire in 1809, Turku lost its status as capital of Finland to Helsinki. The first university in Finland was founded in Turku in 1640. Bishop Mikael Agricola, the founder of literary Finnish, carried out his life's work in Turku during the 16th century. An example of the prominent persons in the more recent history of Turku is Mauno Koivisto who was President of Finland from 1982 to 1994.

The city is located on the Aura River, just on the coast of the Baltic Sea and its large archipelago. There is an industrious harbour and plenty of significant businesses, including one of the most important shipyards in Europe (Meyer). There are also many leisure-time attractions and museums in Turku. Furthermore, Turku hosts many cultural events, for example the festivals Ruisrock and Turku Music Festival are amongst the oldest in Scandinavia. Turku is also widely known for its Declaration of Christmas Peace which is an almost unbroken tradition hailing from the 14th century. Many nationally, and even internationally, known celebrities have their roots in Turku, including, for example hockey player Saku Koivu, rock musician Michael Monroe and opera singer Matti Salminen.

Turku is officially bilingual, with 5.2 percent of its residents having Swedish as their mother tongue. Due to having been one of the most important cities of the Swedish Kingdom in the Middle Ages, the city also has the Swedish name *Åbo* (*Aboa* and *Abo* in 13th century documents). This name is comprised of the Old Swedish word *aa* > Swedish *å* 'river' and the Old Swedish *bo* 'dwelling; house, estate'. Therefore the etymological meaning of *Åbo* could be 'residence by the river'. The Finnish name most likely *Turku* dates back to the 13th century as well, even though its first written documentation was in 1543. The name originates from the Old Russian word *turgu* meaning 'market', and was probably brought along by Novgorodian tradesmen. (Paikkala et al. 2007.) The components of the place heritage of Turku are illustrated in Fig. 4.

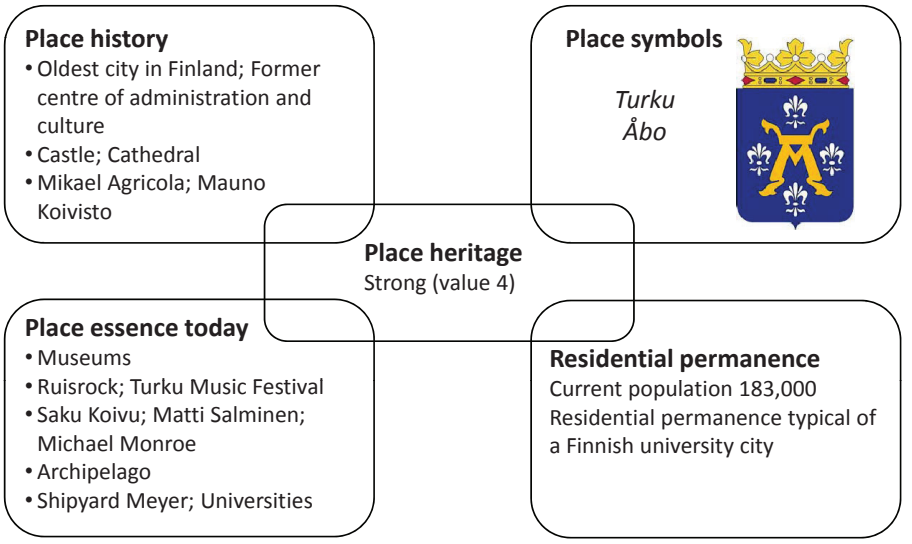

Figure 4: The components of the place heritage of Turku

Turku has used all of these historical and present characteristics efficiently in place branding. The latest step, and rather large one, in making use of its heritage was in 2015, when the city started using its historical coat of arms in its marketing and branding. The coat of arms is based on the city's seal, dating back to 1309. The seal shows the Gothic letter *A*, referring to the city's Latin name *Aboa*. The lilies represent the emblem of the Virgin Mary, the patron saint of Turku Cathedral. At the same time, it unified the city image in all its communications and marketing. The goal of uniformity, a recognisable style and cost-efficiency was behind this decision. (See City of Turku 2016.)

6. Conclusion

Above we have introduced a conceptualisation of place heritage, a place name being one of its focal components. For this, we carried out an empirical study on the 28 municipalities of Southwest Finland and measured their place heritage value. We have demonstrated the importance of a place name in reference to place heritage value. The City of Turku is a good example of systematically utilising this value in place branding.

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Abstract

Commercial producers have long seen the advantage of branding their products, and the idea of branding also attracts place managers. In general, the core component of a brand is its name. In place branding, the name is even more crucial. It marks a geographical entity and creates the identity and image of the place. Having stayed unchanged, it represents longevity and stability and can be regarded as the place's memory. In addition, place names carry of strong emotional attachment. The longer the history behind a name, the more meaningful it is as a word.

A strong place brand is built upon a strong place heritage. Heritage is acknowledged as one of the future priorities in branding research. It is one of the intangible factors, in other words associations that differentiate brands from each other and are a source of tangible prosperity. Many of these associations are susceptible to competitor copying them – however, not the heritage or the name.

This paper will introduce the conceptualisation of place heritage, with the place name being one of the focal components. For this, we will use data from our previous empirical survey carried out in 2013 on the 28 municipalities in

Southwestern Finland. This survey investigated residents' attitudes towards municipality names and name changes. Herein, we will focus on answers to two statements in the survey – *The name of my place of domicile is important to me*, and *A name change will weaken the sense of community and solidarity in the municipality* – and correlations between them and the place heritage value of each municipality. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the importance of a place name in reference to place heritage value and to show an example of utilising this value in place branding.

Keywords: toponyms, municipality names, place heritage, place branding