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Measuring the effect and efficiency of city marketing

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Abstract

City marketing, defined as the interaction that exists in the management of the city policy areas, such as education, employment, or housing towards three target groups, viz. tourists, citizens and enterprises (Hospers, 2011), is increasingly becoming more important in the management of cities (Rennen, 2007) with raised budgets as a result. This research aims at gauging the effect and measuring the efficiency of city marketing, therefore designing a tool that is a combination of integrated performance rating (Jorissen, 1999) and return on investment (ROI) (Jacobson, 1987), based on widely available secondary data, spanning the time period 2008–2011.

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1. Introduction

Cities and towns spend large budgets on carrying out their city marketing policy to attract new target groups and to keep existing ones, without thoroughly measuring the effect and efficiency of their spending. While cities have always taken measures to characterize themselves in an attractive way (Hospers, 2009), differentiation has become even more important in the present, also for smaller towns (Rennen, 2007).

A currently widely used model of measurement of efficiency in economic contexts is return on investment (ROI). It is not exactly clear which information could contribute to calculating an ROI for city marketing. In previous cases

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where a city's effects are measured the main foci are esteem, image or brand power. Such foci are narrow in that they do not give cities feedback about the financial side of their policy efficiency. Not surprisingly, a model combining both financial and effect measurements is of great value to policy makers.

An initial impetus for a global measure was provided in the Eurocities Questionnaire by Seisdedos and Vaggione (2005) where city marketing initiatives are assessed by three factors: the amount of incoming investments (growth of economic activity, job creation, the process of attracting enterprises), tourism (number of visitors, length of visit, expenditure) and last, perception. Most of these parameters are present in cities' policy areas, the latter being the basis for the structure of the model that was developed in this research.

As things stand, city marketing policies are largely based on assumptions (Den Haag, 2011), inasmuch as towns and cities practice impulse marketing, acting on short-term ideas that do not fit in a strategic vision on city marketing albeit such a strategy is present (Goubin, 2010).

This environment demands (i) a stocktaking of the different applications of city marketing, (ii) an objective measuring instrument based on hard data and (iii) fundamental success factors. The measuring instrument or tool comprises effect and efficiency parameters, all based on secondary data. On the one hand effect parameters are based on sources such as firstly the 'city monitor' by Bral et al. (2011) which is a research of satisfactory studies for cities' policy areas, secondly a research that outlines the profile of municipalities and third research by the VDAB (Flemish public employment service). On the other hand, the efficiency parameters are based on sources such as cities' annual reports and financial accounts. The tool gauges the effect as well as the efficiency of city marketing and government policy making. It shows an evolution in the different parameters and allows a city to compare itself to the average of other cities. Furthermore, cities can assess their results in the light of their own policy area goals.

2. City marketing

City marketing covers a broader range than place branding: after devising strategic concepts that make the city concerned a modern brand with a unique personality (place branding), the city is able to attract target groups and can eventually be 'sold' (city marketing). Moreover, Hospers (2011) states that city marketing aims to serve as a catalyst for the organization of several activities and events by (non-) city services. Importantly, it also attracts private investments that generate effects and revenue for city marketing. Boekema (2011) and Van Dijk-Bettenhausen (2011) mention three target groups: citizens, visitors and enterprises.

City marketing is a long-term process that holds the goal of retaining and attracting the major three target groups of a city. That purpose is translated in the strategy policy goals of Flemish cities and towns, trying to satisfy the three target groups' wants and needs, within the different policy domains such as housing, transport or employment. The table below shows the different target groups and policy domains.

Table 1. Target groups and policy domains of the measuring instrument

Target groups	Policy domains
Citizens	Recreation
Visitors	Tourism
Citizens	Housing
Citizens	Education
Enterprises	Commerce
Citizens	Employment
Citizens	Infrastructure, neatness
Citizens	Transport
Citizens	Security
Citizens	Social and medical services

Because city marketing is present in both the target groups and the policy domains of a city, the complete policy of a city can be regarded as city marketing policy, viz. each city's policy goal is set in the definition of the concept

city marketing. Research on developing a measuring instrument to gauge the efficiency of city marketing therefore applies to the total city government policy. The instrument connects only the data from financial documents that are applicable to the policy domains of a city.

3. The ROI model

The most straightforward formula for an ROI is: $(\text{gain from investment} - \text{cost of investment}) / \text{cost of investment}$.

This formula (De Cnuydt, 2012) is limited to one period which makes it most fit for city marketing, although it has its downsides. The profits are usually the result of multiple investments. An increase in the amount of hotel nights could be caused by investments in city embellishment as well as organised events. Opposite, one investment may give rise to various profits, inasmuch as the same investment in city embellishment could probably attract citizens, even on top of the obvious goal of attracting visitors. Usually, profits are not easily expressed in monetary value because a non-financial societal value is accomplished instead. For example, investments in a library can lead to more visitors, more borrowed books, more satisfied visitors, etc. However, financially this only yields a rise of member contributions, unless the library card is handed out free. The above formula assumes that the investment renders profits for the duration of merely one period (in bookkeeping one year) and that this investment occurred in the same period. In practice, however, an investment will generate income during several periods.

As Kuysters (2011) claims it is impossible to make an exact measurement of the economic effect of city marketing. Jacobson (1987) as well criticizes the restrictions of the ROI-model, “unquestionably, ROI has serious limitations as a measure of business performance”. Therefore, researching the development of new, alternative measuring instruments has become a necessity.

4. The integrated performance measurement (IPM)

IPM (Jorissen, 1999) starts with an initial focus on strategic policy goals as a basis to develop concrete action programmes. IPM searches for indicators that measure the result of those action programmes and that give feedback to the initial policy goals. Should the strategic objectives change, the action programmes and their accompanying performance indicators can be updated.

Cities and towns are governmentally obliged to develop long-term policy plans (Leroy, 2012). These policy plans or strategic policy goals can be found on the websites of cities and towns, on the basis of which this research has built policy domains and sub policy domains (action domains). Linked to all those domains are performance indicators, later called ‘parameters’. It is possible that cities have different policy goals as they have all determined goals per domain. Based on the research for a model for an integrated performance measurement of cities and towns, the next step was conducting desk research to scrutinize which parameters can be found in which secondary sources, and then to link those parameters to one of the policy domains that are listed above in table 1.

Customer satisfaction and its concrete evidence in key performance indicators are important to get a firm hold on the efficiency of city marketing. The extent in which the aforementioned goal is already attained can usually be expressed in a percentage (Brian, 2007). Because city marketing objectives are formulated in terms of retaining and attracting target groups, it follows that data concerning participation and satisfaction of those target groups give a clear indication about the degree in which those objectives were accomplished. While data about customer satisfaction are usually primary data, for middle-sized provincial towns different type of research is being conducted with citizens, enterprises and hotels, restaurants and catering. That research is to be published in order of amongst others the Flemish government research department, VDAB, NIS (statistics Belgium), and the agency of domestic government.

The extent in which the aforesaid is attained can usually be expressed in a percentage and advisably this percentage is to be compared to that of other cities, because “competition is maybe the most important criterion concerning customer satisfaction” (Brian, 2007). Applied to city marketing, this is dealt with from an angle of satisfaction of the target groups (citizens, visitors, enterprises) rather than customer satisfaction.

In contrast, the financial part of the model shows in combination with the performance indicators of customer satisfaction a view of the efficiency. A balance has to be established between cost management on the one hand and value creation on the other hand. An example of a financial performance indicator is “the reduction of costs per unit”

(Brian, 2007). Applied to the parameter of a city's library, the financial indicator is set in the strategic goal of retaining and attracting citizens by means of offering recreation, culture and science. Performance indicators are then the percentage of citizens who visit the library as well as the satisfaction percentage of visitors. A financial performance indicator then, is the library cost per visitor. These financial indicators are called efficiency parameters in the measuring tool that this research produces.

5. Results

To assure user-friendliness, the model uses the accessible format of Microsoft Office Excel. Every policy domain contains further 'tabs' representing sub domains. The main tab lists the performance indicators and a summary of financial data, the tab with detailed financial data. A third tab page per policy domain mentions the sources of all performance indicators. The pilot study was developed for the city of Leuven, mapping an evolution from 2008 to 2011. This period is provisionally determined on the basis of the pilot study's findings. Most secondary sources for the performance indicators are still limited to 2011. And only since 2008 do cities include bookkeeping data per policy domain. Two groups of parameters were adopted per policy domain: performance indicators and efficiency parameters. The lay-out of the performance indicators can show, for the purpose of transparency, either a succinct view or more in detail.

The research is based on budget bills, available to the public and by cities. The following data are present in above mentioned documents and are included in the model: ordinary expenditure (OE) and ordinary receipts (OR), exceptional expenditure (EE) and exceptional receipts (ER). The normal provision of services (OE – OR) contains all revenues and expenditure that at least occur once in a financial year and that safeguard the regular conduct and regular income of cities, including the periodical payment of debt. The exceptional provision of services consists of all revenues and expenditure that have a direct and sustainable influence on the magnitude, the value, or the preservation of the city's patrimony (except for the normal maintenance works), the permitted allowances and loans for that purpose, the participation and investments for more than one year and the moved forward repayment of the debt. Normal income is made up of performances (income for which the city gives a certain service or delivery), transfers (the city does not give a direct feat e.g. taxes) and debt (income from capital e.g. interests, dividends). The normal expenditure consists of personnel costs, working costs, transfers and the debt (payment of loans, loan costs, and interests). Exceptional expenditure contains the transfers (all allowances such as the investment fund that are used by the city to finance EE), investments (sale of investments that the city has paid through credits on the exceptional service,...), debt (loans engaged by the city, payment of the city's permitted loans, sale of stocks and payment of participations). EE is made up of transfers (the city pays without realizing a value of the patrimony such as allowances and exceptional damage claims), investments (all sustainable purchases and works, who is the largest part of EE debt (loans permitted by the city, moved forward payments of the city's loans, purchasing of stocks, deposit of participation).

Every policy domain, such as tourism, contains an additional excel tab with details. It includes an elaborated view of the financial data: the four categories as described above, calculated balances and amounts per citizen. A summary of the most relevant financial information is adopted by the head tab page e.g. housing. This involves the balance per capita of the normal expenditure and income as well as the exceptional expenditure per capita. The research's challenge is to combine the performance indicators and the financial data with the most relevant policy domain connection and meaning.

The final step in the research is the analysis (found in the head tab page) where a link is established between performance parameters and financial data. The analysis is visualized in the same graph. For the benefit of transparency, performance parameters were selected and combined or a calculation was applied e.g. an index. The financial data were recalculated to fit the purchasing power of 2008 so that a comparison over four years becomes possible. Further, an ROI was gauged per selected and processed performance indicators on the basis of the real value of the financial data to measure how much every spent euro contributes to the attained performance parameter. Finally, a global ROI was calculated per policy domain.

A similar model is to be constructed for the remaining five case studies of middle-sized cities and towns, allowing the calculating of a mean for the six case studies, concerning both the performance parameters as the efficiency parameters. Cities can evaluate the results for their policy priorities and in relation to the gauged means.

This measuring instrument is easily usable because it only uses secondary data. It offers a value compared to other models because it connects both cities' accomplishments and provided efforts in the whole scope of city marketing (all policy areas of a city) instead of measuring only a few activities.

6. Case study: tourism in the city of Leuven

Fig. 1 below shows the analysis that establishes a link between performance parameters and financial data for the policy domain tourism in the city of Leuven. All data used for the graph description is available for the period of 2008–2011.

Youth, community development and art: tourism (visitors)

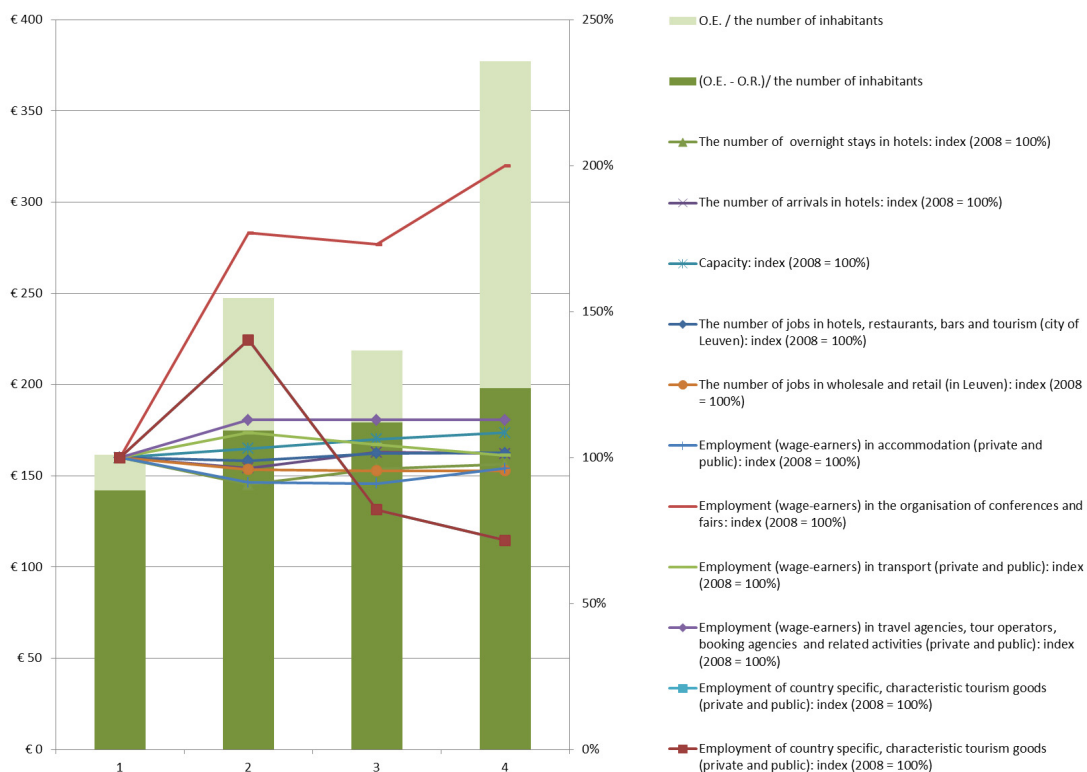


Fig. 1. Analysis of tourism in Leuven, linking performance parameters and financial data

6.1. Performance parameters

As figure 1 shows, the number of hotel nights decreased by 2.16 % (278,604 to 272,595) while the amount of arrivals rose by 1.37 %, showing that more visitors come to Leuven but do not stay as long as before. The number of businesses (concerning accommodation) increased by 42.50 % (54 to 77) whereby notably the number of offered guest rooms rocketed by 41.67 %. The amount of boarding houses rose slightly by 3.90 % (743 to 772), with a main increase in guest rooms as well. A similar trend can be found for capacity (+8.50 %).

The number of jobs in hotels, restaurants and bars, and tourism (viz. hotels, holiday resorts and other accommodation for short stays, camping sites and camping car and caravan terrains, other accommodation,

restaurants and mobile eating places, catering and other eating places, drinking places, travel agencies and tour operators, booking agencies and related activities) went up by 1.62 % (2,177 to 2,212). Interestingly, the parts that rose most were holiday resorts and other accommodation for short stays (+176 %), booking agencies and related activities (+68.69 %) and catering etc. (+38.79 %). The number of jobs in eating and drinking places drops by 6 % and 5 %. For the years mentioned, restaurants provide most opportunities for employment (approximately 50 %), followed by drinking places (approximately 15 %) and hotels (approximately 11 %). The number of branches in hotels, restaurants and bars, and tourism goes up by 4 % (363 to 378). Most branches count between 0 and 9 employees.

The amount of jobs in wholesale and retail dropped by 4.50 % (5,087 to 4,858). There was a specific dip in the amount of jobs in the retail of nutrition, beverages and stimulants in specialised shops (−34.76 %) and in the related wholesale (−20.32 %). This downward trend holds three exceptions that provide more jobs in the retail in specialised stores of ICT apparatus (+65.82 %), motor fuel (+16.84 %) and other (+7.37 %). Involving the amount of jobs, the largest sub sectors in wholesale and retail are retail in other articles in specialised stores (23.71 %), retail in non-specialised stores (17.86 %) and the wholesale in remaining consumer articles (16.82 %). The number of branches in retail and wholesale almost levels off (−0.26 %) whereby 87 % of the branches employ between 1 and 9 people.

The wage-earning employment with regard to transport of people (rental, leasing cars and vans, taxis, rail and boat) also nearly stagnated (+0.76 %: 1,191 to 1,200). As far as employment is concerned, Leuven contains some small but very strong areas of development. First, there is a rise by 266.67 % in employment in youth hostels and youth residences, from 3 to 11 people. Second, the capacity of accommodation of target groups has risen by 12.31 %. Third, employment in the organizing of fairs and conferences has doubled (26 to 52). Last, employment in travel agencies, tour operators, booking agencies and related activities shot up by 12.85 % (179 to 200).

6.2. Financial data

In most cases, activities are available for both target groups. In real terms, the net spending per citizen increases e.g. 39 % between 2008 and 2011, while the exceptional expenditure per citizen by 814 % with especially a large increase in 2011. (The exceptional expenditure in 2011 is mainly spent on equipment and exceptional maintenance of buildings and lands, the refurbishing of the Eden hall, the renovation of the Saint Peter's Church and the buildings of the Park Abbey, and an interest-free loan to the first division football club OHL.)

6.3. Return on Investment

The total amount of jobs slightly goes down by 1.67 % despite strong increases in some sub sectors. The amount of hotel nights decreases as well. Combining this information with increasing budgets causes the ROI's of tourism to decrease, albeit with a minor positive break in 2010.

6.4. Variance analysis

Leuven realises higher ROI's than the average of the other case studies in this research. Nevertheless, the year of 2011 shows an exception, booking large amounts of exceptional expenditure.

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