

FROM COMPETING URBAN IMAGINARIES TO COHESIVE CITY BRANDS – NEW CHALLENGES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Abstract

The paper focuses on the issue of city branding and endeavors to highlight several of the challenges that municipalities face in the process of creating a marketable brand for their cities. While there is only one "real" built city there is a variety of urban imaginaries that coexist and often compete against each other for dominance. Besides city agencies, the traditional actors involved in the process of city marketing, there are other entities like urban lifestyle magazines, businesses, services industry etc, which are interested in marketing their own representation or imaginary of the city.

The paper has a threefold structure. In the first section, it critically analyzes the concept of city branding and tries to highlight how it differs from traditional, product and corporate branding strategies. The second section discusses specific steps and strategies that a city can undertake in order to create a successful brand and positions such efforts in the broader category of local economic development tools. The authors conclude that city branding is more effective when integrated into the strategic planning process undertaken by municipalities. The last section tries to raise some concerns and challenges regarding the concept of city branding. The analysis highlights the fact that it is more and more difficult to talk about a single brand or representation of a city. As long as different groups separated along the lines of race, ethnicity, education, income produce competing urban imaginaries, city branding is merely about one group imposing its representation over the others.

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I. City brands and city branding: A theoretical framework

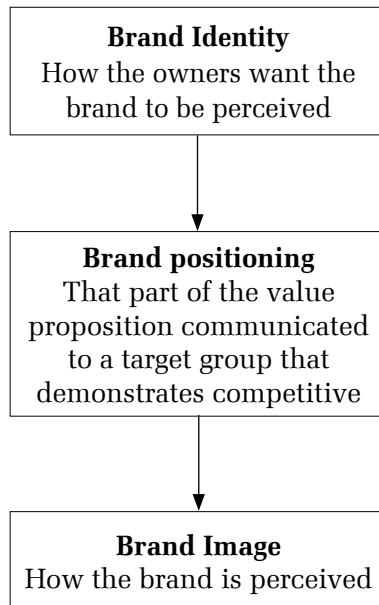
Cities worldwide are increasingly importing the concept and techniques of product and corporate branding for use within place marketing, in pursuit of wider urban management goals. Cities all over the world are now immersed in a global competition for future investment and growth. Facing such stakes, civic boosters across the world have understandably cast about for strategies that might secure for their cities a favorable position in the international market place (Gibson, 2005). As Gibson argues, it is interesting to observe how these strategies are symbolic in nature. This happens because people make sense of places and construct places in their minds through three processes: first, through planned interventions, such as planning and urban design; second through the way in which they or others use specific places; and third through various forms of place representations such as films, novels, paintings etc. Branding in general and city branding in particular deal specifically with such mental images (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). The “real”, built city coexists and interacts with the urban imaginary, a collection of representations that are the result of the city’s architecture, art, and its reflections in mass media (magazines, movies, postcards etc.) (Greenberg, 2000).

The literature on place marketing and city branding has continuously grown over the last three decades. It significantly draws on the concepts underlying product and corporate brands and branding; however most scholars emphasize the need to distinguish between a product and organizations on the one hand and cities on the other hand (Morgan et al., 2002; Kotler et al., 1993).

A brand is a registered trademark, designated ®. It protects and indicates a company’s ownership of a named, particularly identifiable product. The trademark simply aims at lifting the product out of its product category by means of using designed packaging, a name or logo, a slogan, and other distinctive traits (Stiegel and Frimann, 2006). In the interaction with the consumer or buyer, the trademark transforms into a brand that holds a cognitive-emotional dimension as the consumer identifies himself and his behavior with the brand (Stiegel and Frimann, 2006). The boundaries of the brand construct are, on the one side the activities of the firm and on the other side the perception of the consumers. The brand becomes the interface between these two (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). A brand comprises a unique combination of functional attributes and symbolic values (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005); this is why in the last decades information-filled ad appealing to consumers as rational decision makers gave way to ads emphasizing emotional and psychological linkages between specifically calibrated consumer lifestyles and brand-name items (Greenberg, 2000). The complex relationships encompassed by the brand concept are best summarized as in Figure 1:

In a historical perspective, the branding approach has primarily pertained to products (Stiegel and Frimann, 2006). Branding has become an important tool starting with the 1960s and 1970s when a global financial crisis, recessions, and rising competition provoked the shift from Fordist economies of scale to more flexible economies of scope and with them the development of niche marketing (Greenberg, 2000). Product branding has shifted much of the focus of its attention recently to the

nature of the producer, and thus corporate branding, which is the expression of a corporate identity, aims and values and presents a sense of individuality that can help to differentiate the organization within its competitive environment (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). As opposed to product branding, company branding focuses on the internal features of the organizations. Vision, mission, cultures and values become key elements of the corporate branding process (Stiegel and Frimann, 2006). It caters to a greater audience than just consumers or buyers and therefore it leads to the creation of a unified framework for all company's communication (Stiegel and Frimann, 2006). A corporate brand is thus, according to Knox and Bickerton (2003), the visual, verbal and behavioral expression of an organization's unique business model.



Source: Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005

Figure 1

Greenberg (2000) argues that cities have been facing the same competitive pressures and identity crises as businesses. They have long felt a need to differentiate themselves from each other, to assert their individuality in pursuit of various economic, political or socio-psychological objectives (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). While the concept of place marketing is not a complete novelty, Greenberg (2000) contends, it took on an added meaning in the last three decades – it represents the simultaneous marketing and production of a monolithic, consumer-oriented version of the urban imaginary. Some earlier examples of city branding efforts include the creation of city slogans by Danish towns (the first city advertising strategy was launched in 1932 by Randers in Jutland – “Where the seaways meet the 13 highways”) (Stiegel and Frimann, 2006) or the actions undertaken by the original urban boosters in the US who, using the panoptic strategies of photographic panoramas, managed to sell investors on exotically named cities in the swamps of Florida and the wilds of California, sight unseen (Greenberg, 2000).

A distinction needs to be made at this point between place marketing and city branding. City marketing was concerned primarily with “selling” the city to various target groups – existing and prospective residents, businesses, and tourists for example, in pursuit of economic gains. The concept of city marketing implies that the city becomes a multitude of brands, each designed as to appeal to the special needs of different target groups. Under the city marketing approach, market segmentation, separation and targeting are the critical activities. As Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) argue, such an approach implies that we plan, create and sell different products to the various segments. The transition from city marketing to city branding is facilitated not only by the extensive use and success of product branding, but also by the recent but rapid development of the concept of corporate branding (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). On the other hand, city branding implies that places are promoted as a coherent whole; a branding strategy should thus focus on values such as quality, innovation, and care for its citizens, environmental responsibility, and diverseness. These are broad and universal enough values to encompass various local identities but in the same time to allow for consistency in the message sent.

Recent decades have witnessed an explosion of urban scholarship on the changing role of tourism, place marketing and/or city branding, and entertainment in cities worldwide. With the shift in the primary role of many cities worldwide from production sites to consumption spaces after the World War II, the branding of consumer-oriented urban imaginaries was facilitated (Greenberg, 2000). With the rise of the postindustrial city, branding strategies are oriented toward the production and marketing of cities as sites of fun, leisure, and entertainment. Cities try to reinvent and market themselves as “entertainment machines” (Clark, 2001), privatized “consumption” spaces encompassing a package of shopping, dining, and entertainment (Gotham, 2007). From this perspective, urban branding is the frequent use of a specific name, symbol, logo, or design (or combination of these) to identify a place, to distinguish it from its competitors, and to prompt tourists in their decision-making (Gotham, 2007). Florian (2002) contends that there is a huge paradox with regard to the way in which cities understand to brand their names especially for external audiences (most often tourists). In an era when people are or pretend to be interested in and keen on diversity, what is being offered is a lack of differentiation and monotony. The author argues that cities are becoming impersonal, anonymous, and, in the end, uninhabitable. This dilemma stems from the fact that on the one hand we need similar representations in order to better understand each other and the contexts we live in while on the other hand it is more and more often acknowledged that this global, superficial monoculture is only inspiring and durable on a limited scale (Florian, 2002).

One key question that arises is whether the concepts of product and corporate branding can be more or less directly transferred to cities. Stiegel and Frimann (2006) argue that the promoters of city branding contend that the logic of product marketing can be applied to cities as well. Places can be easily assumed to possess the characteristics of identity, differentiation and personality and can thus be managed to maximize equity, values and awareness (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). As more and more cities offer the same services, the core task for branding is to ascribe cities

unique identities that distinguish them from their competitors. There are essential differences however between product brands and city brands. Unlike other brands that people buy and sell in the market place, a branded place is spatially fixed, non-transportable, and consumed by people at the point of production. Corporate brands like Coca Cola, Nike, and McDonalds are centrally conceived and lack locally based networks and communal ties. On the other hand, urban branding is a process of differentiation and diversification whereby local tourism organizations, art and cultural facilities, museums, and historic preservation groups harness and construct place images and help produce tourist sites to attract consumers and investment to a particular locale (Gotham, 2007). Even more, the author contends that in contrast with the homogeneity and standardized nature of corporate brands, branded spaces and cities valorize cultural diversity and project images that attempt to convince people that they are unique and original. It is questionable however whether city branding efforts are successful at creating unique identities, completely different from other existing urban brands. There is a growing body of literature on the topic of “Disneyfication” of urban spaces. In their book “The Tourist City” Judd and Fainstein show that tourist cities as well as their produced and marketed representations are becoming more and more alike, thus gradually eliminating local specificity.

City branding is also different from product branding when it comes to the creation of a sole, cohesive identity that many groups within the urban realm need to agree upon. As argued by Stiegel and Frimann (2006) it is perhaps more accurate to talk about identities rather than about one single identity. Consensus building and compromise among different interest and power groups thus further complicate the process of city branding. As Greenberg (2000) notes, although diverse urban imaginaries may coexist and compete, they do not do so on an even playing field. Distinct groups with varying degrees of power have different resources available to them with which to represent and promote a single version of the urban imaginary that serves their interests. With the dual rise of the capitalist metropolis and modern technologies of mass media, differentials in representational and promotional power have widened. This issue will further be addressed in the last section of the paper.

All these differences are based more or less on the idea that cities or places are more complex realities than tangible products such as toothpaste or jeans. While this is nonetheless true, Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) argue that we should keep in mind the idea that the brand and the product are not synonymous. While products may differ in their nature, brands and branding efforts merely try to endow a product with a specific and more distinctive identity. As Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) argue, a place needs to be differentiated through unique brand identity if it wants to be first, recognized as existing, second, perceived in the minds of place customers as possessing qualities superior to those of competitors, and third, consumed in a manner commensurate with the objectives of the place. It is further claimed that there are similarities between city branding and corporate branding – both places and organizations imply a high degree of intangibility and complexity and they both have to take into consideration a variety of stakeholders and identities.

Gotham (2007) highlights three dimensions of city branding that, in his opinion, distinguish it from other branding efforts. However, it is our opinion that his arguments do not necessarily support the belief that city branding is fundamentally different from product or corporate branding. In the first place, Gotham argues, urban branding not only endeavors to “sell” certain representations to potential consumers but it rather attempts to reshape and manipulate images of the place to be desirable to the targeted consumer to the point that the imaginary becomes the reality. Secondly, Gotham argues, city branding involves the use of sophisticated niche marketing techniques. The idea is to identify subgroups in the larger group of consumers and to create and market representations of the city that are appealing to the very needs of these subgroups. For example, San Francisco, US, is known among other things for its gay community and gay bars and clubs. They represent a market niche that can be targeted by city branding efforts. In the third place, a specific dimension of city branding refers to the blurring of the boundaries between tourist practices and other local cultural practices. While in the 1990s scholars expressed concerns regarding the spreading of theme parks and “Dinesyfication” of cities to the extent that the distinction between residents’ and tourists’ behaviors are blurred (Sorkin, 1992 cited in Gotham, 2007), more recently tourist organizations, for reasons that are easy to understand, are urging residents to behave like tourists in their own city.

Another important issue about city brands and urban imaginaries is that they imply a set of meanings that arise in a specific historical time and cultural space. Greenberg (2000) analyses the evolution over time of urban imaginaries in the US as reflected in urban lifestyle magazines. It is interesting to see how representations and the tools used to produce and communicate them have evolved since 1930s. Greenberg (2000) identifies five different stages: (a) ***the city as skyline*** – the focus of representations is on the newly built infrastructure and construction projects undertaken by cities in the early 1930s (Atlanta); (b) ***the city as attitude*** (New York) – the city is represented as a way of life with a specific focus on editorials about how to “survive” in the city; (c) ***the city as individual*** (Los Angeles) – the entire identity of the city is boiled down to the scale of the individual body and aimed to promote a new notion of urban lifestyle based entirely in individual consumption habits; (d) ***city as commodity*** (most cities)– the “brand identities” of cities across US are becoming more and more alike (standardization) while urban representations focus on consumer items, especially foods and restaurants rather than on human beings; and (e) ***branded city as text*** (most cities) – city brands are becoming increasingly standardized and under corporate control; cities are branded mostly for the purpose of urban tourism but in this process they become commodified and inhuman urban landscapes. It is interesting to see how Greenberg’s analysis resonates with the argument of other urban scholars about the Dinesyfication of cities. While in the early 1930s different cities tried to market themselves differently, according to the existing features of their cities that were embedded in the local context (for example, Atlanta was pictured as the urban center of the South, a city that is becoming more and more cosmopolite and prone to evolution despite past negative perceptions and experiences) in the last decades all urban imaginaries are becoming alike.

One final issue that is going to be addressed in this section refers to how urban imaginaries and the constructed meanings of places have a “real” impact on growth and decline. Can images have as powerful an impact on the evolution of cities as material factors such as location, resources, and economic trends have? Zukin et al. (1998) argue that social imaginary refers to a mythologized, but internalized set of cultural meanings. These meanings are held and communicated collectively – in literary and religious canons, visual images, newspaper stories etc. While the set of meanings of the social imaginary, the authors argue, is conceptualized in symbolic languages, these meanings are materialized and become real in all sorts of special and social practices, from urban design and housing policies. In their view, there is coherence between social and spatial arrangements that is derived in and through cultural meanings attached to specific places.

II. Urban branding efforts undertaken by city governments

Despite a growing scholarly work on the topic of city branding in the last several decades, it was not until around 20 years ago that there was a general acceptance that promotion was a valid activity for public sector management agencies and that systematic application of marketing was relevant to collective goals and practices and thus an essential component of the study of places and their management (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). This section first discusses whether city governments should be at the forefront of branding campaigns. It then analyzes why (for which purposes) do city governments get involved in branding campaigns and which type of mechanisms is available to them.

As noted in the first section of the paper, there are numerous competing groups that can be involved in the marketing and/or branding of a city. As Greenberg (2000) argues, in the wake of wide scale deindustrialization and limited governmental investment, new synergies have formed between traditional city boosters (chambers of commerce, city halls), local and transnational corporations based in advertising, media and culture, as well as high- and low-end industries, from finance to real estate and restaurants. These actors may act together or separately. Why should the city government be in charge of these efforts? A compelling argument is offered in the article “Putting Communities at the Center of Branding”. It is argued that the groups that make up a community speak in their own unique voices. While it is ok to have diversity, it is also advantageous for a community when a brand is launched to speak in one voice and what is spoken needs to be strategic. Only a local government operates in an umbrella fashion (see the discussion on corporate branding) and is therefore able of coming up with a brand that works for the locality as a whole. Of course, there are scholars who contend that there are numerous instances in which governments conveniently forget about issues such as social justice and equity (Davidoff, 1965). However, as pointed out in the marketing literature, we don’t have a brand unless it depicts the organizations in a holistic, unitary fashion. This may be a trade off that has to be accepted in order for cities to be able to take advantage of the other benefits of city branding.

There is no easy, straightforward answer to the question of why do city governments become involved in branding efforts. Most of the scholarly debate emphasizes

two distinct objectives – economic (see Parkerson and Saunders, 2004) and social (Mommaas, 2002; Speaks, 2002; Kavaratzis, 2004). There are also works that point out the symbolic value of city branding efforts (Gibson, 2005; Zukin et al., 1998).

In the context of the development and growing importance of the service-based economic sector, tourism has become one of the most critical forces shaping the world's economy and has been recognized as having a key developmental impact (Nel and Binns, 2002). According to Parkerson and Saunders (2004) the objectives of city branding are to increase the flow of visitors by improving attractiveness, to stimulate capital investment, and to attract new residents to live in the city. They conclude that the bottom line is economic. In many locales worldwide tourism promotion and city branding campaigns are part of a broader effort usually called local economic development (LED). As argued by Nel and Binns (2002) place marketing can often be regarded as a locality-based strategy to reimagine and restructure local economies.

It would be however a mistake to argue that the main benefits of city branding are economic in nature. Hall and Hubbard (1996) clearly state that the strategic manipulation of image and culture provides a strong basis for coalition building; this is a key element underlying all local economic development efforts. Kavaratzis (2004) shows that many scholars have criticized city branding precisely because of its focus on economic benefits and its potential role in stirring social conflicts. He argues that city branding should be seen as a venue both for achieving competitive advantage in order to increase inward investments and tourism and also for achieving community development, reinforcing local identity and identification of the citizens with their city in order to avoid social exclusion. Mommaas (2002) also criticizes the contemporary branding efforts undertaken by municipalities. As the focus is on attracting tourists willing to spend money on leisure, prospective well off residents, and wealthy investors, the author argues that city brands cater only to the “external cash-rich groups”. Furthermore, he argues, city brands should enhance the sense of belonging to a specific community and city pride.

Gibson (2005) shows that many of the urban redevelopment strategies currently undertaken by city governments are symbolic in nature. He claims that city officials are trying to portray the challenges cities face in terms of negative perceptions related to urban life. In other words, Gibson states, the American city has an image problem. If these negative perceptions hinder the attraction of new residents, businesses, and tourists, it means that city brands need to operate at the symbolic level and alter these negative perceptions. The scholarly account on the success of branding campaigns vis-à-vis the chronic problems faced by American cities is mixed.

Once a local government decides that creating a brand and a branding strategy is the way to go, there are several steps to be considered. The article “Putting Communities at the Center of Branding” suggests four main stages. For each stage additional suggestions from the literature were incorporated.

a) The first stage is called **understanding** and it implies an extensive research effort in order to understand the city, its assets, its culture, traditions, the views held by diverse groups. At this stage it is perhaps important to distinguish between the internal and the external audience. As argued by Stigel and Frimann (2006) a correspondence

must exist between externally presented brand values and internally experienced values, i.e. the marketing should reflect both the citizens' conception of their city and what visitors experience. If this connection between the internal and the external level is not established, there is a great risk that the campaign will consist of rather lofty values and concepts that are incongruent with what can be experienced by citizens and visitors alike. Or, even most dramatically, it can lead to the abandonment of a city brand altogether. One example of a top-down branding strategy that was implemented without enough prior research and consensus building is Ottawa, Canada. It adopted the logo "Ottawa – Technically Beautiful" that tried to describe in a single phrase both its natural beauty and technological developments. The residents didn't like it and it soon became subject to mockery. The local government agency in charge of the campaign was forced to abandon it, after an initial investment of \$200,000 (Deffner, 2005).

b) The second stage is called **insight**. In the first section of the paper most of the definitions of the city-branding concept highlighted the fact that a brand should incorporate an emotional dimension that triggers the formation of associations in people's mind. At this stage all the facts gathered during the research effort need to be transformed into "emotional sparks". This stage is about defining the uniqueness of the place and identifying what makes that place special and different in the competitive marketplace. It is very hard to provide recipes for a successful insight. We can only provide one example that came up during my research – Spartanburg, South Carolina, US. Spartanburg is a relatively small city, home to five colleges, and located in the proximity of Greenville, a larger city perceived by locals as the cool place in the region. The Spartanburg's brand – "HUB-BUB.COM" at least in our opinion, has that special "something" that immediately triggers representations and emotional associations in people's mind. When we first saw the brand I pictured Spartanburg as a place that is full of action, with a young, hip, and educated population, while in the same time having a local government interested in supporting cool public events and in offering citizens access to information technologies (perhaps free WIFI in the downtown area). It is impossible to rationally explain how these associations were forged by a sole phrase but this is the power of a brand and of the message it carries.

c) The third stage is called **imagination**. This is perhaps the most critical stage since all the data gathered and the emotional sparks are transformed into tangible products such as symbols, logos, message texts, value statements etc. However, we need to keep in mind a piece of advice offered in the already quoted article "Putting Communities at the Center of Branding" – a brand is not just a logo, a mission statement, or something you produce or provide to others, like an ad, brochure or radio spot. The brand rests in the minds and hearts of other people. It is what they say about you when you are not around. This summarizes the very essence and the importance of the previous stages when you gather the information and insight that makes a brand successful.

When it comes to the actual materials produced as part of the branding campaign, a research done in the US on the brands available on line for almost 100 municipalities shows that there are five main models or alternatives used (Tschirhart); (1) city brand dominant – the municipality focuses on different representations of the city

and not of the government or the way it works and this seems to be a rather common situation; (2) city government brand dominant – in this case the representations emphasize values that are connected to the government’s activity such as efficiency, effectiveness, competence (see for example the Topeka, Kansas, US slogan “A Capital City Government Working for You”); (3) department brand dominant – it focuses on specific representations that reflect the specific of that department’s activity (in the US most department brands are used by police and firefighter departments); (4) mixed branding – a combination of the above alternatives, however the existence of multiple brands may lead to a fragmented message; (5) little to no branding system – this may be a conscious decision or it can be generated by a very poorly managed branding effort.

d) The last stage is **evaluation**. Because branding is a strategic effort there needs to be some indication of whether the branding campaign reached its set objectives. There is a caveat however to keep in kind with regard to the evaluation of branding activities – even when conducted according to a set schedule and based on clearly defined methodology it can still prove to be a daunting task. This happens mainly because there are at least two types of publics to consider – internal and external, and direct indicators of success are hard to quantify. Literature points out that in the first stages indicators of success can be represented by people buying t-shirts and other promotional materials with the city symbol or logo, the use of the city logo by municipal agencies and other organizations on official letters and communication, and even more throughout the entire community (for example on police cars, municipally owned buildings) etc.

III. Challenges associated with the creation of urban brands

While the city brand concept may be appealing to a variety of groups because of the implicit promises it holds for future local economic growth, increased tourism, and better visibility in the national/international arena, there are nonetheless numerous challenges underlying the process of branding. This section critically assesses the implications of the city brand concept and highlights several challenges ahead for both theorists and practitioners.

According to the modernist tradition in urban planning there is a belief in the ‘synthetic’ city; that is, the city of singular form invariant over time. The task for planners is to take the fragments produced by the contradictions and struggles of capitalism and integrate them into a unique and orderly whole (Beauregard, 2003). City branding does essentially the same thing – it simplifies and reduces the complexity of urban reality to a few transparent and easily understood themes, symbols, and slogans (Gotham, 2007). Mommaas (2002) argues that the aim of the brand is to give coherence to something that doesn’t have one normally. The risk underlying city branding is that the city becomes subject to rationalization, cleansing, and the creation of clichés. According to more vehement critics of city branding, such efforts lead to a megalomania accumulation of the obvious that eliminates the last elements of surprise and mystery that cling to the brand, imprisoning it in a “defective” identity (Koolhaas quoted by Speaks, 2002). It is almost impossible to come up with a single

representation or image of a city as long as there are numerous groups segregated along the lines of ethnicity, race, religion, income status etc. Like all variants of urban place promotion and marketing, urban branding is particularly silent about issues of social justice, equity, and inclusion. Very often the representations of cities do not include the poor people, the homeless, or the minorities. Mommaas (2002) contends in this context that city brands emphasize the social inequality because of the economic-driven scope of city branding and recommends a more inward focus in order to raise civic pride. Gotham (2007) points out that city branding is a critical form of power especially when tourism professionals legitimate themselves as community experts or urban planners.

Another challenge is posed by the fact that cities and places are complex and multifaceted systems of organization that contain a variety of different groups, conflictual social relationships, and diverse identities (Gotham, 2007). Parkerson and Saunders (2004) describe cities as networks rather than organizations with clear boundaries and internal structures. A network represents a set of organizational nodes where each node is interrelated to the others. The problems with these types of networks, the authors argue is that they are very good at decentralizing but not at coordinating the decision-making process or at allocating resources. Practitioners argue that during a branding campaign input should be solicited from the entire alliance but actual decision making should be given to only a few. In addition, the ultimate decision-makers should reflect the community's make-up (Brandstanding: Four cities share their success).

Further complicating the problem is the fact that a single community can mean so many different things to so many people. Communicating effectively in today's cluttered marketplace will require one to hone that tangle of feelings and thoughts to a single distinct point (Brandstanding: Four cities share their success). It is questionable however if this is a realistic suggestion. There are scholars who suggest that for example the "ordinary" world of the resident and the non-ordinary world of the tourist are dialectically opposed (Jafari, 1995 quoted in Parkerson and Saunders, 2004).

A final challenge that needs to be mentioned here refers to the highly political nature of the entire process. While the four Ps of marketing are product, place, price, and promotion, the four Ps of community marketing are politics, politics, politics, and politics (Brandstanding: Four cities share their success). The key to overcome this barrier is strong leadership. Parkerson and Saunders (2004) argue that a lack of leadership among decision-makers means there is no one to infuse appropriate values, align interests and overcome inherent conflicts between managers, bureaucrats and politicians.

IV. Conclusions

There is currently a growing body of literature on the concept of city brands and its role in public sector urban planning and management. An overview of the existing literature shows that there is very little consensus about the nature of city branding. On the one hand there are scholars who argue that cities can and should be regarded as commodities and therefore the concepts and mechanisms from product branding

should be applicable to them as well. On the other hand, there are scholars who, though they acknowledge the existence of similarities between corporate branding and city branding, contend that cities are far too complex and fragmented organizations and therefore attempts to create a coherent, singular urban brand are futile.

In addition to tourist organizations, chambers of commerce, and other organizations, there is currently a growing trend for local governments to be at the forefront of branding activities. As opposed to city marketing, urban brands endeavor to promote a unitary vision about the city for all intended target groups. Therefore, in order to be inclusive enough, brands focus on more general values such as creativity, innovation, diversity etc.

There are several challenges underlying the creation of city brands. First, it is impossible to come up with a single representation or image of a city as long as there are numerous groups segregated along the lines of ethnicity, race, religion, income status etc. Furthermore, the whole process of selecting a single brand turns into a competition among these groups each having varying degrees of power, money, and influence. Finally, the brand is more likely to reflect the representations of the elite groups and to ignore the meanings and values attributed to urban spaces and places by less powerful, underrepresented, or socially stigmatized groups.

Even though practitioners and governmental representatives acknowledge the competitive nature of the process of creating a city brand, they still believe in the existence of a single representation and the possibility of building consensus or at least of compromising among the most relevant social groups.

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