

**Voice of Dwellers –
Developing the place brand by listening to the residents**

Keywords – place branding; stakeholders; residents; listening

Purpose – Listening to the customers has long been the key phrase and success element in product branding (e.g. Ramsey & Sohi 1997). In this paper, the importance of listening to the existing *residents* is highlighted in the development of *branding a place*. The number and heterogeneity of the residents as well as they being scattered in different areas and locations makes it challenging to hear them. The participation of and the dialogue with all stakeholders, including the residents, is extremely important in branding a place. Having said that, the purpose of this working paper is to introduce and analyze ways of listening to the residents, to make them heard.

Methodology/Approach – Listening requires place branders to fully attend to, comprehend, and respond to the residents' comments, requests, ideas and feedback. This can happen in multiple means. Herein, ways of collecting and analyzing feedback is provided. For this, interviews and documentary material are being used.

Findings – Findings of the case examples show that listening to the residents can be an asset in developing the place and its brand.

Theoretical Implications – As according to the previous literature (see e.g. Braun et al. 2013), little theoretical and empirical evidence has been published on the role of residents in place branding, this working paper attempts for one's part make an attempt to further the discussion.

Practical Implications – It is the obligation of city authorities to provide opportunities for residents to actively contribute to decision making (Braun et al. 2013). Other cities could learn from the examples introduced in the paper.

Originality/Value – The role of local people has been studied in destination brand-building process, i.e. from tourism perspective. However, within the field of marketing the voice of residents is an area that calls for more research. Echoing Merrilees et al. (2009), consulting residents more could improve place branding theory and practice. Similarly according to Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2010), if place branding is called on to satisfy the needs and wants of residents, an understanding of how residents perceive their city and how they would like it to be improved, should be developed.

Place branding

Commercial producers have long seen the advantage of branding their products. Due to the decline of traditional industries and the growing importance of services to the economy, the idea of discovering or creating uniqueness also attracts place managers. However, there has been little consensus on what type of branding applies to places (Skinner, 2008; Ashworth, 2009). The traditional product-marketing framework has proved to be inadequate for places, and place branding has rather leaned on corporate branding (Kavaratzis 2009). Balmer and Greyser (2006) list parallels from the corporate brand literature to place branding: relationship building, communications, personality and identity, strategy based, creativity and resources.

The management of corporate brands is arguably far more complicated than traditional product-brand management (Wilkinson and Balmer 1996). The complexities involved in place branding as such arise from the number of stakeholders (Roper and Davies 2007), the number of organizations steering the brand, as well as the limited control of the brand and the diverse target groups (Virgo and de Chernatony 2006). Cities have no inherent power to do anything they decide to do as they are governed by judicial regulations, and they cannot exercise the economic powers of private corporations. (Frug 1984). Furthermore, places do not have single identities that can be clearly branded; they can have different attractions and different meanings to diverse target markets. (Skinner 2008)

Place branding is a matter of compromise, shared values and collective benefits. If local communities are to become brand ambassadors rather than critics, its successful implementation requires long-term advocacy and support of local individuals and organizations. (Morgan et al. 2003; Baker 2012) The branding can never start from scratch; each place has its own history, heritage and infrastructure and consequently, the creation and communication of the place brand is often outside of the control of the marketer. (Trueman et al. 2007)

Moreover, branding a place should be seen as a strategic process that requires long-term involvement and commitment. The successful implementation of the brand strategy requires the long-term advocacy and support of local individuals and organizations, i.e. letting the place brand grow from the bottom. (Braun and Kavaratzis 2013; Morgan et al. 2003; Kavaratzis 2009; Baker 2012) A strategy that incorporates the wider community is more likely to gain approval and be sustainable over time (Trueman et al. 2004). Eventually, as Nanus (1992) points out, the responsibility for shaping the vision lies with the leader. The vision should then provide the members of the organization and its stakeholders with an inspiring, clear picture of the future and purpose, and motivate them to work

towards it (Almog-Bareke, 2012). As part of a common vision, there should be shared values which the stakeholders groups are committed to. Values drive behavior and guide the actions into the future. (Virgo and de Chernatony 2006)

According to the former deputy mayor of Helsinki, reliability and creativity are the key features to the success of a city (Sauri 2017). Reliability means everybody obeying the same rules and principles, and everybody being treated the same way. By creativity Sauri (2017) means that the residents' innovativeness and initiative are supported, not limited or restricted by unnecessary regulations. This is called participatory city branding (see e.g. Braun et al. 2013; Colomb and Kalandides 2010). The participatory approach highlights the significance of internal audiences, by trying to increase the brand commitment (Ind and Bjerke 2007; Hatch and Schultz 2009). The participation can concern both city development and residents' contribution to the promotional imagery.

Braun et al. (2013) present three roles of residents that make them an important target market for place branding:

1. Residents as *integrated part of place branding*: giving the residents the chance to express their views on their city.
2. Residents as *ambassadors* for their place brand: The views of residents are significant in building the city image as residents are considered authentic, insider sources of information. The word-of-mouth disseminated by the residents is evidenced to be more trustworthy than paid promotion (see e.g. Colicev et al. 2018).
3. Residents as *citizens*. According to this view, place authorities are obliged to guarantee participation in choosing/voting for their local city representatives but also provide opportunities to actively contribute to decision making. This, however, may be challenging as branding needs a core focus in order to differentiate the offering from competitors (see e.g. Keller 1993).

Ways of listening to the residents

But how to make sure the residents' voice is heard? How to engage them in the city development and have them influence the city brand? An interesting example is the "Be Berlin" campaign launched in 2008 which gave the Berliners, previously left out of city marketing imagery, a possibility to shape the external representations of the city by telling personal stories that connected them to the city. (Colomb & Kalandides 2010) One of the characteristics of the content of the campaign was that new urban spaces, previously left out of the branding imagery, were featured. The Berlin case focused on the promotional aspect of the city.

Recent and examples more to do with residents' involvement in city development come from the cities of Helsinki and Turku, Finland, the goal being to advance and further improve the city's services and brand. In both cases, it is a question of listening to the residents and taking their voice into consideration when making decisions – but the ways differ. The information for the case examples was provided by documentary material as well as interviewing the representatives of the case organizations, first the CEO of Feedbackly (Männistö 2018) and secondly, the area coordinator of the City of Turku (Arnivaara 2018).

In order to get feedback, the **City of Helsinki** has just recently made a two-year contract with Feedbackly, a company specialized in measuring customer experiences and satisfaction. The feedback is collected by an application along the customer journey, the idea being to improve the experience in every online and offline touch point such as the city website, social media sites, service encounters as well as mobile services. After collecting and measuring the data, it is analyzed and taken into consideration when making decisions in the city. The following table illustrates the units where the feedback system is being used, the target groups and what kind of data is collected.

Clinic of physical therapy	Customer satisfaction on individual basis in order to get benchmarks of average satisfaction The main goal is to provide physical-therapy customers with appropriate instructions for follow-up treatment
Clinic of geriatrics	Feedback collected by memory coordinators via a mobile app among demented and elderly patients Operates as a measure of customer experience and coordinators' management attainment
Welfare unit	Feedback collected among visitors in different events Information on the awareness of the services as well as needs and wants for the future (e.g. smart home, better future)
Service center	Feedbackly device used for collecting feedback on lunches at schools Data used for planning future menus
Culture and leisure time	Feedback collected in different units (Culture, Youth clubs, Sports) via pads and QR codes Average satisfaction and NPS measured
Video visit	Remote treatment via computer; afterwards, feedback collected via a pad survey (assisted by a nurse)
City environment	Indoor air measured by 40 Feedbackly devices

In **Turku**, Southwestern Finland, the way of engaging and listening to the residents is called “The Mayor’s visits” (#kjkylässä). Turku is the 6th largest city in the country, with a population of 185 000 people. The city is divided into 8 regions, and the idea of the “Mayor’s visits” is to have the Mayor meet the residents of these regions 2–4 times a year. The area coordinator’s role (interviewed for this

study) is of key importance in organizing the visits: she is in contact with the residents of the particular region and the city officials responsible for particular fields of operation. The initiative for the visits often stems from the residents, and the area coordinator will then help the residents organize the event. By doing this, the city can approach also segments that would necessarily not be heard in decision making. Successful events have been organized among teenagers (the hang-out of the local young people), immigrants (integrating them in the society by joint events) and elderly people (visits in senior homes). Besides the mayor, representatives of the city are represented in every event and visit. The representatives also meet before the events; this is done in order to improve collaboration and prevent silos in the city organization.

The Mayor's visits have been organized for 1½ years by now – since the inauguration of the new mayor – and the results show support for continuing the practice. The possibility to meet the mayor and other city representatives face-to-face lowers the barrier towards authorities, engages passive resident segments, enhances collaboration between city officials and prevents silos (Arnivaara 2018). If local communities are to become brand ambassadors rather than critics, its successful implementation requires long-term advocacy and support of local individuals. (Morgan et al., 2003; Baker, 2012) This paper has introduced two examples of cases where listening to the existing residents, the ones who live the brand, can be an asset in developing the place and its brand. Both examples have features of *Residents as ambassadors* as well as *Residents as citizens* (see Braun et. al. 2013).

Suggestions for future research

In Finland, out of the 311 municipalities 107 are cities. A logical extension of this preliminary study would be to investigate if and how the other cities listen to their residents and let their place brand grow from the bottom. This idea is in line with Braun et al.'s (2013) call for more research on the integration of residents in place branding and investigating the roles in practice.

References

- Almog-Bareket, G., 2012. Visionary leadership in business schools: An institutional framework. *Journal of Management Development* 31(4), pp. 431–440.
- Arnivaara, K., 2018. Interview on 30th October, 2018.
- Ashworth, G.J., 2009. The instruments of place branding: How is it done?. *European Spatial Research and Policy*, 16(1), pp. 9–22.

- Baker, B., 2012. *Destination branding for small cities. The essentials of successful place branding*, 2nd edition. Portland, Oregon: Creative Leap Books.
- Balmer J.M.T. and Greyser, S.A., 2006. Corporate marketing. Integrating corporate identity, corporate branding, corporate communications, corporate image and corporate reputation. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(7/8), pp. 730–741.
- Braun, E., Kavaratzis, M. and Zenker, S., 2013. My city – my brand: the different roles of residents in place branding. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 6(1), pp.18–28.
- Colicev, A., Malshe, A., Pauwels, K. and O’Connor, P., 2018. Improving Consumer Mindset Metrics and Shareholder Value Through Social Media: The Different Roles of Owned and Earned Media, *Journal of Marketing*, 82 (1), pp. 37–56.
- Colomb, C. and Kalandides, A., 2010. The ‘Be Berlin’ campaign: old wine in new bottles or innovative form of participatory place branding? In: Ashworth, G.J. and Kavaratzis, M. (Eds.) *Towards effective place brand management: branding European cities and regions*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, pp. 173–190.
- Frug, G.E., 1984. The city as a legal concept. In: L. Rodwin and R.M. Hollister (eds.) *Cities of the mind. Images and Themes of the City in the Social Sciences*. Massachusetts, US: Springer, pp. 233–290.
- Kavaratzis, M., 2009. Cities and their brands: lessons from corporate branding. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 5(1), pp. 26–37.
- Kavaratzis, M. and Ashworth, G.J., 2010. Place branding: where do we stand? In: Ashworth, G.J. and Kavaratzis, M. (Eds.) *Towards effective place brand management: branding European cities and regions*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, pp. 1–14.
- Keller, D.L., 1993. Conceptualizing, measuring and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), pp, 1–22.
- Merrilees, B., Miller, D. and Herington, C., 2009. Antecedents of residents’ city brand attitudes, *Journal of Business Research*, 62(3), 362–367.
- Morgan, N.J., Pritchard, A. and Piggott, R., 2003. Destination branding and the role of stakeholders: The case of New Zealand. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 9(3), pp. 285–299.
- Männistö, J. 2018. Interview on October 15, 2018.
- Nanus, B. 1992. *Visionary leadership: Creating a compelling sense of direction for your organization*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Ramsey, R.P. and Sohi, R.S., 1997. Listening to your customers: the impact of perceived salesperson listening, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 25(2), pp. 127–137.

- Roper, S. and Davies, G., 2007. The corporate brand: Dealing with multiple stakeholders. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 23(1–2), pp. 75–90.
- Sauri, P., 2017. Luovuus ja luotettavuus ovat avain menestykseen [Creativity and reliability are the keys to success]. *The Helsingin Sanomat*, August 1, A 5.
- Skinner, H., 2008. The emergence and development of place marketing's confused identity. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 24(9–10), pp. 915–928.
- Trueman, M., Klemm, M. and Giroud, A., 2004. Can a city communicate? Bradford as a corporate brand. *Corporate Communications*, 9(4), pp. 317–330.
- Trueman, M., Cornelius, N. and Killingbeck-Widdup, A., 2007. Urban corridors and the lost city: Overcoming negative perceptions to reposition city brands. *Journal of Brand Management*, 15(1), pp. 20–31.
- Virgo, B. and de Chernatony, L., 2006. Delphic brand visioning to align stakeholder buy-in to the City of Birmingham brand. *Brand Management*, 13(6), pp. 379–392.
- Wilkinson, A. and Balmer, J.M.T., 1996. Corporate and generic identities: Lessons from the Co-operative Bank. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 14(4), pp. 22–35.