Building Reputation – Communicating Identity Identity and the Place Branding Process

Place Branding does not merely stick on new labels, but consolidates the essential characteristics of the individual identity into a brand core. At the same time, it sets social processes in motion, which can nuance, strengthen or correct foreign perceptions. The routine development of mechanisms leading to a strong and consistent brand is highly important for Place Branding. Such development doesn't merely promote a core message, a logo or a claim, to the public but additionally communicates the Place Brand on a long-term basis using a consistent communication concept.

In times of globalization and the increasing importance of supranational organizations such as the European Union, the relative position of a place is constantly changing. Nations, regions and places compete for resources, investments, visitors, public attention and capital, both domestically and worldwide.

Day by day, individuals make decisions where to spend their next vacation, where to invest their assets, or at which university to spend a research term. Consciously or unconsciously, connotations attached to the respective nations influence this decision-making process. This increasing competition increases the pressure on cities and nations to act.

Corporations have used the "force of a strong brand" for many years, applying it successfully on the market. In particular, strong brands are characterized by the appearance of emotional content to which the consumer connects straight away: a living and reliable "story" - an extraordinary "brand topic". By creating their own distinctive brand, nations, regions and places can actively manage the perception of their values, and thus gain positive public awareness while countering misunderstandings or negative connotations.

At the center of all brand activities is the reciprocity function of brand image and identity. The reputation of a corporation or a brand is based on a strategic brand management and a management process; it must be consistently represented to the public.

Nations and regions should exploit the advantages of a unique, strong brand. All the stakeholders can profit equally from a uniform promotion of a Place Brand. Its creation demands a holistic identity based on a comprehensive analysis of the present situation, forming a foundation for the representation of the singularity of a nation, a region or a place. The cultural identification with the nation can be seen not only as progress on the path to gaining self confidence, but even stronger as an economic development at this particular location.

Place Branding leads to a stronger operational level in external public perception as well as in the self-perception of the participants.

Place Branding is the essence of a specific, consistent and assertible image of a nation and the basis for the development of reliability, security and confidence.
Only once the benefits of a nation are made visible to both inhabitants and the outside public can attention be gained and the appropriate benefits reaped.

The structural differences between a place and a corporation or product, however, entail modified requirements for the required

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branding. The substantial characteristic of a nation, region or a place is that affiliation belongs by birth. The population of a nation has a historical culture which has grown organically from the inside over time and from which a unique identity can be derived.

Regarding the subject competition, corporations and nations resemble each other as areas of activity, in their financial logic, the existence of a political, social or commercial vision and in the competition for resources. This requires a particularly adapted method for the strategic brand management of places, regions and nations through the modification of theoretical models taken from the brand management of corporations or products.

A nation that hopes to be recognized as a strong brand should follow some basic rules of positioning:

The positioning should be equal for all requirement groups (stakeholders) and have a brand recognition potential (i.e., the potential for identification). It should be differential in relation to the location competition and brand demarcation as well as outward singularity. The positioning is a main component which transports the identity and values of the region consistently as a brand.

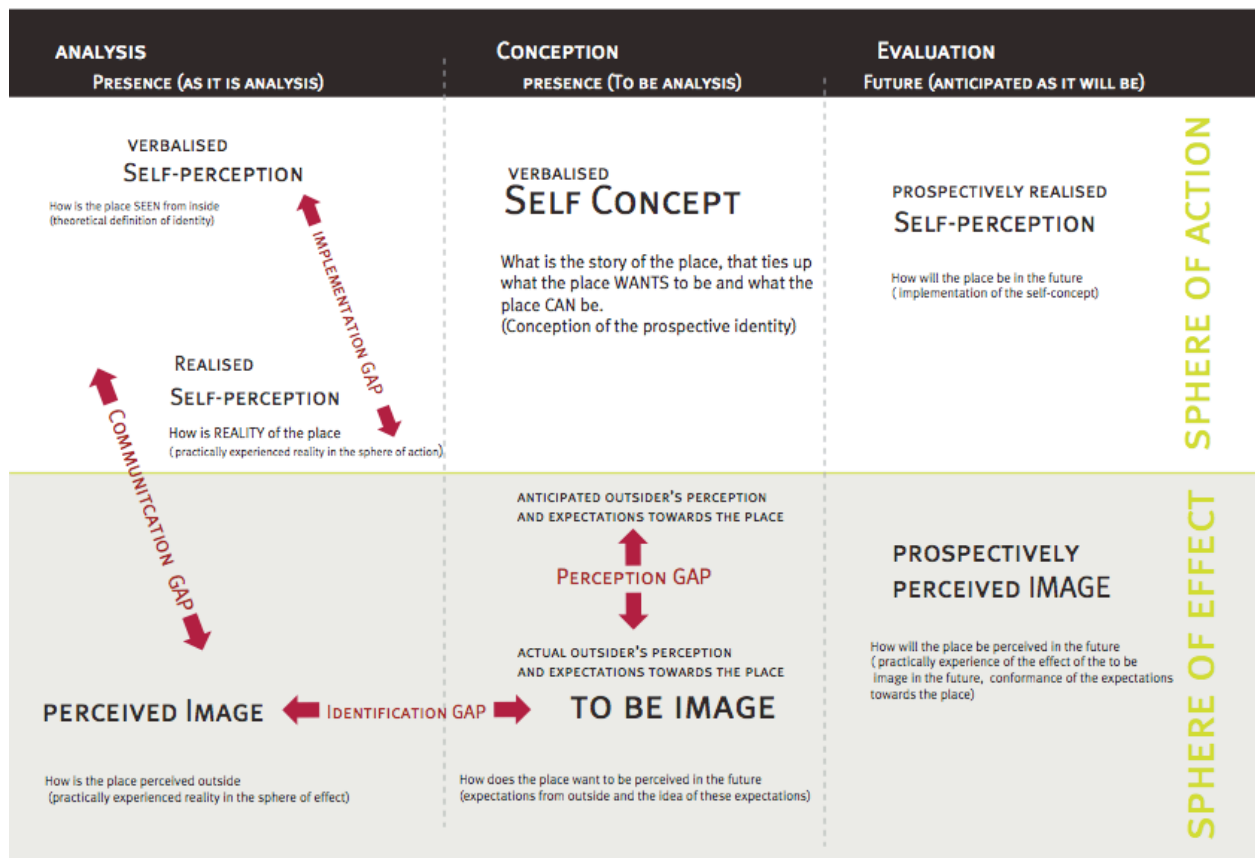## Visualizing identity gaps:
The Place Brand Identity Model

In order to identify the identity gaps of a nation, a region or a place, it makes sense to provide an "AS IS" and a "TARGET" identity. The Place Brand Identity Model represents a means of visualizing the complex identity-forming factors for a nation, region or place in their analysed actual condition as well as the verbalized specified condition.
Place Branding uses existing self-perceptions and extracts these for an authentic self-concept. The existing associations and the

self-concept consolidate themselves into the brand core, which bundles them together and maps out the central characteristics:
- Is the present condition of the place perceived both on the inside and on the outside?
- Which gaps and fits does the analysis of the various perspectives reveal?
- How far away is the anticipated outside image (as the desired image) from the perception on an effective level (viewed from the outside)?

The Place Branding process begins with in an "AS IS" state, with the realized and the verbalized self-perception. From this analysis, a verbalized self-concept is developed. The discrepancy between self-perception and self-concept reveals the creative room for the Place Branding process. The Place Branding process aims at self-perception on an active level; closing the gap between the verbalized self-perception and actually realized self-perception. If the gap remains, the developed self-concept will be regarded as unrealistic and rejected from the inside. The cultural melding of the self and external perception with the verbalized self-concept makes an early check on the communication gap necessary.

The development of a Brand Core always starts in the existing culture and in the existing self-perception, reality, self-concept and outside perception. The Brand Personality works from the inside outwards on the basis of several key issues: Who are we, what do we want to be, how do we become what we want to be, what do others believe we are and how would we like to be seen. The brand must be strategically managed in order to reach an aligned target image. The target image follows the question of how we would like to be noticed in the future from the outside and is functionally linked to the verbalized self-concept. Only once the self-concept and target image are in accordance can the identification gap be closed. For the success of Place Branding, it is crucial that the target image be effectively communicated

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SPHERE OF ACTION

VERBALISED
SELF-PERCEPTION

How is the place SEEN from inside
(theoretical definition of identity)

IMPLEMENTATION GAP

VERBALISED
SELF CONCEPT

What is the story of the place, that ties up what the place WANTS to be and what the place CAN be.
(Conception of the prospective identity)

PROSPECTIVELY REALISED
SELF-PERCEPTION

How will the place be in the future
(implementation of the self-concept)

REALISED
SELF-PERCEPTION

How is REALITY of the place
(practically experienced reality in the sphere of action)

COMMUNICATION GAP

SPHERE OF EFFECT

ANTICIPATED OUTSIDER'S PERCEPTION
AND EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS THE PLACE

PERCEPTION GAP

ACTUAL OUTSIDER'S PERCEPTION
AND EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS THE PLACE

PROSPECTIVELY PERCEIVED IMAGE

How will the place be perceived in the future
(practically experience of the effect of the to be image in the future, conformance of the expectations towards the place)

PERCEIVED IMAGE ← IDENTIFICATION GAP → **TO BE IMAGE**

How is the place perceived outside
(practically experienced reality in the sphere of effect)

How does the place want to be perceived in the future
(expectations from outside and the idea of these expectations)

Eitel/ Spiekermann 2007, vgl. auch Aaker / Parasutam /Zeithamml

Fig.: Place Brand Identity Model Eitel / Spiekermann (2007)

The perception gap develops between an image and a target image. Each Place Branding process must be accompanied by thorough observation regarding the structure of the perceived image.

Verification and examination of a results-orientation for the Place Brand.

A difficult success factor for the Place Brand is the notion of durability. Many brands do not succeed. They end up as short or medium-term campaigns which fail due to lack of financing or changing political priorities.

An important argument for the implementation of a controlling system is therefore the strength of the political argumentation: In Place Brand management, public funds are invested; the verification and examination of a results orientation of the expenditures are inevitable. The assumption that a Place Brand is successful, if it initiates a positive image among the stakeholders, is the basis for the measurement of the brand knowledge, which consists of brand awareness and the brand image. The brand image shows the perception and preference of a brand on the basis of different stored brand associations. The possibility exists of measurement using recall tests, recognition tests or also evoked set analyses. The brand image can be analyzed using an image profile and other innovative approaches. The tasks of

Place Branding include the measurability and evaluation of the Place Brand management measures. The primary task of the Brand Controlling process is to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the Brand management. In addition, the measurability of the success of the brand management

activities ensures a solid evaluation and, at the same time, the possibility of a targeted improvement to the brand management strategy.

Place Branding is more a process of structuring the existing culture and identifying national characteristics that should be consolidated and stated centrally, because culture and identity are not controllable or moldable. Place Branding represents the stabilization of the perception and communication of a nation through comprehensive and flexible organization. The Place Branding process is more than just a new term or method to establish image campaigns.

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