

Abstract "Nation Branding: San Marino Developing into a Brand."

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Berlin, 02.01.2006

Imagine France without fashion, Germany without the automobile industry or Japan without gadgets and sushi: Countries implicate pictures, emotions and associations in our heads, even if we have never been there. The idea we associate with a country, is the decisive factor for its emotional compounding. Limited experiences may have preceded (vacation, prejudices, media reports, acquaintances, circle of friends, etc.) which barely match a country's actual reality.

In times of globalization and the increasing importance of supranational organizations such as the European Union, the position of the nation states is constantly changing. Countries, regions and nations compete for resources, investments, visitors, attention and capital, both at home and worldwide. Day by day, Individuals make all sorts of decisions, e.g. where to spend the next vacations, where to invest their assets, or at which university to spend a research term. Consciously or unconsciously, connotations with the respective countries influence this decision-making process. The increasing competition puts cities and countries under pressure to act.

Although San Marino never had financial problems, three years ago, the country showed a budgetary deficit. This triggered a process of reorientation in the mindset of the social and economic communities. A new awareness of potential challenges emerged. Leading personalities from business, tourism and politics of the Republic of San Marino organized an expert workshop with Berlin's *Hochschule der Künste* (University of the Arts). By integrating a fresh external perspective various solutions for these challenges were discussed and defined.

The result is ambitious: the re-positioning of San Marino with a powerful and unique branding. At this point, the concept of **Place Brand™**, i.e. developing a country, a region or a place, comes in. The issue as such is not necessarily new, since many countries try to convey a rather concrete impression or opinion: Switzerland and the Helvetica-cross, the Netherlands and Mrs. Antje's cheese, and one can hardly avoid associating the passionate Italians with pasta and pizza.

But which factors determine these connotations? Can one influence them, as for instance, with a classical Corporate Identity strategy elaborated for an enterprise? Is it possible to manage these connotations via a strategic marketing approach, and if so, how? The brand perception and image formation, the "power of the brand" could be a suitable instrument with a huge potential for a country to communicate its own values both within and outside its national boundaries.

By creating their own, distinctive brand, countries could actively manage the perception of their country and its values, in order to be positively perceived by the public and work against misunderstandings or negative connotations.

Meike Eitel and Marie Spiekermann critically discuss the terms *corporate identity* and *branding* with regard to their transferability to a state: To which conclusion does the theoretical discussion lead us? Which theories can be applied for branding a nation and how can this be devolved to branding San Marino? Which characteristic of San Marino are unique (so-called *unique selling proposition*) and can deliver their identity? How does the country view itself today and how is its situation to be judged? What are the relevant problem areas and which are the appropriate stakeholders? What constitutes San Marino and where can it be positioned in a sense of strategic image formation?

As a first step, the authors analyze and determine the characteristics of the country San Marino and define the core messages of communication, within the country as well as towards the outside. As a second step, a briefing for a communication concept is elaborated. This online briefing to brand San Marino covers various potential areas, such as San Marino's "emotional" aspects, which "colour" it has and how it "feels" or makes you feel.

Taking into account the heterogeneous requirements which affect a complex system like a country, the "way to a strong brand", can only lead across the concept of "identity". This concept of identity defines itself not as a "created" example and not as a smooth, non-contradictory strategic object. This identity lives from its diversity and draws its conciseness and uniqueness from its own contradictions.

By taking into account the achievements of well-known branding strategies an *identity model* was developed, which can represent the essential elements for the representation of the *actual* versus the *target* identity of a country. At the same time, specific "gaps" in the inside and outside communication can be identified.

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M. Eitel and M. Spiekermann are dealing with the commercial aspects of identity since 1998, notably how this identity can be transported and most importantly how the recipient receives the identity. A recent addition to the portfolio is the scientific market research on the identity label of entire countries. The joint thesis as final effort in respect to the course "electronic business" at the University of Arts in Berlin delivers state-of-the-art branding tools and is known for good access doing a very good job. Yearlong experience in media observation, advertising, editorial and project management form the practical bases for their work.

www.identitylab.de; Berlin 2006.