Chapter 4
The Intended Image of a Place Brand:
A Danish Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This chapter studies the counterproductive impact of a place image on the entrepreneurial activities in a rural Danish municipality. Nationally, the municipality is rated 'very good' in terms of traditional business environment measurements. However, this stands in stark contrast to the historically embedded image of the municipality. In this chapter the intended image of the municipality is compared to the image as it is perceived by newcomers. The study shows that historically embedded images of places are hard to manage and change when they involve elements with negative appeal towards a specific target audience e.g. entrepreneurs. The branding problem for the municipality is shown to be the conflict between the brands of history, entrepreneurial spirit, family friendly town, and tourism etc. To manage a place brand so diverse is almost impossible and it is clearly demonstrated that the solution has been to brand the place as everything for everybody.

INTRODUCTION

What happens when the historically embedded image of a municipality (supported by tourist activities) conflicts with the objective of being a modern, entrepreneurial city? The problem was evident for Nyborg, a Danish town of 30.000 inhabitants and a history dating back, at least, a thousand years. Is it possible to brand a city towards tourists as the historical town with a long history, propose an image of an entrepreneurial city for the entrepreneurs and picture a family city that appeals towards the newcomers?

In this chapter, we will compare the intended image of the municipality to the image perceived by newcomers. The study shows that historically embedded images of places are hard to manage and change when they involve elements with a negative appeal towards a specific target audience e.g. the entrepreneur.

The case study of the Nyborg Municipality began two months before the realization of a municipal reform in Denmark in 2007 and stretched through the implementation of this reform and further on.

The purpose of this chapter is, first of all, to demonstrate from a longitudinal case study how difficult it is to change the image of a place and to make different images work together. The analysis opens by introducing some of the literature on place branding selected to fit this case, but the aim is first of all to present an analysis of the case.

Overview of the Case

The results of the case analysis showed five recognizable themes. Nyborg has a good infrastructural location and a strong historical association. In addition to this, the region is perceived as a safe place to raise a family. Fourthly, the natural surrounding is named as a common point of reference. Furthermore, the cultural entrepreneurship in and around Nyborg is a dominant element of the sense of the place with sports playing a large role. To facilitate a more entrepreneurial image the municipal council invested substantially at the time of the reform in an old office building creating a new attractive incubation facility for entrepreneurs and access to cheap office space for the SME's already in the area. Furthermore, the municipality had business consultants employed to service the existing SME's as well as the (expected) new ventures. Concurrently to this business focus, the historical elements of Nyborg were also conceded as a common reference point to the place branding strategy by the council since the municipality of Nyborg lies as popular wit will have it "in the middle of history". In hindsight, this historical perspective made up for one of the biggest obstacles to attracting entrepreneurs to the area of Nyborg. The history of the place seemed to be one of the greatest assets to attract newcomers – and thus potential entrepreneurs – to the municipality, and the branding strategy had to include reference points to the historical elements.

Theoretical Background

Arguably the history of a place is one of, if not the primary factor in the sense of the place. The images embedded in the history of the place in the form of stereotypes is difficult to change and acts as strong markers of what the place once where – and of course still is (Durie, Yeoman, & McMahon-Beattie, 2005). As a consequence, place brands have a close relation to unchangeable elements such as the geographic characteristic of the area, the history of the area, the climate and the people living there (Anholt, 2002; Durie et al., 2005; Warnaby & Medway, 2013). Neglecting these would render the brand image an empty shell without the depth that a historical anchor would give it.

The strategy of marketing – or branding – places has often been misconceived as an activity only concern with the industry of tourism precluding other major stakeholders in the location (Kerr, 2006). Often in this type of research, there is not made any distinction between marketing and branding or image and brand. This chapter will, however, not present an extended discussion of these concepts as the intention is to present a case study.

Globalization and the ever-increasing competitiveness of geographic locations have led to an ongoing evaluation, rating and ranking of places in every conceivable dimension in search of answers to questions such as. Where to raise a family or plan retirement, where to hold a convention or buy a specific product,

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