Chapter 8

Branding Porto:
An Authentic-Based Approach to Place Identity Theory

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ABSTRACT

Departing from the Porto brand case study, this chapter discusses the concept of destination brand identity from the supply-side perspective. Consequently, it proposes an authentic-based approach to place identity theory, in which destination authenticity is pointed out as a key driver to create a strong place brand identity. Moreover, it is suggested that destination managers should follow an eight-step approach to branding a destination. This dynamic view of place identity, which is supported by a continuous co-creation process involving local and external stakeholders, allows destination brand managers to mirror and reinforce the destination authenticity.

INTRODUCTION

Porto is pointed out as a unique and exceptional city in many ways. Known as the "Cidade Invicta" (unvanquished city), Porto easily seduces its visitors through its history, architecture, culture, gastronomy, trade, encounters and discoveries. Furthermore, Porto has all the charm of towns that happily cohabit with the river, allowing tourists to stroll along river Douro (river of gold), to cruise on the majestic river or to visit the Porto wine caves. Moreover, Porto is also a sea city where you can bath in the Atlantic Ocean and enjoy a fresh drink and tasty food in a cozy esplanade.

Nevertheless, to attract tourists to an almost unknown destination in Europe, Porto Municipality had to make efforts in branding the city to the world. One of main steps was taken in 2014 when the municipality created a new visual identity representing Porto as a global city, the city for everyone. This new visual identity, which was awarded in the European Design Awards 2015, reflects creatively the passionate feelings of the city: ancient, very noble, and always local, where you can feel cozy and at home. Moreover, Porto has interestingly been referred in the media as a mysterious holiday destination (The Guardian, 2017), a city full of surprises (The Guardian, 2009), a food and design hub (New York Times, 2016) and a charming destination (Le Figaro, 2014). This is undoubtedly the result of an intense campaign of public relations initiated in 2014 by Porto City Hall, combined with nation branding digital campaigns targeting international tourists always eager for exciting and affordable experiences. Adding to that, well-known events such as Red Bull Race have been used to promote the city as a hub of fun and amusement.

Thus, this chapter´s aim is twofold: firstly, it intends to review the main theories on place branding, with a focus on destination image, destination authenticity and place brand identity. Secondly, it discusses the process of branding authentic destinations through the illustration of the Porto case study. To conclude, this chapter offers novelty by discussing theoretically and empirically how strong place brand identities can be created and how destination authenticity contributes to mirror the destination core values.

PLACE BRANDING

Place branding research has gained much attention among academics and practitioners in the last decades. The rising interest in the field of destinations, nations and cities is deeply anchored on the need to design effective place branding strategies to attract foreign investment, talented or skilled manpower and visitors. Indeed, a destination brand is increasingly considered a valuable asset for urban development and a relevant tool for cities to distinguish themselves and improve their positioning (Camilleri, 2018a; Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009). Moreover, extant research shows that tourists usually visit destinations which falls in their destination awareness set (Yousaf, Amin, & Gupta, 2017) and fulfill their hedonic and sensory needs (Agapito, do Valle, & Mendes, 2014).

Nevertheless, it is commonly accepted that destination brands are complex assets and that place brand managers have very little control on the process of branding a city (Yousaf, Amin, & Gupta, 2017). Indeed, destination brands as a product are the result of a continuous and interactive process between government, international funding bodies, private stakeholders and residents (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009).

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