Chapter 39
Destination @–Branding of Ten European Capitals Through the Institutional Stems and Commercial Logos

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ABSTRACT

The chapter compares the social representations evoked by brands of the 10 European capitals (Rome, London, Paris, Helsinki, Vienna, Warsaw, Berlin, Madrid, Brussels, and Lisbon) among potential first-visitors. The associative network technique has been applied using as iconic stimuli both the institutional stems and the commercial logos of each of the 10 capitals. Moreover, a grid has been created ad hoc to identify the distinctive elements of the institutional stems and the commercial logos. The analysis of the institutional stems resulted in detecting some elements that many cities have in common: textual elements (words written in Latin) as well as royal, military, and symbolic elements, evoking especially mythological and historical aspects, narrating the history of the cities since their foundation. On the other hand, the commercial logos always include the names of the cities, and as iconic urban narratives, they use abstract signs to recall modern aspects and topicality of the brand. They meet the city's identity-related needs of distinctiveness and recognition.

INTRODUCTION

Starting from a broad research programme on *Place-identity and Social Representations of European Capitals in first visitors of six different nationalities* begun by de Rosa in the 1990s (de Rosa, 1995; 1997; 2013b) - later developed along multiple interrelated research lines based on "*field studies*" and "*media studies*", inspired by a multi-method *modelling approach* to social representations (de Rosa, 2013a; 2013c) - this contribution represents an integrative work concerning a study on the "*Destination@-branding*" (Morrison & Anderson, 2002) of ten European Capitals through communication via their institutional stems and commercial logos.

The research line based on the "*media studies*" (de Rosa, Bocci & Picone, 2012; de Rosa & Bocci, 2014) focuses on the comparative analyses carried out between:

- The "*City@-brand identity*" (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2002) created by the marketers (assumed as vehicle of "expert knowledge") through the institutional tourist websites of ten European Capitals (Rome, London, Paris, Helsinki, Vienna, Warsaw, Berlin, Madrid, Brussels and Lisbon) -examining their usability, interactivity and contents.
- The "*City@-brand image*" (Keller, 1998; Cai, 2002) perceived through spontaneous conversations and experience exchanges among members of the Social Networks, like *Facebook* and *Yahoo Answer* and forum discussions like *TripAdvisor*, assumed as vehicle of the "common sense knowledge".

In accordance with the model of "destination branding" (Cai, 2002) composed by three interrelated components: *brand identity*, *brand image* and *brand element mix* (name, logo, sign, design, symbol, slogan…), this contribution focuses on the institutional stems and commercial logos as symbolic tools and cultural artefacts created in different historical periods in order to contribute to the "*distinctiveness*" of the different cities.

Therefore, the aim is to compare the iconic structural elements of the brands (ancient and modern stems and logos) of ten historical European capitals, which play a determinant role in the narration of urban history.

The research also compares the social representations evoked by brands (stems and logos) of the ten European Capitals among potential first-visitors.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Destination branding constitutes a way to communicate a destination's unique identity by differentiating a destination from its competitors (Morrison & Anderson, 2002).

In the model of destination branding proposed by Cai (2002) -organized around brand identity, brand image and brand element mix- the process starts choosing one or more brand elements -identifying the destination- and goes on with the formation of "brand associations" (attributes, affective and attitudes components of an image -Gartner, 1993; Keller, 1998-) driven by brand identity.

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