

Destination@-Branding and Re-Branding of Ten European Capitals

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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; 2013b) - later developed along multiple interrelated research lines based on *field studies* and *media studies*, inspired by the *modelling approach* (de Rosa, 2013a; 2013c, 2014) - 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 brands of Rome, London, Paris, Helsinki, Vienna, Warsaw, Berlin, Madrid, Brussels and Lisbon are the symbolic tools and cultural artefacts created in different historical periods in order to contribute to the “*distinctiveness*” of the different cities.

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

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

Moreover, by considering that branding is an evolutionary process (re-branding), this contribution analyses the recent transformations of some commercial brands from a longitudinal perspective.

Finally, this contribution integrates the results of the analysis of the main graphic elements of branding in the framework of the more complex research programme (de Rosa, Bocci, Dryjanska, 2019), suggesting a preliminary overview of the Destination@-Branding focused on the iconic social representations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Destination branding constitutes a way to communicate a destination’s unique identity by differentiating a destination from its competitors (Morrison & Anderson, 2002; Mitoula, 2019).

According to different authors (Cai, 2002; Florek, Inch and Gnoth, 2006; Nandan, 2005), brand identity and brand image are critical ingredients for a successful destination branding, including two different perspectives:

- the “marketers” who desire to create the brand identity;
- the “targets” who perceive the brand image (Kapferer, 1997; Florek, Insch and Gnoth, 2006; Qu, Kim & Im, 2011).

In particular:

- Kapferer (1997) and Konecnik & Go (2008) state that before knowing how a place “is” perceived by tourists, it is important to establish how a place “should be” perceived by its target audience; Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2000:68) define brand identity as: “a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from organization members”; while
- following Keller (1998:93) and Cai (2002:723), brand image can be defined as: “perceptions about a place as reflected by the brand associations held in tourist memory; or as a combination of cognitive and affective evaluations stored in the consumers’ minds” (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Pike, 2009).

The relationship between destination brand identity and brand image can be considered as circular and dialogic:

- brand image plays a significant role in building brand identity (Cai, 2002);
- brand image is the reflection of brand identity (Qu, Kim & Im, 2011:467); “the reaction to this message in the minds of recipients” (Florek, Insch & Gnoth, 2006:279).

The distinctive and unique image deriving from the brand image differentiates the destination from the competitors and can be used by the marketers for destination branding. In fact, as stated by Cai (2002:722): “Image formation is not branding, albeit the former constitutes the core of the latter. Image building is one step closer, but there still remains a critical missing link: the brand identity”.

The model of destination branding proposed by Cai (2002) is organized around three central elements: brand identity, brand image and brand element mix featured in this contribution. The process starts by 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 -see also Gartner, 1993; Keller, 1998) driven by brand identity.

Moving beyond the molecular studies interested in identifying the cognitive and evaluative factors in perception, purely focused on the processes of categorization, encoding, storage and retrieval of information in memory, this article captures the multi-dimensionality of the Social Representations Theory (Moscovici, 1961/1976; Jodelet, 1989; de Rosa, 2013a; 2019; de Rosa, Dryjanska & Bocci, 2017; de Rosa, Bocci & Dryjanska, 2018).

MAIN FOCUS: DESTINATION@-BRANDING AND RE-BRANDING OF TEN EUROPEAN CAPITALS

From the recent review of the City Branding literature conducted by Kasapi & Ceia (2017:139): “it can be concluded that the field of studies of destination branding in general and that of city branding specifically are still in their infancy suggesting that more studies can be conducted in these fields”.

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