Guest Editorial

'Security branding': The role of security in marketing the city, region or state

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While it may take many years to build up a successful place brand, it can take considerably less time to damage this positive image of a locale through the generation of overtly negative perceptions. The potential of perceptions of security to protect a brand, or insecurity to damage a brand, is increasingly being given attention. In the contemporary political and economic climate perhaps nothing potentially damages a place brand more than portrayed images of insecurity, connected to high crime rates, the threat of terror attack or risk from catastrophic natural disaster. On the other hand, if we reverse this branding logic, we can see how the active promotion of security, and attempts to disguise, downplay or lessen the impact of insecurity traits, can emerge as vital attributes for branding and marketing in certain place-based contexts. Amidst an almost constant stream of government announcements and media headlines purporting to highlight the omnipresent risk that society now faces and the culture of ambient fear this engenders, emerging safety concerns and security threats are, we argue, rapidly unlocking the potential for security to become a key selling point in the practice of place branding. The marker of security has become a scarce commodity, and most states and cities compete for it in the collective mind of a global audience.

Moreover, being recognised as a provider of security (a prize vied for by actors like the US, NATO, as well as the European Union) offers concomitant authority and credibility. In this sense, what we might refer to as 'security branding' adds value to, or at least reconfigures, existing brand images, and creates Unique Selling Points (USP's) for political actors and place.

Most notably, since the events of 9/11 in New York and Washington DC, and subsequent large-scale terrorist acts around the globe, security has become a central part of national government policy and has had a significant impact on how places are perceived, planned, regenerated, governed and promoted. The creation of safe and secure conditions (or at least the appearance of safety and security), both physically and institutionally, has become a key corporate and political priority. The success of such policies and the image they generate is seen as a strategic asset that must be carefully managed and in some cases explicitly branded. This not only applies to the European cities where large scale terrorist attacks actually took place in the past few years (Madrid in 2004, and London in 2005), but to all other territorial actors who realise all too well that 'security' has become an essential part of their reputation.

The importance of security is an area that has long been largely absent from the

place promotion and place branding literature. But in today's geostrategic environment, brand professionals have begun to recognise safety and security as key attributes that can be used to incentivise business location choices and inward investment potential. On top of the news value of terrorist or terrorist-related events, we should also not forget the impact natural disasters (such as tsunamis, hurricanes and earthquakes), health concerns (such as pandemic influenza and SARS) and man-made accidents can have on the image and reputation of places, marking them as 'insecure' and 'unsafe' in the minds of a variety of relevant audiences (Avraham and Ketter, 2008). This is why we argue that security has, or at least could, become a key selling point at a variety of spatial scales — in the practice of neighbourhood, city, regional, national or transnational marketing.

Indeed, there is growing evidence to support the assertion that threats from international terrorism, insurgency and war and organised crime have been a driving force in the adoption of the secure brand. The occurrence of such risk or threat can leave places highly stigmatised both as a result of observed conditions of insecurity but *also* as a response to the institutional reaction to disaster events that might be perceived by the media, international organisations and potential investors as slow, unresponsive and inadequate — in other words lacking resilience. Examples such as the bungled response of the US authorities after hurricane Katrina (2005), as well as the initial refusal of the Burmese junta to accept international emergency aid after the May 2008 tropical cyclone, come to mind. In this sense, the ability of places to embed security to increase their 'safe' reputation becomes another tool in the armoury of place management at all geographical levels, and emerges as a factor in the attraction of inward investment, tourism and large-scale cultural events (Coaffee and Rogers, 2008).

In order to get some conceptual clarity of our notion of 'security branding', we can also draw on the concept of 'securitisation' (coined by the Copenhagen School) to develop the

relationship between security and branding (Buzan *et al.*, 1997). The key ideas underpinning securitisation theory are that the perceived need for security against particular threats and risk requires 'security actors' to claim that special and exceptional measures are required. In this sense, 'the issue is then moved out of the sphere of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics, where it can be dealt with swiftly and without the normal (democratic) rules and regulations of policy-making. For security this means that it no longer has any given (pre-existing) meaning but that it can be anything a securitizing actor says it is' (Taureck, 2006: 54).

If we apply this logic to the practice of place branding, then the marketers in a place that is popularly perceived to be insecure, at risk or under threat are therefore required to develop a series of immediate strategies in order to change the image of an area. For these places, a process of *desecuritisation* is required, with the objective to change the discourse away from security-related problems to problems of a different nature, such as economic or social. Securitisation and desecuritisation are, like branding, processes that deal with perception and reputation, and can be consistently and deliberately managed, for example by marketing campaigns, as the papers collected in this Special Issue will testify. That said the correlation between marketing campaigns and brand image change is still largely unproven and in need of further research.

SECURITY FOR SALE

When unpacking the potential of 'selling' security for place-based advantage, we should note that fear and insecurity is largely socially constructed and amplified by the mass media. For example, Frank Furedi (2006) in *Culture of Fear Revisited* referred to the lack of statistical relationship between crime figures and fear of crime as part of a 'crime complex' that 'encompasses a cluster of attitudes that are shaped by the belief that high crime rates are a normal part of life' and that 'these attitudes are expressed through a consciousness of crime that is moulded by popular culture and

institutionalised in the organisation of everyday life' (p. 3). At the urban scale such a 'culture of fear' is also expressed notably through the built environment, creating an ever more common situation where 'virtually every institution — bars, universities, doctors' surgeries, sport, public transportation — takes security very seriously. Burglar alarms, outdoor lights, panic buttons, CCTV cameras and an array of private security personal are testimony to a flourishing market in fear' (*ibid.*).

In recent decades, the importance of developing a secure urban image became a key feature of the evolving rhetoric surrounding the so-called post-modern city. In the 1990s, the response of urban authorities to such insecurity in some cases was dramatic, especially in North America, and particularly in Los Angeles where it is argued that the implementation of crime displacement measures and the surveillance of particular spaces were taken to an extreme (Davis, 1998). In Los Angeles, 'fortress urbanism' was highlighted as the order of the day, as an obsession with security became manifested in the urban landscape and as a response to consumer preferences (Christopherson, 1994). This was perhaps most noticeable in the predominance of gated communities as the new designer living spaces, seen as an ultimate lifestyle choice and a dominant feature of contemporary urban life. The emergence of 'Fortress LA' as an unofficial moniker of Los Angeles also appeared to be about transforming the city in the mirror of middle-class paranoia combined with economic vibrancy. Here the militarisation of commercial buildings and their borders became 'strongpoints of sale' and a 'master narrative' in the emerging cityscape (Davis, 1990: 223).

This dystopian scenario was seen as an almost inevitable result of the way in which high levels of visible security, particularly for the middle and upper classes, have become a commodity for sale, fuelled by the constant stream of media pronouncements that fear is all around and the resultant protectionist reflexes where insulation against the dangerous 'Other' is sought. Security is seen as a 'prestige symbol', which provides

personal insulation, protecting the rich from 'unsavoury groups' (*ibid.* p. 224). Interestingly, a similar psychological mechanism also applies to international security. With the existential Soviet threat now long gone, security has turned from ultimate survival tools to a luxury item, which is branded at a high premium. For example, like other elite brands, the EU and NATO wear their logos like Armani and Chanel labels, telling their clientele that buying their 'product' (ie security) implies that they are sophisticated and safe. These branding efforts follow the same logic, since both Armani and NATO aspire to reinforce the 'customer's' sense of self, offering a feeling of security and belonging. Little surprise, therefore, that new members like Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic wear their NATO badges as signs of achievement and chosenness. For these countries, the rationale of their Alliance membership is quite simple: 'Because I'm worth it!'

The success (or failure) of places, whether they are cities or continents, to brand themselves as safe and secure can have a number of implications for marketing potential. For example, the inability to be able to respond quickly and effectively to high crime rates, perceived danger or disaster incidents might result in external criticism, especially through the media, and lead to a loss of confidence from investors. Likewise, the perception of the city, region or country as a dangerous or disorderly place or a place that is institutionally 'unprepared' can damage investment and the quality of the economic climate for tourist, investors and consumers.

Although we can within a few minutes find massive amounts of information about any economic and political actor around the world by using Google or other search engines, it is still true that human beings jump to conclusions based on knowing only a few things about a person, or a place. Even in today's age of information-overload, most people thrive on stereotypes and clichés. It is this unalterable mental phenomenon underlying the process of branding which assures that it is not a fad. And since the marker of 'security' is

the most powerful of all, the relevance of security branding for understanding economic and political processes is becoming increasingly obvious.

THE BRANDSCAPE OF SECURITY

Security branding is a multi-scale concept that is also important in the sense that international actors — be they institutions or states, but on occasion also private actors such as private military and security companies — are in the business of branding themselves as ‘security providers’. For example, NATO has a strong security brand, while the European Union (EU) is acquiring one. Both organisations are aware that they have to guard their image and reputations. Together, they offer the key markers of success; they have all the right labels, from ‘market economy and stability’ to ‘democracy’ and ‘security’; most other states do not. This poses a series of questions, most notably how the process of branding informs these shifts in public perception, which may in turn impact on foreign policy. Indeed, for students of international politics, one of the interesting problems is to determine whether place branding entices people to ‘buy’ the ‘products’ of brand states, that is, whether they support a state’s ideas and foreign policies.

It is, of course, well known that commercial brands and political reputations interact. Since many companies remain associated with their countries of origin, the images and reputations of brands and states tend to merge in the minds of the global consumer. It is little surprise, therefore, that people also construct social and political meaning through their consumption decisions. Policy makers increasingly call upon consumers to make choices on political grounds, and even for reasons of ‘national security’. In 2002, for example, the US Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) launched a campaign aimed at American youngsters where a direct link was made between drug abuse and the enrichment of terrorists threatening US security. President Bush unambiguously argued that ‘[i]f you quit drugs, you join the fight against terror in America’ (Campbell, 2002).

To link public consumption patterns with security discourses is hardly new. For example, the now obligatory ‘made in’-label found on all products was first used by the British Government after World War I in order to warn consumers that they were buying German goods. Moreover, ‘Buy American’ campaigns were most powerful during World War II, but can today still be found to encourage ‘patriotic shopping’, aimed against supporting ‘Middle East oil’, or, more generally, to scold China. Since consumption is the focal point of identity, commercial interests and foreign policy, it is hard to disentangle the individual strands of power and influence. Public discourses about the relationship between oil and security, or genetically modified food and safety, illustrate consumption’s complexity. These vignettes also illustrate the intricate linkages between (place) branding and security.

PAPERS ON SECURITY BRANDING

In this Special Issue on *Security Branding*, a number of papers are presented which analyse the link between security, public discourse, branding, public diplomacy and image management. Collectively, the papers relate to the challenges of place marketing in cities, region or nations, where the need for security is an ever-present pre-occupation, with a view to generating a better understanding of this complex and increasingly important phenomenon.

There are many strategies that might be deployed by place branding agencies in attempts to reduce, remove or reverse an unsafe image. The first paper in this Special Issue, written by *Eli Avraham and Aran Ketter*, provides a taxonomy of place branding in order to cope with crisis, risk and insecurity. Particular focus is placed upon the role of media strategies and how different messages are generated by branders who seek to handle a negative place image. Examples drawn from around the world are utilised to show how insecurity is leading to a new set of marketing challenges.

Similar themes are also developed in the paper by *Jon Coaffee and Peter Rogers*, which focuses upon ideas of how risk to reputation, specifically in relation to terrorist events in the UK, have historically, and more recently, necessitated a response by marketing and branding agencies. Utilising the business management concept of reputational risk, this paper highlights how urban authorities in Belfast, Manchester, London, and elsewhere have sought to cope with the negativity surrounding the threat of terrorism through a variety of means. It argues that increasingly the ability of cities to embed organisational resilience against security risks into corporate functioning and emergency preparedness can increasingly be used in a positive way in place branding.

The role of security in place branding at an international scale is dealt with in the paper by *Andrew Hammond*. This paper is focused upon US and UK homeland security policies that have evolved apace since 2001. The paper details how both countries have developed such policies and highlights their impact in the countries respective international image. Utilising a variety of marketing surveys on country brands, the paper draws out the differences between US and UK approaches in terms of a series of key factors such as historic precedent and the perception of their political leadership.

A comparative international dimension is continued in the paper by *Peter van Ham*. This paper examines the cases of the EU, the US, as well as China to illustrate the relevance these key players in international politics attach to their security brand. It also studies how negative branding has become a serious matter of security by looking at the impact of the movie

Borat on the image of Kazakhstan, and the impact of the 2006 Mohammed cartoon imbroglio on the reputation of Denmark. The paper suggests that more study is required to examine how place branding can inform the interplay between soft power and hard power (including security).

The final paper in the special edition by *David Wills and Cerwyn Moore* focuses upon how issues of security and insecurity are reflected in attempts to brand post-Communist Russia. The paper unpacks the critical tension between place branding and identity through a reworking of securitisation theory and applies this to the Caucasus. It then uses this reading of 'place branding' to trace shifts in the public perceptions of Chechnya since 2004.

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