Guest Editorial

Ethics of place making

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Rarely do decisions and actions in place branding and public diplomacy avoid ethics. Recognising this inseparability, many local authorities and professional associations have developed codes of ethical conduct to guide their members. However, not all ethical decisions can be made according to a systematic framework or formula, especially the issues place making confronts – stakeholder inclusion, governance, place identity construction, representation, legitimacy, authenticity, sustainability and environmental stewardship. The reasons for investing in place branding programs and public diplomacy efforts are widely known and espoused by politicians, academics, policy makers and marketing consultants alike. On the other hand, the undesirable consequences of place branding are often overlooked. Detrimental outcomes of place making, such as wasteful investment, uneven development, social inequality and environmental damage, are likely to cause concern among stakeholders, but typically do not receive the attention that they deserve. This special issue of *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* is intended to reposition ethics at the forefront of place making theory and practice. In doing so, it calls for the ethics of the ambit, actors (and their actions), agencies and impacts of place making to be questioned, scrutinised and evaluated. Together the articles in

this issue reflect the diversity, complexity and richness of ethical issues involved in building appealing places to live, work, play, visit and invest in, and apply fruitful methods to take a closer look at them.

The first paper by Efe Sevin (American University School of International Service, USA) questions the fundamental nature of place branding concepts. Through the lens of critical theory, Sevin argues that the market-driven nature of place branding might potentially limit the identification of ethical issues and their treatment. To address this challenge, Sevin introduces communicative action as a framework for identifying and analysing the underlying, but typically overlooked ethical questions in place branding. Application of the framework evokes important questions relating to inclusion, legitimacy, sincerity and responsibility in place brand communication. For example, the unclear ownership of place brands obscures the legitimacy of actors and authorities in the communicative process of place branding. In turn, this challenges how the determination of which aspects of the place should be showcased and which should be ignored. Implementing this framework, as Sevin explains, involves grassroots projects to enable social inclusion of relevant stakeholders to create new platforms for interaction in the meaning making process of place branding. This critical theory perspective

on place making provides an apt starting point to consider the context specific topics in the following papers.

Truth in representation and portrayal of identity is the focus of the second paper by Alan Pomeroy and Leanne White (University of Wollongong and Victoria University, Australia). The authors cast doubt on the authenticity and success of Australia's tourism destination advertising campaign which featured elements of Indigenous Australia to leverage the exposure gained from 'Australia: The Movie'. A vital assumption of their analysis is that most countries are multicultural in nature and the idea of a national identity is an illusionary one. Although, in practice, dominant groups in a society might garner control over identity construction and reinforce the stereotypical and often one-dimensional portrayal of minority ethnic groups. This appears to be the case with the depiction of Indigenous Australia as the noble savage persona in the national tourism campaign. Such a portrayal might be incongruous with other images held by intended audiences both locally and internationally. As well as raising ethical questions about its legitimacy, it also lacks credibility and relevance to those holding a more holistic and sophisticated understanding of Australian politics, history and its multicultural society. To assess potential gaps in credibility and lack of authenticity in representation, Pomeroy and White propose a future empirical study that seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of Australia's destination brand positioning in light of the recent advertising campaigns.

Ruth McElroy (University of Glamorgan, UK) also examines the ethics of portraying cultural identity and place through a case study of BBC Wales' landmark drama in the third paper. As part of a multi-stage research process involving participants from BBC Wales and Welsh residents, questions about how television represents a nation and how producers and audiences engage with these representations are evaluated. The findings suggest that audiences in Wales support the depiction of their capital city in quality

television shows, and demonstrate a sense of attachment to their places when they recognise them on-screen. However, they would prefer to see a more diverse, inclusive portrayal of the capital city and nation as a whole. Importantly, audience members recognise that the BBC has a specific ethical responsibility to ensure a fair and inclusive representation of their home in their homes. Apart from these important findings, the research emphasises that using television as a vehicle for place brand communication is fraught with difficulties in acting responsibly to respect and accurately represent the diverse cultural affiliations that constitute a place.

Another vehicle for building place attachment and civic pride among residents and gaining the attention and awareness of potential visitors is major events. In the fourth paper, Nicholas Dynon (Macquarie University, Australia) puts the World Expo under the microscope to investigate its role and impact in 2010 host city, Shanghai. Dynon's in-depth analysis of the case reveals that the Expo served to promote the idea that 'Cities make life better', that is, cities should be viewed as the ideal form of community in China. Further, Dynon argues that the Expo functioned as a medium to showcase Shanghai of the future and to secure the legitimacy of the governing Chinese Communist Party. Issues of citizen inclusion and truth in representing the values of place brands are recurring themes in this article. Indeed, the event attracted international criticism for reinforcing support for the ruling elite through creating an ideal model environment for visitors, quite separate and artificial to surrounding urban areas. Thus, it remains contentious as to whether the Expo site's aspirational model locality will act as a positive agent for change or simply a utopian virtual reality. This article raises questions over the ethics of place making at its core – how can place branding efforts reflect the values and realise the needs of a place's multiple constituencies?

Contrasting the urban environments studied by the other authors in this special

issue, Pamina R Bou (Cambridge University, UK) examines the Kayapó tribe and their home in the Brazilian Amazon in the final paper. Departing from previous methods of understanding the identity politics of indigenous Amazonian communities, this study uses branding theory to frame its critical analysis of the Kayapó's brand building activities in concert with Western interests, notably The Body Shop. This approach enables a balanced evaluation of the appropriation of an indigenous identity in place and product branding, since it recognises that both sides of this commercial agreement expected to benefit from commodification of identity. The case also demonstrates that once in the global 'brandscape', ownership of identity becomes fragmented, unclear and increasingly difficult to measure the impacts – positive and negative – for the original owners. More concerning is the distancing of rights of local indigenous communities unable to represent themselves against more powerful agents of their identity. This article, like the others, also stresses the dangers of inconsistent ethical behaviours in projecting place brand values. In particular, guardians of the brand, like politicians, must ensure they are scrupulous in their intentions and actions to protect and deliver the brand promise. In this case, 'guardians of the forest' proved too problematic a promise for the Kayapó and thus 'guardians of knowledge of the forest' was substituted as a more realistic promise. Rather than judging the morals and ethical behaviour of those involved in this case, Bou reconsiders the impacts and implications of identity politics, so that practitioners and academics alike can learn from this experience.

Collectively, the topics addressed in this issue cover a fraction of the ethical questions encountered in this field. Rather than ascribing a set of rules for ethical decision making and behaviour, each of the papers provide tools for identification of ethical issues facing the varied actors involved in place branding and stakeholders with a vested interest in these activities. In particular, there have been repeated

calls for a rebalancing of place branding's goals, which have tended to focus on appealing to external audiences (Vanolo, 2008). Greater attention to meet the expectations and satisfaction of internal audiences, particularly local residents, is vital for ensuring social equality (Kavaratzis, 2004), the formation of strong emotional bonds of attachment among a place's inhabitants (Florek, 2011) and over time, the longevity and vibrancy of places (Insch, 2011). Reconciling the needs of internal and external audiences does not necessarily mean compromising the aspirations of a place. As Lindstedt (2011) argues, 'perceiving inhabitants and other people in close contact with the place as it marketers only strengthens the relevance of their place relations. From this perspective, the strengthening of the internal image also supports the external image' (p. 48).

This first step in refocusing on the ethics of place making aims to inspire readers' professional practice and research agendas. Mechanisms to ensure accountability in the governance of place brands and holistic and equitable measures of place brand performance remain to be developed. Equally important topics for future investigation are gauging the perceptions and images of the ethical character of places and their citizens, auditing the sustainability of places and optimising the developmental priorities of places through inclusive participation and engagement. These topics inherently support interdisciplinary approaches, similar to the ones applied in this special issue. As the morals and ethical behaviours of politicians and leaders of intergovernmental organisations is scrutinised by global media organisations and citizens of the world, place branding and public diplomacy cannot ignore the demand for greater accountability and transparency in public and private administration.

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