Guest Editorial

Managing the reputation of places in crisis

Place Branding and Public Diplomacy (2014) **10**, 171–173. doi:10.1057/pb.2014.18

Events such as the 2014 military coup in Thailand, the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis in Japan, and the 2010–2011 flooding in Queensland, Australia, are major crises that have immediate and long-term consequences for local communities. Two types of negative place image are discussed in the field of image restoration. The first is a sudden negative image that is the result of an unexpected crisis, such as terrorism, natural disasters or health epidemics. The other is a long-term negative image brought on by ongoing issues such as economic hardship, high crime rates, continuous war or political instability (Avraham and Ketter, 2008). The theme of this Special Issue of *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* deals with these two kinds of crises and the ways that places respond to and manage the negative effects on their images. The ubiquitous marketing environment gives places experiencing crises unprecedented exposure. This coverage can be detrimental and may lead to the formation of unfavourable perceptions of the place that could create distrust or even harmful stereotypes. A potential defence to such negative attention may be in the form of a strong reputation, built over time that offers resilience. Such is the case of Japan's strong recovery efforts due to the goodwill incorporated in its national image and further investment by the government to promote the country as an attractive tourist destination.

The articles collected in this Special Issue offer a range of rich insights into the

responses of places to past and ongoing crises, which negatively impact their image and reputation. In the first article, Avraham (University of Haifa, Israel) builds on previous work to construct a typology of image improvement strategies for places that have turned an image liability into an asset, with the aim of assisting place administrators and marketers. Through an analysis of media reports and case studies of places with negative images, he identifies 10 different situations in which locales cannot ignore their image problems. These situations are grouped into two broad categories – (i) using negative occurrences and past events to attract tourists, (ii) turning problematic prominent place characteristics into a positive feature to attract tourists. A distinction is made between the two types of situations, based on their appeal to mass-tourism audiences. Whereas the former might appeal to a wide audience, the latter are focused on niche markets, who are deliberately seeking something different. The ethics of drawing attention to and even profiting from the hardship of others is also emphasised in this article, to prevent further harm to those affected. One issue that would further this research agenda is to examine support for these types of marketing strategies by local residents and how they might benefit from such activities.

In the second article, Daye (University of Northampton, UK) examines the linkages between a destination's crisis media management strategies and framing of tourist

risk in press reports. This article provides a fitting review of the literature on media reporting of risk in relation to disasters and crises, and the media management strategies employed by destinations to mitigate negative publicity. Importantly, Daye explains how these influences can impact tourists' perceptions of events and destinations in their travel decision process. Findings in this article offer guidance for those charged with crisis management communication. Specifically, the article cautions against using short-term marketing strategies to provide a quick fix for destinations that have experienced such a crisis. Instead, destination managers and local tourist authorities should offer access to the disaster area to build trust with reporters and avoid heavy discounting to attract tourists that is likely to erode the destination's brand equity. Tourists should be encouraged to visit post-event to assist with ongoing recovery and rebuilding, and authorities should continue to monitor press reporting to reduce perceptions of risk.

In the third article, Johnson (Roger Williams University, USA) aims to explore the challenges confronting Brand Jamaica. Her findings show that the negative components of Jamaica's image – economic instability, crime, corruption and a bad track record on human rights – outweigh the positive global coverage of its outstanding brand achievements in sports, music and as a premier tourism destination. Johnson's findings raise questions regarding the existing knowledge in place marketing. As many readers know, many authors in the field of place marketing have focused on providing advice to place marketers about which marketing strategies, tactics, tools and initiatives they ought to use. However, most of the authors did not deal at all with nations having unknown, weak or negative reputations. Thus, these places will not necessarily be able to make use of many of the marketing strategies discussed in previous studies, as they suffer from a prolonged negative image or are trying to overcome a sudden crisis. We can learn from Johnson's analysis of Jamaica's image that places suffering from a problematic image will find it necessary to adopt unique marketing goals and strategies (Anholt, 2006). Johnson also

mentions that policy makers need to deal with the problematic issues in their place and confront economic underdevelopment, unemployment, crime, corruption and a decline in human rights if they hope to gain control over its public image.

The main aim of fourth article by Kubacki and Jones (Griffith University, Australia) is to review the place branding strategies used by marketers of 25 places that suffer from social problems, in order to identify any underlying themes along with the different approaches that have been taken or are recommended by place branding researchers. This case study analysis has three main aspects: place branding strategies, types of social problems and the role of policy development in addressing the problems. The review's conclusion shows that place branding strategies for places with negative images can succeed, especially when they stem from social problems; however, the improvement of place image is an all-encompassing process that must deal with more than a single issue. Kubacki and Jones remind us of the role of policy makers in correcting the problems that led to the negative image of a place; ignoring the problem or merely promoting the chosen logo and strapline is not going to be effective in making lasting changes to a place brand. This article, like Johnson's article on Brand Jamaica, connects us to the important role of policy makers in restoring place image mainly by their decision between two approaches that aim to restore the place image and reality. First, the 'cosmetic approach' that aims to change the place's image without changing the reality. The place's problems are not solved or managed but marketers try to portray it in a positive light by using advertising or public relations campaigns without facing the reasons for the negative image. Second, the 'strategic approach' includes strategies that deal primarily with the reality and only focus on the image to a smaller extent. These strategies take an active, comprehensive approach to the image problem and try to deal with the reasons for the negative place image and relate to both the physical and communication aspects.

Through a case study of the 2005–2006 Denmark Cartoon Crisis in the final article, Rasmussen (Roskilde University, Denmark) and

Merkelsen (Lund University, Sweden) analyse the efforts of Denmark's policy makers to restore its image. The authors' thesis is that in their efforts to address the crisis's effect on nation branding, the Danish government did not adequately deal with the short-term consequences in the areas of national security and exports. Their findings question existing models and theories in crisis communication regarding their suitability to handle image crises in cities, countries and tourist destinations. The shortcomings of current crisis communication theory as presented in this article pose a challenge to future theoretical developments concerning places in crisis. It seems like places are more complex than companies in terms of stakeholder perspectives and how crises are perceived, framed and handled.

One theme that is touched on by several authors, but not the focus of their examinations, is the contributions that residents can make to brand rebuilding and confidence restoration following a crisis. As well as the crisis itself, residents are a source of information that visitors, or more broadly external audiences, can obtain and abstract information about a destination, to form their perception and image of the place (Florek and Insch, 2011). In the aftermath of a crisis, residents' behaviour demonstrated through their loyalty and commitment to their city is essential for its resilience. According to research in disaster management, residents' resilience and social capital affects the pace and extent of a place's recovery (Nakagawa and Shaw, 2004). While the central role of residents in creating vibrant cities has long been acknowledged in urban studies research and other related fields, the emerging fields of place marketing and city branding have not as yet established residents' varied roles in the city branding process. One example of residents' contribution to crisis communication is in the aftermath of the devastating floods that hit Calgary and other parts of Alberta in June 2013. Tourism Calgary created a campaign to restore confidence in the city's ability to host tourists for

the upcoming Calgary stampede. On the day the city lifted its state of emergency, the 'Calgary, Our Doors are Open' campaign was launched which featured a message from the city's Mayor and residents showing 'Open' signs. The tongue in cheek expression 'Hell or High Water' that started on social media was embraced as an official T-shirt slogan, with proceeds from sales of T-shirts given to the Red Cross's flood fund. Some of the flood's impacts appeared to be mitigated by the campaign, with a minimal drop in attendance at the Stampede and hotel occupancy in July 2013 actually increased compared with the previous year (Wexler, 2013).

Together, this collection of articles provides insight into the nexus of crisis and improvement for places, advancing the agenda for future research in this area. Specifically, the assessment of success in crisis communication and residents' roles in this process is not directly tackled in this special issue. Given the high stakes involved, these are also important issues that should become a focus of research.

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