Foreword

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The City Branding Symposium 2013 took place at the Tsinghua University from 23 to 25 October 2013. Themed as ‘Positioning Cities: Innovative and Sustainable Strategies for City Development and Transformation’, About 100 academics from China and around the world gathered in Beijing to attend the 3-day event.

Following the success of the first symposium held in Stockholm in August 2012 by the Stockholm University (School of Business and Forum for Asian Studies) and Fudan University (School of Management and Nordic Centre), the 2013 symposium aimed to further the city branding discussion at a world level, and create a continuous flow of academic debate and output in branding and marketing cities, particularly cities in China.

In recent years, cities in China are facing challenges in adapting to rapid urbanization, globalization and modernization, which the country is undergoing. Innovative and sustainable strategies for the development and transformation of these Chinese cities are becoming essential. The 2013 symposium therefore helped to draw out some theories and models in city branding research that characterize the communication and positioning strategies, and brought about some case studies into the academic field for discussion.

Hosted by the City Branding Studio of Tsinghua University, the City Branding Symposium 2013 was organized by Tsinghua University School of Journalism and Communication, Stockholm University School of Business, Fudan University School of Management and the National Academy

of Economic Strategy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Co-organizers include Forum for Asian Studies at Stockholm University, the Nordic Centre at Fudan University and Peking University School of Government.

At the opening ceremony of the City Branding Symposium 2013, Professor Binjie Liu, the Executive Director of Education, Science, Culture and Public Health Committee of the National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China, also the Dean of Tsinghua University School of Journalism and Communication, greeted all participants by stating that city branding could help people to understand and highlight a city’s cultural spirit. Ms Hui Wang, Director of Information Office of Beijing Municipal Government, also welcomed everyone by stating that hopefully the forum could help generate brilliant ideas for Beijing’s city brand development. Professor Hong Fan, Director of the City Branding Studio of Tsinghua University, pointed out in her opening speech that integrating a city’s political, economical, historical and cultural assets can increase the city attractiveness, which helps the city to generate a better economic income in the long term. Thus, city branding studies and strategic brand planning for cities are extremely important for cities’ future development.

Participants of the 2013 symposium were academics and professionals from well-known world class universities and research organizations. These include Professor Olof Berg from Stockholm University, Professor

Jesper Falkheimer from Lund University, Professor Bill Merrilees from Griffith University, Professor Noberto Muniz Martinez from University of Neon, Professor Hong Fan from Tsinghua University, Professor Xiucheng Fan from Fudan University, Professor Yanping Liu from Chinese Academy of Social Science and Professor Tiyan Shen from Peking University.

In the 2013 symposium, six topics relevant to the proposed theme were discussed by the attendees. These include: (1) Sensory positioning: atmospheres and attractiveness, (2) Innovative social branding and inclusiveness, (3) Branding and innovative urban planning, (4) Identity and heritage in relation to positioning, (5) Strategic communications: strategy and planning, and (6) Governance and city branding.

For Sensory positioning: atmospheres and attractiveness, different strategies deployed by cities in an effort to favorably position and transform its 'sensory topography' were discussed. It was interesting to note that the use of sensory elements, such as food, music, sport and so on of a city could help to enhance attractiveness and competitiveness of a city's atmosphere.

Innovative social branding and inclusiveness has become an interesting issue to explore as cities were increasingly regarded as 'commons', while citizens become both players and actors of a city. Social inclusiveness constituted the basic pillar of the legitimacy of place branding. In the discussion, cities in China and other parts of the world were used as examples to analyze how city branding and positioning are relevant to social inclusiveness.

Branding and innovative urban planning intertwined closely with each other in city brand development. The branding process of a city could drive its urban planning, while sometimes it is the other way around. Academics explored this relationship under the topic, and discussed some examples from China and Turkey, which highlighted city branding and innovative urban planning.

Identity and heritage in relation to positioning suggested the renegotiation and integration of cultural heritage and present identity of cities in

the process of urbanization and city brand development. Many relevant examples of cities in China and around the world have been shared by academics in the discussion. Focus was brought on how these cities were branded by maintaining their cultural identity, and at the same time turning their cultural heritage into an appealing part of brand positioning.

Strategic communications: strategy and planning raised concern that cities worldwide were increasingly engaged in strategic communication efforts when creating a favorable city brand image. The session explained how Chinese cities are influenced by a propaganda approach instead of a marketing approach, and suggested how cities' brands in the other part of the world are being communicated and positioned in a strategic manner.

Governance and city branding discussed the relevancy between city branding and local governance. Apart from discussing some past examples of how Sweden and France has fulfilled city branding through its communication policy, light was shed on how the Internet has become an innovative means to include public opinion in governance.

To stimulate discussions and debates between researchers the symposium was 'Power Point Free'. Paper presentation was framed within 10 min, followed by a 5-min question and answer session. The symposium was held in English, while simultaneous interpretation was provided for a few Chinese presentations. The 3-day event involved a combination of interactive paper discussion by participants, panel debates as well as some social events. Although not being held on a big scale, the City Branding Symposium 2013 has provided a perfect opportunity for participants to get to know each other and facilitated research collaboration. We hope the City Branding Symposium will become an annual event in the future, and a platform for city branding academics and practitioners to exchange new ideas and research results.

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