Guest Editorial

Positioning cities: Innovative and sustainable strategies for city development and transformation

I was among the delegates who attended the 2nd City Branding Symposium in Beijing, China, in October 2013. The theme of the symposium was 'Positioning Cities: Innovative and Sustainable Strategies for City Development and Transformation', attracting participants from around the world from a variety of disciplines including place marketing, history, urban studies and planning. The geographical scope of the studies presented at the symposium reflects the universality and imperative of effective positioning for branding cities. Positioning, a core activity in defining and managing a brand's strategy, can be defined as the process of gaining a desired position in the audience's mind, by owning a specific set of associations, in the context of competing brands (Kapferer, 1992; Keller, 1998; Temporal, 2002; Ellwood, 2009; Janiszewska and Insch, 2012). Skilful positioning can achieve a cohesive and consistent brand identity, by ensuring all elements of the marketing programme are consistent and mutually reinforcing, which is vital to establish meaningful differentiation from rival city brands. Furthermore, positioning can act as a compass for a city brand's development and guard against the impacts of changes in leadership of the brand. There are several criteria for successful brand positioning that can be applied to city brands to assess the appropriateness of a chosen positioning statement. A brand's positioning should be credible (that is, anchored in

reality), significant to the target audience, differentiate it from competitors and allow for the brand's growth (Janiszewska and Insch, 2012). Papers selected for this special issue engage with the theme of city brand positioning for development and transformation and are among the best presented at the 2nd City Branding Symposium.

In the first paper, 'Urban Atmospheres as Brandscapes and Lived Experiences', Orvar Löfgren (University of Lund, Sweden) examines the application of the concept of atmospheres to cities and how cities' sensory elements can serve as mechanisms of differentiation in an increasingly uniform landscape of city branding, architecture and urban planning. Growth in interest in the concept of atmospheres in place branding and urban studies is linked to its resurgence in many disciplines through a focus on the influence of affects and moods and how they might be collectively 'produced, shared or dissolved'. Löfgren provides a comprehensive review of the concept of atmospheres, from meteorology to the social sciences, urban planning and place marketing, as a basis for examining two longitudinal case studies of the development of urban atmospheres in city branding projects in *Ørestad*, Denmark, and Västra hamnen, Sweden. The interest in these two sites germinates from the construction of the transnational Öresund bridge in 2000, linking Malmö in Sweden and Copenhagen

in Denmark, and flagship urban developments in each city. Through these cases, the important question of how atmospheres can be produced, packaged, stored and marketed is explored. The renewed interest in studying and promoting the 'soft' elements of cities is emphasised in this paper, along with the multiple challenges in studying them; most notably the fact that they are constantly changing. Thus, it is difficult to determine at which point in time to assess the success or failure of a new urban development in its ability to harbour a desirable atmosphere through users' lived experiences. A contribution of this paper is the acknowledgement that new forms of ethnographies might be needed to understand the tensions between city brandscapes and lived experiences.

In the second paper, Professor Bill Merrilees, Dr Dale Miller, Dr Wei Shao (Griffith University, Australia) and Associate Professor Carmel Herrington (Macquarie Graduate School of Management, Australia) examine the topic of social inclusiveness in city branding positioning, from the perspective of different socioeconomic groups in two cities. The geographical focus of this study moves to Australia and two stressed satellite cities in Queensland – Logan and Ipswich. Bridging the gap between city branding and social inclusiveness, this paper examines the city brand perceptions of residents in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged suburbs in these disadvantaged cities. Through a large scale survey, the study asks whether residents from different socioeconomic groups experience the city differently. The key findings and contributions of this study are that the more advantaged groups interpret and engage with their city brand in a more abstract, symbolic way (emphasising nature and social bonding) than the most socioeconomically disadvantaged groups of residents. Specifically, these groups of residents interpret the meaning of the city brand in a more materialistic and functional way, with emphasis on markets, business vibrancy and public transport. The authors offer suggestions as to ways that their study can be applied to other contexts – particularly to Chinese satellite cities, given their increasing urbanisation and potential for social

exclusion. Application of this methodology to determine the brand perceptions and engagement of different socioeconomic groups with the city brand would permit urban policymakers to anticipate and manage issues requiring attention and assist to maintain local community satisfaction and support.

In the third paper, Professor Fan Hong (Tsinghua University, Beijing) examines the topic of place branding through the lens of historical and cultural heritage by focusing on one culinary tradition – Tofu. This paper explores the process of using local history and cultural heritage as foundation for branding the Shouxian Daquan village as the origin of Tofu in China. Through an in-depth case study, Professor Hong reports on a branding project conducted in 2011, on behalf of the Shouxian county government, Anhui Province, Southeast China. In contrast to the final paper with its emphasis on food as an element of city branding, this paper examines the role of local cultural heritage in developing a brand identity for a specific place. On the basis of the author's experiences in developing a branding strategy for other cities and villages in China, the 4D Place Branding Model was developed to accommodate the particular challenges of marketing destinations in China, to be 'used as a blueprint in a variety of projects'. The model incorporates four phases: Discover, Define, Design (re-Design) and Deliver. In the case of the Tofu Village, the process of creating the new brand involved re-interpreting pre-existing images and values of the Shouxian Daquan village. Despite several challenges facing the brand project due to political constraints, the paper demonstrates the usefulness of the 4D model: its systematic approach to branding Chinese villages, its focus on identifying local uniqueness, enhancing local cultural heritage and utilising local natural resources. Together, this paper offers important and useful insights into the ways that a place's cultural heritage and history can be rediscovered to position a place in a unique, credible and meaningful way.

The final paper, 'Food–Branding Places – A Sensory Perspective', presents a conceptual framework of the role of food in branding places,

based on a multisite field study of 15 metropolitan cities by authors Per Olof Berg (Stockholm Business School, Stockholm University) and Guje Sevón (Stockholm School of Economics). Their study broadly defines food to incorporate food, beverages, meals, eating and gastronomy, and investigates how and why food is used in the strategic branding and positioning of cities. The authors conceptualise places as spaces of co-existence; involving many stakeholders and audiences that contribute to creating a place's common space and image. Through their examination of selected cities (including Bangkok, Beijing, Copenhagen, Stockholm, San Francisco, Malmö and Melbourne), examples sourced from the Internet and a literature review, Berg and Sevón develop a conceptualisation of cities as sensescapes, 'organized in space, orchestrated in time, and iconically mapped'. Importantly, the authors identify three dimensions of a city-sensescape affected by food-related sensory cues: (i) spatial configuration, (ii) time flow and (iii) sensory iconography. Each of these three dimensions is carefully explained using illustrative examples. Applications of the framework to enhance city branding and urban regeneration projects that are described and analysed will aid both scholars and practitioners. This paper is rich with ideas, examples and guidance for those interested in understanding the ways that food and gastronomy can work to effectively position cities, extending knowledge beyond the domain of regional food tourism.

As the four papers demonstrate, application of the concept of brand positioning to cities and the complexities facing those who are ultimately responsible for their design and implementation are not trivial. Inspired by the conference and the papers in this special issue, five noteworthy conceptual and practical challenges in translating product–brand principles to cities are highlighted. First, attempts to re-position a city brand are likely to be long-term, resource intensive undertakings, which many city marketing authorities struggle to execute effectively, because of limited budgets, fragmented coordination of marketing activities and disruptions in leadership. Cities might partly overcome this challenge by

establishing an independent authority or organisation, with autonomy over demarcated marketing resources and designated guardianship of the brand.

Second, city branding faces the challenge of selecting a position which is aspirational in order to create strong emotional bonds with the target audience and allow for growth, on the one hand, and will establish and maintain its credibility, on the other. Credibility will be undermined if the city's stakeholders are unable to consistently deliver on the city brand's promises. This requirement is crucial for city brands and demands in-depth research into audience perceptions and expectations to ensure the city possesses the assets and competencies to protect its credibility.

Third, city brand managers face the challenge of choosing an appropriate frame of reference to define the brand's competition. Their choice might be restricted by geographic, administrative and functional factors, rather than being defined by how different market segments perceive the context of competition (Janiszewska and Insch, 2012).

Fourth, city brand positioning faces the challenges associated with prioritising target markets. Unlike a typical product brand, city brands are often positioned in multiple markets that might create contradictory influences on the desired brand identity (Turok and Bailey, 2004). For example, the benefits of living in the city that may appeal to residents or students may differ from the needs of business operators. Simultaneously appealing to multiple stakeholders may dilute the brand's positioning and point of difference. Instead, a city brand's position should focus, at least initially, on the most important target market(s) for the city (for example, tourists, residents, students, investors); otherwise it may risk a bland, blurred or undifferentiated image (Brown *et al*, 2013). Thus, the decision to adopt a uniform versus a concentrated approach depends on the priorities and capabilities of the city concerned (Janiszewska and Insch, 2012).

Fifth, city brand managers face particular challenges when implementing the concept of

positioning. As Kerr and Balakrishnan (2012) demonstrate in the case of Sydney, a city brand's positioning might be in conflict with the positioning of the nation brand. Those leading or responsible for the brand's positioning strategy might lack the necessary skills and expertise to effectively develop and implement it (Kerr and Balakrishnan, 2012). On the other hand, there is potentially greater risk in failing to manage the city brand's identity, as cities risk losing the ability to influence their brand image when rivals take on the task and devalue the brand as a consequence. City authorities are increasingly becoming aware of these challenges, if not through first-hand experience, through a growing collection of cases from around the world.

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Andrea Insch
University of Otago,
Dunedin, New Zealand.
E-mail: andrea.insch@otago.ac.nz