

FORGING A “GREEN” IDENTITY: ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY AS BALANCED KEY FACTORS IN CITIES’ FUTURES

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ABSTRACT

Urban areas, under the influence of social mobility and technological changes of the 20th century, are currently in a process of re-urbanization that takes place in parallel to other on- going internal transformations. The effective management of urban (re)developments, has become the primary objective for achieving sustainability and tackling urban degradation. The current state of affairs makes the study of –the often contradictory- interrelations and inherent links between Environmental Design and City Branding particularly interesting. The former comprises of strategies aiming to secure environmental sustainability while the latter consists of strategies that forge the unique identity of a city, aiming to attract target audiences -residents, workers, visitors, businesses and overseas markets, mainly aiming towards economic viability. FLIMethodologically, this is evidenced by a bibliographic review of the two fields, and by examining case studies of cities within the EU. New challenges for cities, environmental and competitiveness requirements, call for new strategies, vision and planning tools. Initiatives within the EU that enhance cities’ sustainability by encouraging good practices according to specific indicators have proved that cities can forge a “green identity”, through the adoption of environmental strategies, achieving “quality of life”, and a strong “green image”, which is ultimately economically competitive when properly communicated to a wider target audience. Showcase projects demonstrate that building and promoting a sustainable yet competitive city will soon be based on recognizing its particular context/identity, and on a deep understanding of its ecological reality that allows city experts a clear perspective. Viable/sustainable/resilient and ultimately “smart” cities will need to be considered as integrated targets, subject to programming through specific set of environmental indicators.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable urban design; City branding; Green cities; Smart cities

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Braun ^[1], urban areas are currently undergoing re-urbanization; as UN statistics suggest, 55% of the world population

currently lives in cities, a percentage that is projected to increase to 68% over the next 30 years ^[2]. Yet, urban concentrations account for a percentage ranging between 0.57% and 3% of the world's land surface ^[3]. In addition, cities are responsible for the production of 80% of

the world GDP, the consumption of 2/3 of the world's energy, and for over 70% of emitted greenhouse gases ^[4]. The above imply the vital role of urban development management for achieving sustainability and highlight the role that cities can play in tackling climate change.

Cities are melting pots that exemplify the importance of a holistic approach for their sustainable development, whereby Environment, Economy, Society and Cultural Heritage play equally important roles ^[5]. While working towards their sustainable futures, cities are also competing in the context of a globalized economy. The choices of their target audiences pose challenges in the contemporary practice of City Branding/Marketing, that are countered by procedures that identify and then shape their "unique identity" with the aim of further promoting it.

The paper examines the often contradictory interrelations and inherent links between *Environmental Design* and *City Branding/Marketing*; the latter recently receiving increased attention from both the scientific community and local actors and evolving into an interdisciplinary research field ^[6, 7, 8].

Methodologically, this is evidenced by a bibliographic review of the two fields, and by examining case studies of cities within the EU, namely winners of the Green Capital and Green Leaf awards, which sought to enhance their sustainability by encouraging good practices according to specific indicators, essentially forging a "green identity", achieving "quality of life", and a strong "green image", which is ultimately economically competitive when properly communicated to a wider target audience. The results of the above analysis were ultimately used in order to study the Municipality of Paleo Faliro (Attica, Greece), as a field of application for a holistic strategy of "green" city branding and marketing.

2. BRAND, PLACE BRAND, BRANDING & MARKETING

The terminology and concepts of Place Branding derive from the evolution of the theory of Product Marketing, a fact that justifies the frequent confusion of terms and derivatives used in the field. Despite the fact that cities meet functional, symbolic and emotional needs, they have recently been viewed as "products" or as "businesses" with supplied goods; their quality of living, the tourism they receive, or their external investment quota being indicators for their success ^[9].

According to the theory of Place Branding, the "identity" of a city is composed of its unique characteristics; what it "offers": history, culture, natural and man-made environment, quality of life, etc. Unique but also flexible, the identity of a place can be shaped to become an important "asset". As a reflection of its identity, the "Image" of a place is formed through a set of cognitive associations; different and often conflicting messages that are perceived by each recipient. The latter refers to the "external city", (buildings, properties, colors, food, etc.), and to the "inner city", a reflection of feelings and desires of its target audience ^[10].

Place Branding processes the "Identity" of a place and is guided by what is offered: the urban environment shapes a large part of this identity and develops a primary communication of its "image". Place Marketing (advertising, PR, graphic design, logos) manages the "image" of a place and is driven by "demand", aiming to develop secondary communication. Along with the two aforementioned strategies, the city's image is also communicated by word of mouth, in a largely unmanageable way ^[11] (Figure 1).

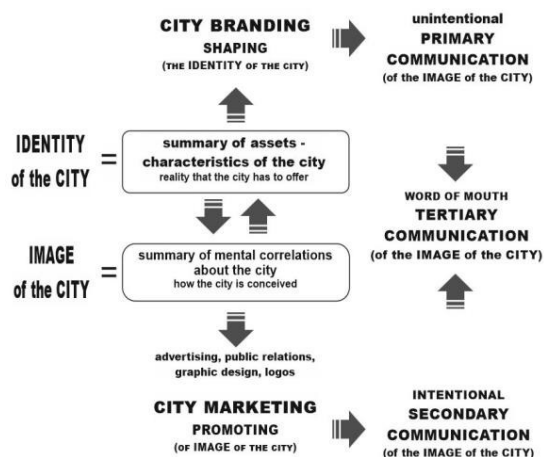


Figure 1. Identity and Image of a city as developed through the disciplines of Place Branding and Marketing

3. THE IMPACT OF A CITY'S BRAND

The existence of models for measuring the degree of success of city branding and marketing strategies is of particular interest to the current study. They emphasize the identification of the positive, tangible and intangible characteristics of the city: the history of the place, its general appearance, the architecture, the sights, the demographics, the economic possibilities, the governance, the feeling of the inhabitants, the degree of common perceptions and general "philosophy" of its core values and identity are some of them.

The City Brand's Index was developed by Anholt and gauges a city's brand according to six categories; "presence", "place", "people", "prerequisites", "pulse" and "potential" form the sides of the city brand Hexagon [12]. The City Brand Barometer, developed by Hildreth, follows the approach of an XY diagram whereby the city asset strength, consisting of factors pertaining to culture and comfort (X axis), is combined with the city brand strength (Y axis) composed of the iconographic recognizability, the quantity and power of attractive images, and the value and recognition by the media [13].

The position of cities in either of the two previous rankings can play an important role in the flow of cultural and tourism capital, allowing feedback to the dynamics of the

respective scientific/professional fields. More recently, programs such as Urban Audit [14] and URGE [15], relate the quality of environmental parameters, such as urban green, to the identity and quality of life in cities.

4. BRANDING THE CITY "GREEN"

The "practices" of city branding do not necessarily include environmental planning as a whole, despite the fact that environmental and urban management strategies achieve "sustainability", while at the same time strengthening the "green" identity of a place, and therefore its competitive image [16, 17]. This is evidenced by examples of cities that mobilized towards a green branding strategy either by simply participating in or by receiving the title of "Green Capital of Europe" or the "European Green Leaf Award".

Vitoria-Gasteiz and Mollet Del Vallès, cities of a medium and small size, respectively, have been exemplified, though the two aforementioned competitions, as good practice models for cities that currently house nearly 80% of Europe's inhabitants. The examination of these two case studies allowed the mapping of sustainability measures and solutions that were put in place in order for them to achieve environmental goals with common characteristics, according to measurable indicators. The two cities organized their strategic planning to tackle global climate change, undertaking actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote RES. They promoted sustainable mobility and environmentally friendly modes of transport, managing to reverse the upward trend in the use of private cars (Figure 2). In order to conserve and protect biodiversity, they developed new green zones, with an emphasis on sustainable land use (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Mollet del Vallès: Sustainable and Safety mobility European Week 2012, Pilot program, pedestrian -bicycle coexistence ^[18]



Figure 3. Vitoria-Gasteiz: The "green Belt" around the city ^[19]

The two cities installed systems for monitoring the quality of the atmospheric and acoustic environment and also undertook strategies to reduce municipal waste to a minimum, creating an integrated, "green" urban metabolism. Furthermore, they reduced water consumption and distribution losses and applied wastewater management technologies. Finally, they implemented integrated environmental management systems and applied good practice dissemination programs.

The participation of cities in the two aforementioned competitions presupposes the existence of measurable and presentable data to support their application. The installation of control and environmental monitoring systems (prior to the implementation of any actions) and the creation of a specialized monitoring body is a necessity. At the same time, these create the prerequisite conditions for significant improvement of the image of cities, created through a "communication" system with measurable and tangible results in the

daily experience of the inhabitants. The strategic vision of the "green city", which is needed to shape a successful branding strategy, acquires measurable figures - environmental indicators- that enable both the visibility of the environmental planning strategy and also feedback, to better prioritize actions.

In addition, the benefits gained by cities are also marked by a strong "momentum" for the continuation of improvements. These have been found to positively impact on social and cultural sustainability by creating new jobs, by stimulating local pride and sense of belonging, by fostering partnerships and encouraging the community for joint initiatives, as well as by supporting the arts and the culture through the networking of green capitals/cities. The enhancement of cities' economic viability is also reflected in their positive coverage by the media, at national and international level, in increasing traffic and tourism, in networking and building new alliances of "green" cities, in attracting funding and financial support from institutions, public funding bodies, and in their better access to European funding programs.

5. PALEO FALIRO'S GREEN IDENTITY, BRAND AND IMAGE

P. Faliró, Attica, was studied as a field of application for the research. The elements that have shaped its identity - image and value over time, those that create a core image, common to all, were found to be i) its geographical location, ii) its natural environment and climatic conditions, iii) the built/unbuilt environment (including uses, infrastructure), iv) its history, v) demographic characteristics, and vi) its economy and employment data. The above compiled the list of themes for a SWOT analysis.

During its recent history, the public works undertaken for the 2004 Olympic Games (Tram, Faliró Pole, Esplanade, Marina Floisvou, closure of Elliniko airport), were the changes that shaped the modern identity of the Municipality. Today, the city is being redefined, with the operation of the "Stavros Niarchos

Foundation Cultural Center" and the Faliro Metropolitan Park, currently under construction.

The utilization of the City Brand's Index and the City Brand Barometer methodologies indicated that the identity of P. Faliro is composed of tangible and intangible properties with substantial asset strength which allow the potential for a highly recognizable City Brand Name.

With regard to the environmental profile of the Municipality, this was gauged according to the indicators used for judging the nomination of cities for the European Green Leaf Award, which is suitable because of P. Faliro's relative size. The analysis found a lack of specific - realistic goals that would be the result of an overarching strategy, with emphasis put on demonstration projects which are mostly undertaken in the perimeter of the Municipality, mostly in an unimaginative way that does not foster creative ideas in finding solutions that could be funded through EU programs. A major hindrance in establishing the above is the lack of any measurable indicators in place (unconfirmed problems, difficulty in targeting, non-activation of the local community). It appears that to date the existing opportunity for the Municipality to utilize the "measurable" side of its image has been neglected. This, on one hand, could be activated at a marketing level but could be more beneficial if used to excite, sensitize and engage the residents. As the city is called to maintain and strengthen its identity and the quality of life, in order to maintain its human resources, the interest of investors and entrepreneurs and its tourism traffic, the need for a parallel course of city branding and environmental planning strategies is critical (Figure 4).



Figure 4. The interrelated relationships between the examined concepts, towards cities' sustainability

6. CONCLUSIONS

Environmental planning and design achieve the improvement of infrastructure, urban functions, and other environmental, social, economic and cultural aspects, which relate to the vision for the holistic sustainable development of the city. Enhancing the overall quality of life leads to the creation - forging of a strong, "green" identity, capable of addressing a wider audience of people, ie the promotion of the city, thus being a key element in promoting its competitiveness, with an emphasis on benefits to its inhabitants. At the same time, at least in academia, the methodology proposed for the success of a city branding strategy focuses mainly on the satisfaction and role of inhabitants. This hints to the common end-recipient of the two strategies, with a prerequisite for cultivating collective consciousness and active participation.

Clear, concise and measurable environmental indicators and the formulation of a city's strategy in order to influence them for the better have proven to highlight the potential of viewing "the city as a product of environmental planning and design". Utilising them means that the concept of "improving the quality of life in the city" can have specific content which can influence the image of a city, built on solid foundations, and through actions of the competent bodies which can be effectively

better organized, targeted and coordinated.

Cities that have reduced their environmental problems have drastically improved their image and reaped significant benefits. The conscious adoption of environmental design practices, in parallel with the methods of city branding, is necessary in order for city officials to embark on such strategic schemes and also in order to maintain their momentum. Hence, the "traditional" methodology of urban planning gives way to strategic planning, which draws feedback from a comprehensive management and monitoring program.

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