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Place overbranding and how to prevent it

Place overbranding

Combining two conceptual and methodological approaches

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to present concepts and tools for developing place branding that protects places from overbranding, redundant promotion and excessive tourism.

Design/methodology/approach – The concept of a product-based place brand that reflects local ways of life and local identities was introduced. A combination of projective, typological and narrative methods was applied. Three focus groups composed of future place managers were held in three countries ($N = 27$) to develop place brand vocabularies and typologies of verbal characteristics of abstract places as products for internal users (residents).

Findings – In most cases, the place brand vocabularies were consistent and compatible within each abstract type and were unique (mutually exclusive) between the types. The vocabularies contained both detailed and more generalized elements. For each place, short formulations of the general concept were found. Each brand vocabulary reflected the institutional, socio-psychological, cultural, historical and geographic differences of the countries involved in the research.

Originality/value – A conceptual and methodological framework for creating place brand vocabularies is offered, and it describes the close relationship between multiple internal brand attributes and their concise expressions appropriate for communication and high differentiation among brand attributes that facilitate the recognition of branded places by target and non-target audiences. The framework is applicable for designing verbal attributes of place brands for specific places to avoid overbranding effects.

Keywords Place overbranding, Product-based place brand, Brand vocabulary, Projective methods, Full typology

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Introduction

Residents increasingly resist the marketing and branding of their places as destinations, as business and investment locations. Some resident groups' reactions to newcomers (attracted deliberately or whose relocation was not due to place marketing) may be more ambiguous. If residents believe that the image of their place that is deliberately shaped in the minds of external groups is not associated with reality, they will judge the branding negatively (Zenker and Beckmann, 2013).

However, an even more noticeable dissonance occurs regarding the use of places, as residents, visitors and newcomers often interfere with each other. In the travel industry, the problems of overtourism and tourismophobia have emerged (McKinsey and Company, 2016; Soydanbay, 2017). As a result, in developed countries the question about the ratio of benefits and losses from tourism is becoming increasingly pertinent. Because this issue has not been resolved at the conceptual and strategic levels, additional tourist fees and tourist codes of conduct regarding local standards are implemented. Moreover, in the relationships between residents and newcomers present, even more difficult situations, such as: increased xenophobia in local communities which leads to migrant dissatisfactions, conflicts and segregation.

Managerial decisions are implemented as reactions to the situation, rather than preventive measures. At best, they begin with negative advertising campaigns that are initiated against the countries whose residents represent potential immigrants, which results in the restoration of migration barriers.

Obviously, this increases the mutual mismatch in the expectations of different place users with newcomers and (likely) tourists expecting much more hospitality than they receive and residents experiencing a cultural shock related to tourist and newcomer behaviour.

All of these factors indicate that when pursuing short-term goals for promoting the awareness and popularity of places and attracting new users and their money, place managers pay considerably less attention to the strategic issues of compatibility regarding the methods of using and representing a place by different external and internal audiences. *Overtourism* is promoted by *overpromotion* and *overbranding*, which unambiguously create and communicate attractive place images globally.

This problem can be resolved without restricting access to the place, i.e. without economic and administrative barriers. Beautiful images and clever slogans communicated worldwide should be replaced by the creation and dissemination of true and targeted images of places. This paper aims to develop concepts and tools for maintaining local ways of life and local identities when creating and communicating brand messages for new place users, thereby helping to prevent the effects of overbranding, redundant promotion and excessive tourism.

Place branding literature: current conceptual and methodological problems

Conceptually, the relationship between the reality of a place and its reflection as a brand becomes highly relevant. According to image and brand definitions [American Marketing Association (AMA), 2017], an image or brand does not necessarily have to reflect the actual properties of the company product. Fuchs and Diamantopoulos (2010) clearly separated a brand's positioning based on features and benefits and the surrogate (user) positioning. In other words, a brand can be determined by both the properties of the product and the features of mass consciousness, in which the brand should continue to establish itself. If one also relies on the definition of image, which "may or may not correspond with 'reality' or 'actuality'" [American Marketing Association (AMA), 2017] and one bears in mind that the

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brand is nothing more than a specially crafted image (Roberts, 2017) suitable for communications through the mass media (Relph, 1976), then brand might not even have anything to do with reality.

This aspect promoted the creation of logo designs and slogans in the early stages of place marketing and branding (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009). These slogans and logos often appeared to be “bolted-on rather than built-in” places (Eisenschitz, 2010, p. 28) that destroyed place identity (Relph, 1976).

Discussions on whether places can be branded in the same way as conventional goods led most academics to conclude that they cannot, specifically, because of the geographical and social complexity of places (Van den Berg and Braun, 1999; Braun, 2008). An important step towards a comprehensive concept of place branding was the recognition of the role of residents (Braun *et al.*, 2013), an understanding how place brands and place identity are connected (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013) and the necessity of building different (but connected) place brands for different target groups (Zenker, 2017).

Efforts to apply service-dominant logic (SDL) (Warnaby, 2009) and the corresponding concepts of place marketing and branding are likely the most influential and recent conceptual findings and they state that place branding is performed through the combination of personal communication via stakeholders, each of whom creates his or her own “place narrative” (Lichrou *et al.*, 2014; Warnaby and Medway, 2013) or “mental association” (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015), thus, becoming a brand co-creator. The results of such network communications cannot be considered branding in the classical sense [American Marketing Association (AMA), 2017].

The SDL approach to place marketing and the participatory approach to place branding meets the need to create brands driven by residents that respond to the challenges described in the previous section. However, the concept has not gained universal approval, and many researchers still consider place branding a deliberate goal-setting activity, whereas the integrated model of places, which is formed without a clearly expressed subject (of management), is regarded not as a brand but an uncontrolled image (Roberts, 2017). Consequently, unity has not been achieved in our understanding of place branding, which has impeded further methodological developments.

Within the framework of SDL and participatory approaches, imposing a deliberate and intentional influence on place brands is problematic (if not impossible) (Rozhkov and Skriabina, 2015a). Free dialogue with resident respondents when carrying out expert interviews and focus groups is not restricted to a survey format and, thus, is compatible with participatory approaches. Nonetheless, the results obtained from free dialogue cannot be compared or subjected to the quantitative evaluations required for brand management (Zenker and Beckmann, 2013a).

The classical approach predetermines an intentional influence on image, as an addressee of mass brand communication of places persistently reacts more to simplicity than complexity. Most visitors and newcomers do not strive to explore a location but instead wish to be entertained, work or gain social benefits. Therefore, these individuals need precise information that catches their attention but does not provoke deep thinking.

However, certain methodological issues associated with this approach remain unresolved. Reducing the content in place brand communications implies detachment from the residents’ perceptions, local life, local identity and historical and cultural heritage (Romanowski, 2013), which has led to criticism of the primitive slogans and logos from both local communities (Zenker and Beckmann, 2013) and the academic environment (Govers and Go, 2009; Warnaby and Medway, 2013; Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2015).

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Although academics and experts have attempted to provide the symbols of place brands with a local meaning and identity, they have not been able to offer a transparent method of linking external and internal place images when developing brand concepts and symbols. For example, the rebranding of Amsterdam was originally based on the residents' desire to rebrand the city. However, the method for integration of separate attributes of the city with core values and the slogan "I Amsterdam" and defining target audiences was not clear (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2007). A fundamental question of how to combine the simplicity of brand symbols needs to be promoted within external groups of place users via the mass media (Anholt, 2009), while maintaining the place identity embodied in a variety of cultural, historical, geographical and daily aspects of local residents remains unanswered.

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In addition to the analytical problem, is an organizational issue: who should create a place brand and how can it be accomplished? Involving residents (or stakeholders in a broader sense) at all stages of branding is considered to be particularly significant (Kavaratzis, 2012; Braun *et al.*, 2013). However, this involvement is difficult at concept and symbol development stage. Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2007) noted the inevitability of the substitution of residents' views by those of experts in the process of designing and conducting a survey, which is formally aimed at creating a brand based on residents' views, and they suggested that the survey list of brand attributes and its groupings considerably depends on a researcher's subjective choice, even if qualitative research, which has fewer restrictions for respondents-residents in terms of format, was conducted before the survey.

The issue of combining the views and allocating the roles of experts and local stakeholders has been widely discussed in place branding and local planning literature. On the one hand, local brands are based on:

- properties that distinguish one place from another, which is similar to commercial brands (AMA, 2017); and
- the differences of key characteristics of a place in the present and future (Kavaratzis, 2008).

On the other hand, all these tasks "require a rigour of thought and process" (Interview: Place Branding Expert Malcolm Allan, 2015), which is more common for experts rather than the public. To express local meaning, local brands must be created based on the hopes and aspirations for the future of the place by stakeholders (Interview: Place Branding Expert Malcolm Allan, 2015). However, "practitioners and local authorities are not able to define their own needs" (Kavaratzis, 2015) because most people "are looking for and strive to achieve an equally high quality of life" (Gordon, 2013). That is, when locals are replaced with experts and the brand concepts and symbols (logos and slogans) are being developed, a loss of identity is quite possible because local representatives can fill in these concepts and symbols with place reality. However, the removal of experts from the process is impossible because local representatives do not possess the necessary expertise.

As a result, by the time the problem of overbranding emerged, the research on place branding presented conflicts in terms of conceptualization and methodology. The major factors (individually and together) that trigger place overbranding are represented in Figure 1. Current research is focused on three factors that make an impact on the character of place branding:

- the essence of "organic" (built on the local reality and identity) place brands;
- analytical methods to express transparently the complex nature of a place in brand symbols; and
- the distribution of experts and locals' role when creating brand symbols.

Conceptual and methodological framework for preventing place overbranding

In general, problems of overbranding are determined by uncritical and direct application of a brand concept to a place. Indeed, the logic of branding in business suggests the following:

- A brand should target the maximum possible number of groups.
- The perception of the object of a brand is valued considerably more than the object itself.

Both issues already imply overbranding at the stage of symbol development. Such overbranding is not considered negative for businesses, which can always isolate unwanted customers with price adjustments. For places, however, the excessive inflow of visitors cannot be averted with a price barrier because places are not commercial organizations and pursue economic and social aims. Therefore, because “profit-orientation (...) requires modification if it is to be relevant in the context of places” (Warnaby, 2009), such modifications are required for the conceptual and analytical techniques of place branding as well.

Symbols alone cannot be equated to branding because brand is primarily a customer experience that is “represented by a collection of images and ideas”, and often it “refers to a symbol such as a name, logo, slogan, and design scheme” that “identifies one seller’s goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers”, whereas “brand recognition and other reactions are created by the accumulation of experiences with the specific product or service, both directly relating to its use and through the influence of advertising, design, and media commentary” [American Marketing Association (AMA), 2017]. Places are used jointly and concurrently by different user groups (Ashworth and Voogd, 1988). Thus, place users obtain their experience through direct contact with both the product and other users. Obviously, among all place users, the key role is performed by residents who are also co-producers of the place product and co-creators of the place image as sets of personalized benefits and associations accordingly.

However, along with the personal use of a product and the following personalized communications with the local community, population movements (in the form of tourism and migration) remain that are, *per se*, massive place use. These movements are based neither on communication with residents nor on the understanding of the history and culture of a place but rather on taking photographs of local attractions.

Accordingly, the last part of the abovementioned classical definition of brand as applied to place remains relevant. Brands are still needed in the classical sense of the term, i.e. images that are specially designed and communicated through the media (and not only narratives generated by network interactions). Therefore, place branding itself is a type of managerial process with individuals who are clearly identified as management and managed persons (rather than equally interconnected stakeholders).

Nonetheless, the content of brand place symbols and their communication channels should differ from those used in business marketing. Brand should inform the audience more about how residents live. Residents differ from tourists in their insider knowledge of the location. To not contradict the internal place image (that local residents have in their minds), a place brand (place image for external audiences) should convey authentic daily living. To prevent overbranding, a place brand needs to represent the place coherently, truthfully and holistically and not just draw an attractive picture of attractions and facilities that are convenient for quick commercial exploitation. Therefore, compared with the branding of “tradable” goods, place branding should not only create a desirable vision for a place in the minds of its potential users (tourists and new residents) but also render this image compatible with that of current residents as existing place users.

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Finally, the natures of the competitive relationships in which places are involved differ from the relationships of firms. Competition with other places becomes less important (Ashworth and Voogd, 1988) if the priority of a place is the quality of life of its residents and not the money gained from external audiences. Therefore, competition for the place among different users increases (Rozhkov, 2013), and place branding is more focused on showing the differences between the way the place is used and other possible ways of use than on distinguishing it from competing places.

Thus, brand that is adapted to the reality of a place or *product-based place brand* can be defined as a place user experience represented by a collection of images and ideas. Often, a brand refers to a symbol such as a name, logo, slogan, design scheme or any other feature that identifies a place's use as distinct from desired, undesired or incompatible uses. The pattern of "a place for (to) [. . .] (list of benefits, i.e., particular residential needs that the place satisfies or residential activities it encourages)" (Rozhkov and Skriabina, 2015b) represents the generalized verbal characteristics of a place appropriate for the construction of a product-based place brand.

An analytical tool that provides a means of creating such generalized formulations is a set of interrelated typologies in which one of these typologies of the same abstract place is described in less detail than in another typology. Classifying unstructured descriptive data of real places with the help of such typologies can transform place narratives into standardized and concise descriptions of products and ways of using places. Such descriptions are compiled from a standardized set of words of a typology, whereas the word combinations typical for each place under study (its morphological formula) are rather specific (Rozhkov and Skriabina, 2015a). This aspect increases the potential utility of the analytical tool in the creation of verbal symbols of place brands (if the brands are based on place products) and, thus, generates a solution to the problem of transitioning from complexity to simplicity as discussed.

Moreover, a comparison between an abstract place and a specific place under investigation allows an analyst to identify a set of strategic alternatives for the latter, which enables a comparison of the positions of the place now and in the future, including its present and future images.

Indeed, imagining places is of a great conceptual significance in place branding; any brand has to be previously imagined before being planned and embodied in a physical form when developing or redesigning the place (Puig, 2009; Shoaib and Keivani, 2015). To imagine is to make present to our mind's eyes what is absent for now (Donald, 1999). In addition, the best way to do so is to use a typology shaped by collectively exhaustive classification types. When comparing them with the initial position of the place under study, the analyst can obtain a full spectrum of possible development options (transitions from initial to final place use or image). In other words, typologies create convenient analytical frameworks for planning and competitive analysis in general. Finally, because classification types are mutually exclusive, their application provides for a sufficiently high differentiation of characteristics of places, which is important for product-based place brands to be focused on the values of target audiences and simultaneously discourage non-target audiences.

Important requirements are imposed on the organizational procedure for the creation of product-based place brands. The described analytical instruments can be applied without active participation of residents by merely observing their behaviour in daily life and systematizing the results of the observation (Rozhkov and Skriabina, 2015a). However, to prevent overbranding, residents must specifically participate in the creation of brand symbols that will further be communicated to the external world.

In this regard, [Gordon's \(2013\)](#) statement about the needs of communities appears too bold. Resistance to overtourism indicates that a high living standard (specifically at the expense of the resources of external groups) does not satisfy all local communities. Therefore, locals are able to distinguish different levels and types of living standards (and place products); however, in most cases, these parameters are distinguished by feeling rather than by thinking, which mostly occur post-factum (when the results of overbranding are obvious).

In such a scenario, the real reason for place brand detachment and overbranding among local communities is not because of a lack of unique local meanings in the everyday lives and images of the residents but rather because of a need to extract these meanings from daily routines and community consciousness, reconsider them and express them in brand symbols. [Kavaratzis \(2015\)](#) notes that "practitioners need experts to provide them with clear concepts and a strategic view". Although we generally agree with this statement, additional precision is required. Experts should provide practitioners with a framework that could allow the practitioners themselves to formulate both an existing internal place image and an external image that matches the latter. The typologies compiled from abstract types can play this role. Moreover, locals must participate in the creation of the derivative typologies, i.e. drawing and describing the abstract types from various points of view with pictures and words that are already available in their figurative thinking and lexicon, respectively. By possessing this co-created construction set, locals can further use it to co-design visual and verbal images of their own places.

The previous section indicates that the benefits of two approaches can be combined for place branding. Based on the products, place branding is different from classical branding only in the focus on internal users of places as key actors and the image they create. However, the key requirements for place branding, which are aimed at mass communication, remain the same for businesses.

Methodologically, symbols of product-based place brands are *de facto* built on narratives, such as the words, phrases and pictures of current internal place users. Thus, organizationally, these pictures are created by locals in cooperation with experts, which is exactly what will prevent the narrowing of local meanings in slogans and logos that was strongly criticized by [Ashworth and Kavaratzis \(2015\)](#). This narrowing, in fact, renders place brands all-embracing (unfocused) and detached from reality, thereby leading to overbranding. Although a product-based place brand is not the direct result of personalized associations and communications among stakeholders, it obviously offers personalized communications between practitioners, who are bearers of local meanings, and experts, who are responsible for defining the framework for thinking. Such personalization aligns with the suggested approach with SDL.

An empirical study was performed to verify how the first part of the methodological approach described previously works and focuses on how abstract, mutually exclusive and compatible types of places can be used to generate brand vocabularies for places. One can define place brand vocabulary as a typology of verbal characteristics of places that are considered products (users, user benefits, uses, elements of product technologies and product concepts), which can be applicable for designing the verbal attributes of product-based place brands.

Co-creating place brand vocabularies: a combination of projective and typological methods

To date, research on marketing and branding has extensively used qualitative methods ([Gummesson, 2005](#)) that could be used to create and analyse texts. In particular, the opinions

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of managers involved in place branding were examined by [Foroudi et al. \(2016\)](#) through face-to-face in-depth interviews. Text documents and interviews regarding place events were studied by [Gavinelli et al. \(2016\)](#). In classical marketing research, projective techniques that identify participants' attitudes based on their subjective judgments about things, events or other people have also been widely used ([Morrison et al., 2002](#)). [Day \(1989\)](#) and [Kay \(2001\)](#) used projective methods to explore insights into consumers' views on brand image, and [Pich and Dean \(2015\)](#) applied projective methods for exploring political brand images. However, place-branding research less frequently applied projective techniques ([De Carlo et al., 2009](#)).

The projective technique applied in this study combines the advantages of projective techniques, which maximally frees the participants to create texts full of diverse and vivid place images and the more rigid structuring of the input tasks and results of focus groups to obtain place brand vocabularies. The participants were asked to first draw and then verbally describe their associations with eight abstract places classified by the characteristics of the residents' behaviour ([Table AI](#)). The identification of typical words used to describe factors of place users' behaviour and supporting place product elements was expected to meet the key feature of the concept of the product-based place brand. Each pattern of place users' behaviour had to be associated with the place conditions that contribute to this pattern.

In terms of [Hofstede et al. \(2007\)](#), who grouped projective techniques into five main types (association, completion, construction, choice ordering and expressive), the applied technique can be classified as mixed (associative and expressive), where the expressive part was formed by successive drawing and story-telling. The specific point was that drawing does not play an independent role ([Porr et al., 2011](#); [Pich and Dean, 2015](#)), but rather a supporting role. The drawing task was designed to induce respondents to generate less structured and more emotional visual images, so that they can later maintain the colour and detail when describing abstract places verbally.

The main difference of the method used in this study was how the object of projection was chosen. First, abstract (not real) places were described. To a certain extent, abstracting from the characteristics of a real place and describing places in general have a similar task, which is common to projective methods. The task is to obviate the need for respondents to provide a straightforward answer to an "inconvenient" question. The only distinction was the idea of distracting respondents from the description of their own places to widen their scope of thinking and then providing the maximum diversity of words and collocations to characterize people's behaviour and the places where they (people) live in general.

From the authors' perspective, such abstractions enable a better understanding and reflect the general context of the objects under study, which is important for further analysis of certain objects but not abstract objects. For example, compared with association network-based and map-based methods ([Henderson et al., 2002](#); [Zenker and Beckmann, 2013a](#)), vocabularies can help to clearly distinguish the existing methods of using the place under investigation from the full set of alternatives (including those that are desirable and undesirable for residents), which leads to a better understanding of the comparative advantages and disadvantages of all strategic paths in branding the place and helps the creators find exact words and collocations to describe them. Moreover, the focus group participants themselves built associations of each abstract type, transformed detailed descriptions into short forms and compared them, thereby avoiding arbitrary and intuitive decisions by experts mentioned in the conceptual section.

The following considerations have been taken into account when sampling. First, to verify the possibility of generating vocabularies for designing place brands in general (without exploring brand symbols of a specific place), focus group participants were

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recruited, and they did not have to be residents of a specific place. Moreover, to determine whether the same combination of abstract types could be interpreted differently (to be associated with different vocabularies), the sample had to represent places that were geographically, socially, culturally and historically heterogeneous. Second, the focus group participants should be able to comprehend the procedure and be able to serve as experts by conducting similar focus groups in real local communities.

Three focus groups have been held with master's degree students focused on place management issues. In all, 15 students from Russia, 10 students from Poland (including four Polish students) and 8 students from Spain participated in the focus groups. The Russian focus group was subdivided into three subgroups. Lecturers of three universities served as the focus groups moderators. The participants were required to reach an agreement on the topics discussed. All three focus groups were asked to perform the same task:

- (1) Let us consider all places in the world (towns, cities and villages but not countries or regions) as products that are attractive or unattractive to different people.
- (2) Let us consider all residents as the consumers of these places. The decisions consumers make about the place are manifested in their spatial and demographic behaviours at large:
 - moving in or out of these places;
 - staying in the places for a long duration or not; and
 - having children there or refusing to do so.
 Let all these indicators be binary variables (only two values are possible: "yes" and "no").
- (3) Let us imagine eight nominal places, each of which has particular combination of meanings of these variables. Imagine each place. With what do you associate it? What types of people live there? What do they do? How do they spend their time? What natural and man-made objects surround it? How and for whom is the place attractive?

Discuss your associations with each other, coordinate your positions and draw each of these places in detail; give the place a nominal (not real) name; and prepare a story about it.

Answering these questions, the students discussed how and why the residents of abstract places would behave, with the students projecting their own possible spatial behaviour as if they were residents and projecting the conditions influencing their behaviour as well. Thus, the students portrayed the images modelled from the inside of each abstract place. When creating names for the places under discussion, they were tasked with concisely expressing the essence of a place, which corresponded to the task of searching for verbal external brand symbols of a place.

After one hour, each small group presented eight pictures of eight nominal places and gave a brief presentation about each location. The Russian subgroups presented the results consecutively one after another and gave each other critical feedback on the accuracy of the interpretation of the abstract types. Each moderator recorded the focus group report, made tape recordings of the script in the native language of the focus group and translated it into English. The Russian expert made three recordings and retained only the results that had withstood mutual criticism of the small groups.

The analysis of the results was conducted in two stages. First, a method of narrative analysis dating back to the work of Propp (1968) that has also been used in marketing research (Pace, 2008) was applied. Words and word collocations that indicated key product elements and user features of each abstract place were extracted from the transcripts and

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put into morphologic tables (Figures 2-7). The texts were then analysed and discussed by all the moderators who conducted the focus groups.

Place brand vocabularies: views from different countries

The content of the morphological tables show that the focus groups generated detailed lists of the characteristics of separate places and their users. In certain cases, attributes of place-product technology were described in detail, whereas in other cases, a more accurate description was given to place users. Moreover, although uneven across the groups and types, the participants described the variants of people's use of time.

Within each type, these lists were quite consistent, compatible and united by a general idea. Few examples were found of inconsistent characteristics. Consequently, all the focus groups found a succinct and capacious verbal expression of this general idea for all types of places. The general idea formulations were both concise and reflected the diversity of the detailed properties of the places and the characteristics of their users.

Remarkably, the focus group participants found different methods of expressing general concepts of place when performing a task "to give it a nominal (not real) name". Thus, names can be found that reflect key functions of places from the perspectives of their technologies (for example, "economic city", "university city" and "food/gastronomic place"). A number of names indicated features of places that were useful for its residents (give birth to and raise children, a life for oneself and an academically orientated life) or characteristics of the residents (a place for elites, a place for successful people and city for families).

A significant aspect of the wording of the general ideas was also emotionally charged and shaped (for example, "Corporate Mordor", "Nothing to do, just to bear children" and "City of euro-orphan"). Moreover, the task "to give it a nominal (not real) name" was perceived by a focus group as having to create a fake word to refer to the place (MilitaryBurg, MortalVille and Maletown). Finally, in addition to positively coloured and neutrally expressed formulations, negative expressions were found, which were mapped onto the same place by the same focus group. For example, the sixth type of place was called "Corporate Mordor" and "Sin City" by the Polish focus group and it was described as "modern attractive, entertaining, business oriented" place that offered "momentum toward a career" by the same group.

The next step was to consider the repetition or uniqueness of words and phrases used to describe product concepts and separate elements from type to type. Certain repetitions or similarities within several types were observed in the results of the Spanish focus group. In particular, "traditional architecture" and "food (gastronomy) production" were mentioned in the descriptions of the first and eighth types of places. Additionally, "natural landscapes" and "primary sectors" of the fifth type were close to "rural ambience and atmosphere" and "primary economy" of the eighth type, respectively. Elderly residents as key users appeared in both the first and eighth types. The adjective "quiet" was used to characterize types 1 and 3. However, repetitions were almost never observed in the other types described by this focus or in the descriptions of the other focus groups. Taking into account combinations of words (and not individual words), they are unique (mutually exclusive) in almost all cases.

Finally, the experts estimated the mutual consistency of the descriptions of the elements of every type in each focus group. The expert dialogue showed that in the vast majority of cases, the focus groups followed given spatial behaviour patterns in their associations. The discussion demonstrated that adherence to the rules of full typology building helps to significantly differentiate among the generated characteristics of places, whereas the deviations lead to repeatability.

Moreover, a significant portion of the originally identified inconsistencies was non-existent due to differences in the spatial behaviour patterns of residents from different countries. These differences in pattern are determined by historical, cultural and geographical factors, and they show that respondents had different initial cultural backgrounds and imagined place representations. Thus, the applied analytical technique and organizational procedure allowed these differences to be embodied in place brand vocabularies.

However, two types of barriers were observed when analysing the results. The lexical barrier represented the difficulty or inability to identify English equivalents for specific words when translating the focus group transcripts. The semantic barrier occurred much more often and was caused by the abovementioned differences in people's spatial behaviour. All three focus groups provided the same type of interpretation for only three (the third, sixth and seventh) of the eight abstract types. Three more types (the first, second and fifth) were equally interpreted by two groups of three, and the two remaining types (the fourth and eighth) were interpreted by each focus group in their own way. As indicated by the expert dialogue, the reasons for these differences can be combined into several groups:

- institutional (development of the family, state and civil society institutions);
- socio-psychological (individual and collective values and encouraged behaviours);
- cultural and historical (the impact of local history and culture on the situations, values and behaviours); and
- geographic (spatial development and dispersal of communications).

Conclusion

In recent years, greater differences have been observed between the perspectives of residents and those of tourists and newcomers regarding the uses of place. These differences have rarely been embodied in place brands. Beautiful pictures of places and catchy slogans communicated through the media without clear targeting were expected to maximize the flux of new users and their money in the short-term. However, the result was fraught with a growing number of contradictions and conflicts between user groups with incompatible views and behaviours in the long-term. When the anger of locals, who mostly suffered from the effects of overtourism, reached critical levels, place managers and marketers had to increasingly restrict external access to "overpromoted" and "overbranded" places as they failed to predict and prevent user conflicts.

To avoid overbranding, places should be branded by creating and communicating truthful images (shared by the locals). These images should encourage a place presentation that truthfully conveys the lifestyles of residents and local identity, which can be appreciated by new users, therefore, supported, enriched and not destroyed.

This research develops place branding concepts and methods that promote the maintenance of local ways of life and local identities during the process of creating and communicating brand messages for new place users, thereby preventing place overbranding. The concept of product-based place brand was introduced to express the idea that brand can be built on multiple interconnected qualities that shape real places and how they are represented in residents' minds. The applied method combines associative and expressive projective methods (Hofstede *et al.*, 2007) and provides results that allow for diversity and colourfulness along with the strictness of typologies (Bailey, 2005), which allows the results to be structured. This combination of methods makes it possible to

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structure place narratives and obtain place brand vocabulary or an ordered set of verbal characteristics of places, which provides:

- a close relationship between multiple place attributes and a concise expression appropriate for communication; and
- high differentiation of these attributes that promotes the recognition of branded places by target audiences.

The results show that when communicating with each other and cooperating with experts, residents are able to create a place brand vocabulary using their own words, phrases and sentences. Differences in the content of vocabularies compiled by focus groups of residents from different countries indicate the ability of the proposed methodology to provide a verbal embodiment of the local way of life and identity. The combination of personalized communications (suggested by SDL) and mass communications (considered a precondition by the classic approach to branding) in product-based place branding can prevent place overbranding. In the worst case, the consequences can be overcome in gentler ways (without imposing restrictions on people's movements).

The described approach is directly focused on practical applications. A similar focus group with residents of a particular place will result in a vocabulary of its brand or a typology of verbal characteristics of the place filled with words familiar to residents. Additionally, this vocabulary can and should be used to construct verbal brand attributes of the place (Figure 8). Initially, locals can organize unstructured ideas and feelings about their place, thereby rethinking its current image. To perform this task, residents need to verbally associate the place with an abstract type or types and choose the right words from the vocabulary. Finally, this form of representation facilitates the comparison of available, desirable and undesirable future images to the brand (if any) to identify the relationships between images and to define clear directions for brand adjustments (or rebranding).

A product-based place brand is co-created by experts and residents, where the former delegates most of the analytical functions and the development of the analytical tools (brand vocabulary) to the latter. This distribution of roles can be performed within a strategic session, which can also be held in the focus group format (Rozhkov and Skriabina, 2016).

The main limitation of the study is the limited sampling. The adequacy of the developed brand vocabularies for the language, culture and identity of specific places can be ensured only if the vocabulary is representative of a specific local community. The presented empirical study involved only one group of locals (students) because it was important to understand only the fundamental possibility of creating different brand vocabularies in the same analytical framework. In this sense, the suggested tools were applied in test mode.

This study opens up broad prospects for researching "organic" branding based on the reality of places. The first and obvious step is to test the described method with a sample representing a specific local community. Second, the development of basic vocabularies of place brands can be performed via cross-cultural studies on the intersection of marketing and linguistics and the resulting vocabularies can provide brand managers from different countries the opportunity to choose the necessary combination of brand elements when conducting strategy sessions with locals. Therefore, the geography of the study should be extended by involving more countries with cities that have experienced significant travel and/or migration flows, suffered from overbranding and, thus, need to be branded strategically. Such an extension would increase the practical nature of this research. Finally, a task for generating basic visual (logos) collections of brand symbols should be proposed. In this case, the role of drawing in the projective method becomes primary and not auxiliary.

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Further reading

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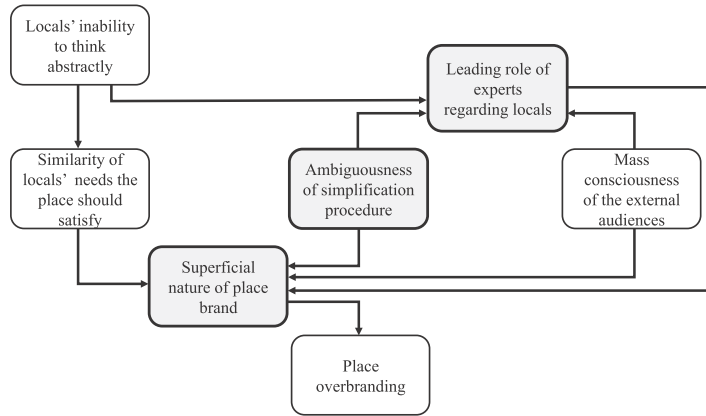
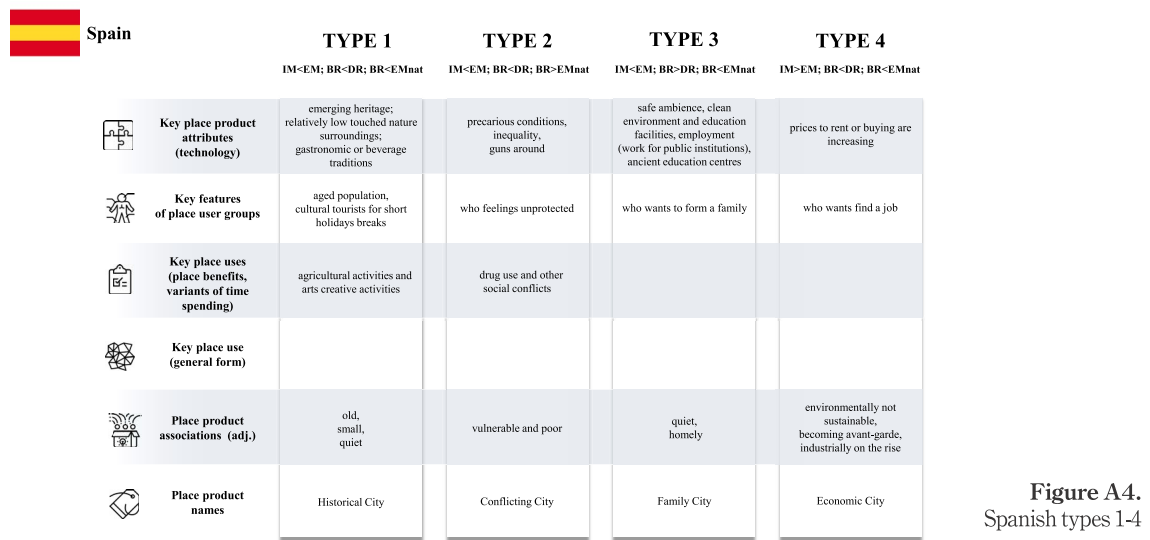
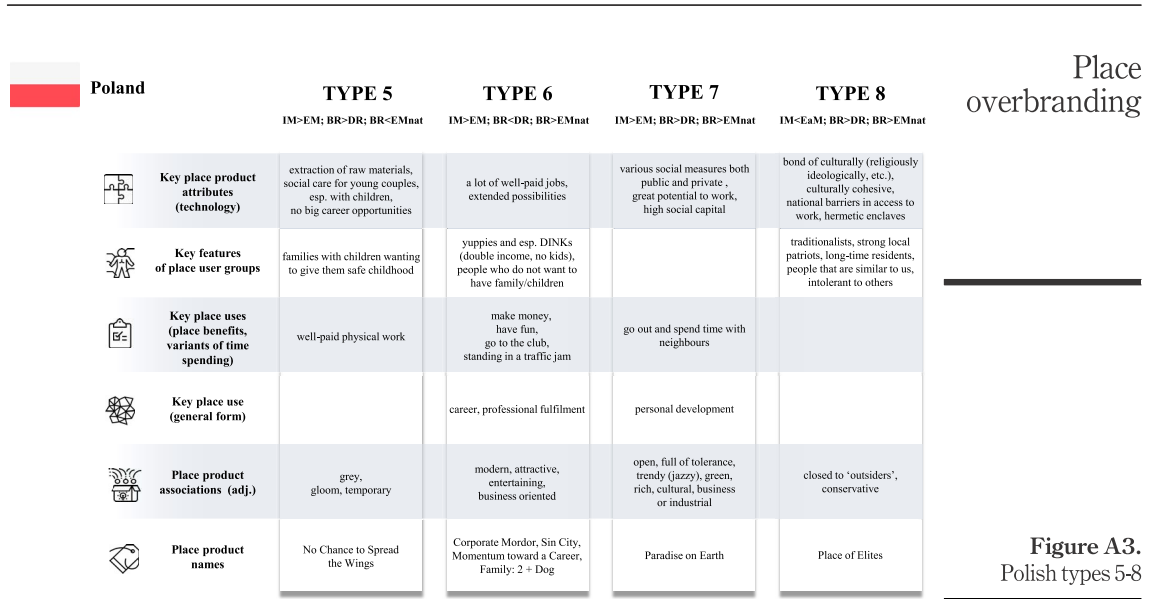


Figure A1. Main factors of place overbranding

Poland		TYPE 1 IM-EM; BR-DR; BR-EMnat	TYPE 2 IM-EM; BR-DR; BR-EMnat	TYPE 3 IM-EM; BR-DR; BR-EMnat	TYPE 4 IM-EM; BR-DR; BR-EMnat
	Key place product attributes (technology)	far from the culture centres and large groups of people	farm, secondary education, vocational training, basic very few jobs	church school	natural environment, a bench near the lake canes
	Key features of place user groups	those who are somehow doomed to remain; a person with no prospect; [a person with] pathology, alcoholism	multigenerational families or one child lives with his or her parents or old couples with neighbours, poorly educated, local patriots	mothers with children; large families	retirees in old age
	Key place uses (place benefits, variants of time spending)			pendulum migration	to relax in nature sitting, admiring the bosom of nature and delighting in it spend a nice time, escape from the bigger cities
	Key place use (general form)		live here quietly until last days	give birth to and raise children	spending the "autumn of life"
	Place product associations (adj.)	poor, full of delinquency (crime)	small, traditional, extinct, slowly dying	strongly religious, conservative	friendly, small, seasonal
	Place product names	Horror! Terror City City with No Prospect	Sowchoz Village	City of Euro-Orphans	Holiday Town for Retirees Place of One Attraction Tourist Resort

Figure A2. Polish types 1-4



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Spain

TYPE 5

TYPE 6

TYPE 7

TYPE 8

IM>EM; BR>DR; BR<EMnat

IM>EM; BR>DR; BR>EMnat

IM>EM; BR>DR; BR>EMnat

IM<EaM; BR>DR; BR>EMnat

	Key place product attributes (technology)	natural landscape, nature is preserved, hard climates, basic economy, primary sectors	economy is very specialized in education services, sport facilities, green zones and open spaces	modern buildings and transport facilities, high technologies—future robots, recycling, entertainment, big transport communications	traditional architecture in balance with the environment, rural ambience and atmosphere, primary economy (food production)
	Key features of place user groups	self-confident, used to live in hard and extreme climate conditions, travellers looking for authenticity	seasonal population living only temporarily	multi-cultural and cosmopolitan population	elderly people, related traditional food production, emerging agro-food tourists
	Key place uses (place benefits, variants of time spending)		academic, sport and leisure activities		emerging creative (gastronomic) activities
	Key place use (general form)		academic oriented life		
	Place product associations (adj.)	cold, hot, dessert		big, smart, business, political, touristic, economic, internationally influential, global	rural
	Place product names	Remote Place	University City	Futuristic City	Food Gastronomic Place

Figure A5.
Spanish types 5-8



Russia

TYPE 1

TYPE 2

TYPE 3

TYPE 4

IM<EM; BR>DR; BR<EMnat

IM>EM; BR>DR; BR>EMnat

IM<EM; BR>DR; BR<EMnat

IM>EM; BR>DR; BR<EMnat

	Key place product attributes (technology)	natural disaster; man-made disaster (nuclear explosion); nuclear power station; water contamination		mediocre rural school	harsh living conditions, some mine or oil industry
	Key features of place user groups	extreme visitors (even old people are trying to move out)	those who got used to living here, those who have nowhere to go, the elderly	women, poor, uneducated grateful children	young, strong, healthy population
	Key place uses (place benefits, variants of time spending)	to leave this town	growing some food, sitting on a bench, eating sunflower seeds and talking about nothing	to cook, do the laundry	to earn money for comfortable life
	Key place use (general form)		life on borrowed time to survive		
	Place product associations (adj.)	mortal, risky	small, socially immobile (old)	home (female)	the ascetic, "the bachelor", single (male)
	Place product names	Mortalville	Old River Oldfactoryburg The City In The Past	"Nothing to do, just to Have Children," Nestville	New Diamond Maletown Shiftworkertown

Figure A6.
Russian types 1-4



	TYPE 5 IM>EM; BR<DR; BR<EMnat	TYPE 6 IM>EM; BR<DR; BR>EMnat	TYPE 7 IM>EM; BR<DR; BR>EMnat	TYPE 8 IM<EaM; BR>DR; BR>EMnat
Key place product attributes (technology)	both workplaces and infrastructure, many many-storied houses with infrastructure for children	bad ecological environment, conflict and rising cost of living	both career opportunities, family infrastructure, and environmental conditions, a lot of pedestrian zones	nobody is allowed to move in here from outside
Key features of place user groups	families with children	workaholics, successful people	openness, tolerance	a closed society, people who are committed to traditional values
Key place uses (place benefits, variants of time spending)		to build a career, to actualize oneself, to create a personal image	not only to be born and live but also to die	
Key place use (general form)	life with family for a long time	life for oneself	Life in Rosy Hues	community life
Place product associations (adj.)	family	career, selfish (for singles)	socially-oriented	gated community, secret research
Place product names	Anti-Hype Regional Centre	Businesspotic Child-Free Students' Campus	Dream City Fairytale City Ideal City Promisedland	Militaryburg

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Figure A7.
Russian types 5-8

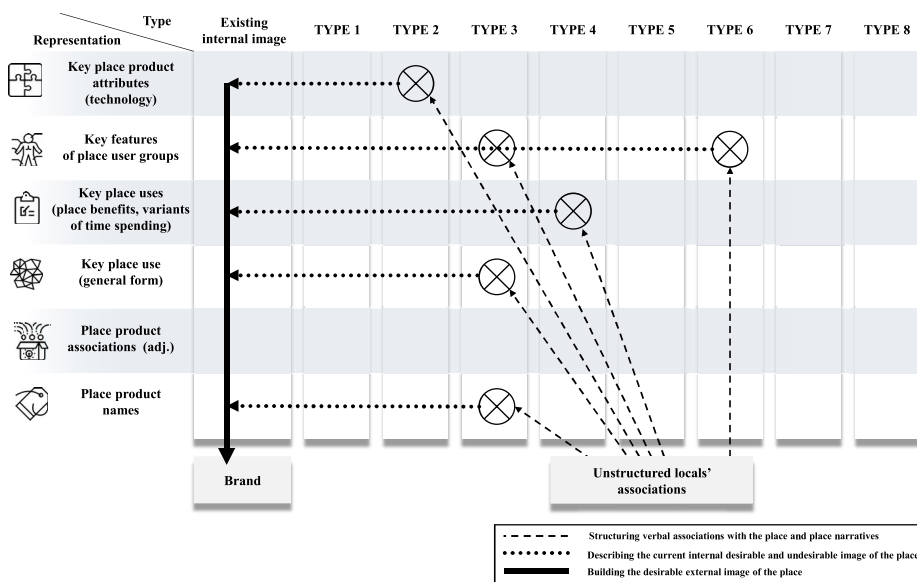


Figure A8.
Steps of the method application

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Characteristic/ Type of place (nominal place)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Immigration (Im) > Emigration(Em)	-	-	-	+	+	+	+
Birth rate (BR) > Death rate(DR)	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
Birth rate (BR) > Emigration of natives (ENat)	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	+

Note: The table shows positive (“+”) or negative (“-”) values of three typology dimensions
Source: Rozhkov and Skriabina (2015a)

Table A1.
Typology of place demand patterns based on spatial behaviour

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AQ1— Please check affiliation for “Robert Romanowski and Norberto Muniz-Martinez” and provide Department/School/Faculty details.

AQ2— Please check the following sentence for clarity, and amend as necessary: Moreover, in the relationships between residents and newcomers present, even more difficult situations, such as: increased xenophobia in local communities which leads to migrant dissatisfactions, conflicts and segregation.

AQ3— Please check the edits made in the following paragraph and correct if necessary: A fundamental question of how to combine the simplicity of brand symbols needs to be promoted within external groups of place users via the mass media (Anholt, 2009), while maintaining the place identity embodied in a variety of cultural, historical, geographical and daily aspects of local residents remains unanswered.

AQ4— Please check the following sentence for clarity, and amend as necessary: In terms of Hofstede *et al.* (2007), who grouped projective techniques into five main types (association, completion, construction, choice ordering and expressive), the applied technique can be classified as mixed (associative and expressive), where the expressive part was formed by successive drawing and story-telling.

AQ5— There are currently no funding included. Please confirm if this is correct or provide the funding.