Destination @-Branding of Ten European Capitals Through the Institutional Stems and Commercial Logos

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INTRODUCTION

Starting from a broad research programme on Place-identity and Social Representations of European Capitals in first visitors of six different nationalities begun by de Rosa in the 1990s (de Rosa, 1995; 1997; 2013b) - later developed along multiple interrelated research lines based on “field studies” and “media studies”, inspired by a multi-method modelling approach to social representations (de Rosa, 2013a; 2013c) - this contribution represents an integrative work concerning a study on the “Destination@-branding” (Morrison & Anderson, 2002) of ten European Capitals through communication via their institutional stems and commercial logos.

The research line based on the “media studies” (de Rosa, Bocci & Picone, 2012; de Rosa & Bocci, 2014) focuses on the comparative analyses carried out between:

- The “City@-brand identity” (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2002) created by the marketers (assumed as vehicle of “expert knowledge”) through the institutional tourist websites of ten European Capitals (Rome, London, Paris, Helsinki, Vienna, Warsaw, Berlin, Madrid, Brussels and Lisbon) - examining their usability, interactivity and contents.

- The “City@-brand image” (Keller, 1998; Cai, 2002) perceived through spontaneous conversations and experience exchanges among members of the Social Networks, like Facebook and Yahoo Answer and forum discussions like TripAdvisor, assumed as vehicle of the “common sense knowledge”.

In accordance with the model of “destination branding” (Cai, 2002) composed by three interrelated components: brand identity, brand image and brand element mix (name, logo, sign, design, symbol, slogan…), this contribution focuses on the institutional stems and commercial logos as symbolic tools and cultural artefacts created in different historical periods in order to contribute to the “distinctiveness” of the different cities.

Therefore, the aim is to compare the iconic structural elements of the brands (ancient and modern stems and logos) of ten historical European capitals, which play a determinant role in the narration of urban history.

The research also compares the social representations evoked by brands (stems and logos) of the ten European Capitals among potential first-visitors.

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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Destination branding constitutes a way to communicate a destination’s unique identity by differentiating a destination from its competitors (Morrison & Anderson, 2002).

In the model of destination branding proposed by Cai (2002) -organized around brand identity, brand image and brand element mix- the process starts choosing one or more brand elements -identifying the destination- and goes on with the formation of “brand associations” (attributes, affective and attitudes components of an image -Gartner, 1993; Keller, 1998-) driven by brand identity.

Moving beyond the molecular studies interested in identifying the cognitive and evaluative factors in perception, purely focused on the processes of categorization, encoding, storage and retrieval of information in memory, this chapter captures the multi-dimensionality of the theory of social representations (Moscovici, 1961/1976; Jodelet, 1989; de Rosa, 2013a, 2016).

MAIN FOCUS: THE BRANDS

Modelling Approach

Research Design

Given the relevance assigned to the iconic-imaginary dimension to social representations by the “modelling approach”, the brands have been studied by using an appropriate research design as described in the Figure 1.

The “modelling approach”, developed by de Rosa (2013a, 2014) is a paradigmatic option specific to the research field inspired by the Social Representation theory. It is aimed to grasp its core value as a unifying meta-theory of the social sciences, by operationalizing the investigation about any object of this supra-disciplinary field.

Table 1. The main features of the research design

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<th>Objective</th>
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<th>Main results</th>
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<tr>
<td>The aim is to compare the iconic structural elements of the brands (ancient and modern emblems and logos) of ten historical European capitals, which play a determinant role in the narration of urban history.</td>
<td>In order to identify the social representations of the brands (emblems and logos) we used: 1) a grid has been created ad hoc to identify the structural (distinctive) elements of the brands. (structured tool).</td>
<td>1) Which are the structural elements of the emblems and logos?</td>
<td>We expect to identify discrepancies and/or contrasts of meaning between institutional stems and commercial logos in terms of structure of the elements that characterize these brands since, even though both are aimed at distinctiveness and recognition: • the stems have historic roots, which often date back to the origins of the city; • logos were created in modern times, for well defined marketing purposes.</td>
<td>The stems origins from heresy and evoke the prestige of the cities through rich combinations of different kind of elements: royal, military, religious or symbolic/ideological and natural. In many cases the history of the city continues elements of legends or religious beliefs, often recalling virtues of the Saints. These elements, present in the stems, narrate the history since the cities foundation.</td>
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<td>The research compares the social representations evoked by brands (emblems and logos) of the ten European Capitals among potential first-</td>
<td>2) The “associative network” using an iconic stimuli on both stems and the logos of each of the ten Capitals, able to determine the structure, contents and potential of the Social Representations of emblems and logos (de Rosa, 2002, 2003, 2005) (projection tool).</td>
<td>2) Which are the main differences between the social representations evoked by stems and logos? (Strengths and weaknesses; attitudes etc.)</td>
<td>We expect to identify discrepancies and/or contrasts of meaning between institutional stems and commercial logos concerning attitudinal components of their social representations since, even though both are aimed at distinctiveness and recognition: • stems have historic roots, which often date back to the origins of the city; • logos were created in modern times, for well defined marketing purposes.</td>
<td>Referring to the evocative component of the social representations, the calculation of the indexes of polarities allowed us to detect a general more negative attitude towards institutional stems than towards commercial logos.</td>
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<td>The research compares the social representations evoked by brands (emblems and logos) of the ten European Capitals among potential first-</td>
<td>3) Concerning commercial logos, is it possible to improve them and how?</td>
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Figure 1.