Chapter 6
A Psychological Perspective on City Brand Positioning:
The Dimensional Organization of Sensemaking Data

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ABSTRACT

Today the competition between cities is no longer a national game, but global, pitting emerging markets against traditional Western centers of economic power and decision makers have wholeheartedly embraced branding as a way to differentiate their cities in the competition for investments, talents and visitors. Hosting mega-events has become a popular branding strategy, which however requires significant contributions from the public purse. It is therefore necessary to develop analytical approaches, which can mitigate the risk of failure brought about by aspirational overreach. This chapter aims at articulating a starting point for formulating city brand positioning strategies based on studies of contemporary city ranking literature and two case studies concerning Shanghai and Istanbul. This chapter demonstrates how sensemaking data can be converted into quantitative measures and organized in a 16 dimensional construct enabling researchers to identify the most important perceptional dimensions of the city experience for the purpose of developing realistic city brand positioning.

INTRODUCTION

The competition between cities is an international competition. It is no longer a national or regional game as it has been for most of 19th and 20th centuries. The forces of globalization are pitting the youthful and densely populated cities in emerging market countries against the traditional Western centers of commerce, finance, and power (Larsen, 2015). As a result, the contemporary thinking on city branding finds

itself intimately connected with the globalization phenomenon (U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, 1995), as well as the post-industrial notion of the knowledge economy (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1996). Thus, governments have in recent years wholeheartedly embraced city branding as a way to differentiate their cities, with a plethora of city ranking indexes that have lent themselves to measure their success or lack there off.

Although there appears to be a clear consensus on the importance of city branding, the understanding of how to successfully formulate and implement city-branding strategies is more contentious. Scholars argue that one of the problems for destination branding lies in the fact that the approaches largely draw on traditional branding theories without thorough consideration of how these methods can be transferred from the realm of product and corporate branding to entities, which are as multidimensional as cities (Hankinson, 2012). This state of flux is, for example, illustrated by a meta-analysis of 152 destination-branding studies, which revealed a lack of consensus on the actual range of city brand dimensions (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). Another challenge arises from the primarily economic aspirations of government authorities and business interests, which are often major "shareholders" in the city branding efforts. This is reflected in the fact that economic measures are overrepresented in the city ranking literature (Larsen, 2015) and in the fact that some of the most popular city typologies that are articulated by contemporary scholars are composed of primarily economic and technological dimensions, which is the case for the Global City (Sassen, 2010), the Smart City, and the Intelligent City typologies (Larsen, 2015a).

Research has indicated that in the modern knowledge-economy, the ability of cities to attract knowledge workers to strategic growth industries is as much a competitive parameter as the ability to attract and execute large-scale investment projects (Clark, 2006; Jansson & Powers, 2006). In this connection, studies have also demonstrated that the image of cities is an important factor when highly skilled knowledge workers are deciding to relocate for employment (Eggert & Schweyer, 2007; Florida, 2002; Greenhalgh, 2008; Krizner, 2007); Florida (2003) goes as far as to argue that companies should be thinking about relocating to the cities where workers want to live rather than the other way around. These insights have in turn led to the development of typologies more focused on the quality of life aspects such as the Nice City and Creative City (Larsen, 2015a). Consequently, the current state of affairs within the city branding and ranking literature is characterized by a diverse range of agendas, typologies and measures, which challenge not only comparative research, but also marketers' ability to formulate sustainable and effective city brand strategies (Clark, 2008).

This chapter therefore aims at introducing approaches and tools for the purpose of formulating city brand positioning strategies, which are based on psychological theories and case studies conducted in the aftermath of the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai and the 2010 European Capitol of Culture event in Istanbul. Specifically, this chapter will demonstrate how complex dimensional constructs can be applied to organize sensemaking data. The outcome of this analysis can be utilized as a starting point for formulating positioning strategies.

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