

Chapter 20

Touring Pittsburgh's Glocal Narratives: Leveraging City Brands for Global and Local Audiences

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ABSTRACT

The term “glocal” indicates a co-existence of local characteristics and global conditions that can lead to a co-dependency and counter-relationship between capitalism and culture. The hybridization of these spaces offers opportunities for glocal voices to become meaningful parts of the city brand, yet their inclusion within city branding techniques occurs primarily on the external level, i.e., within tourism or Destination Marketing Organizations’ (DMOs) advertisements. This chapter explores how post-industrial cities can leverage the glocal in their city brand communications via narrative. It is argued that narratives reveal authentic perceptions of the city, while highlighting the complexities of a city’s glocal identity. This study “tours” Pittsburgh’s glocal narratives emerging from face-to-face, print, and online modalities to unearth the vitality of Pittsburgh’s city brand for global and local audiences.

INTRODUCTION

Once a powerhouse of steel, iron and coke production, Pittsburgh attracted over a 10,000 immigrants to work in the mills (Hays, 1989). In its industrial heyday, Pittsburgh produced half of the nation’s steel, attributing to cloud of smoke and soot residue continuously hanging over the city. Like many Rust Belt cities, Pittsburgh has suffered economic decline ever since its mills began to close in the 1970s. Since then, Pittsburgh has lost 11% of its population and turned to several branding campaigns and expensive flagship projects to clean up the city’s industrial image.

Even as little as fifteen years ago, Pittsburgh could not shake their dark past as the “Dirty City,” “Smoky City,” or as Boston columnist, James Parton wrote, “Hell with the Lid Off” (Kalson, 2003). Today, Pittsburgh looks to brighten their future by focusing on the city’s rising entertainment, tourism,

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medical, and technology sectors. “We’ve got it all going on—great food, outdoor adventure, history at every corner, tax-free shopping, a thriving Cultural District—and our familiarity with Lord Stanley and Mr. Lombardi makes us a sports lover’s dream!”. This statement from VisitPittsburgh’s Official Visitors Guide summarizes the city’s appeal to multiple audiences. Pittsburgh was named one of America’s Most Livable Cities in 2010 and 2011, and ranked first on *The Economist’s* 2014 Most Livable City (on the mainland) list. In 2012, Pittsburgh made *National Geographic Intelligent Traveler* magazine’s 20 Must-see Destinations. In 2015, *Condé Nast Traveler* named Pittsburgh one of the top three places in the world to visit. Citing the city’s history, food, and art as evidence of Pittsburgh’s allure, Condé Nast correspondent, Brent Burket (2015), states:

The furnaces are long gone, but this city’s on fire. Pittsburgh reinvigorates my love of art every time I visit. The Carnegie Museum of Art, The Warhol, Mattress Factory, and Wood Street Galleries have been on a curatorial tear in recent years. The restaurant scene is also alight, led by Cure and Bar Marco, but hit the old school Primanti Brothers for the best sandwich of your life.

Pittsburgh also hosted the 2009 G-20 Summit on World Economy and recently opened one the greenest buildings on earth, the Center for Sustainable Landscapes at Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens. Not to mention that Pittsburgh has become a mecca of Hollywood production with over 1,000 movies being filmed in the area.

Pittsburgh is just one example of how the rise of global competition and the fall of manufacturing has transformed places from industrial-based to knowledge-based environments, forcing cities to focus more on social and cultural factors and less on labor and production (Hubbard, 1996). Much like the branding of corporations for public consumption, cities have branded their most appealing features by targeting favorable perceptions of the city and framing those images for insider (residents, local businesses, and organizations) and outsider (tourists, potential residents, and international travellers) audiences. “City branding is understood as the means both for achieving competitive advantage in order to increase inward investment and tourism, and also for achieving community development, reinforcing local identity and identification of the citizens with their city” (Kavaratzis, 2004, p. 70). Mihalís Kavaratzis’ description of city branding suggests that a successful city brand undertakes a joint objective of promoting the glocal.

A term combining global and local, “glocal” indicates a co-existence of local and/or cultural characteristics and global conditions that lead to a co-dependency of national, local, and global issues (Holton, 2005; Wellman, 2002). Glocal further designates a counter-relationship between capitalism and the promotion of cultural issues (Smith, 2001). Scholars note that glocal communication plays a significant role in emulsifying private and public perceptions (Shi-xu, 2015; Govers & Go, 2009), implying that the hybridization of social and spatial environments offers opportunities for glocal voices to become meaningful parts of the city brand. Nonetheless, glocal considerations are primarily communicated to outsiders via tourism or destination marketing organizations’ (DMOs) campaigns (Pike, 2005; McCarthy, 2005), and only appear to residents as corollary results from flagship projects meant to (re)brand a city’s urban and cultural quarters (Evans, 2015). This chapter suggests that one way of unifying multiple approaches to a city brand, and enhancing the glocal in the process, could be through narrative.

Literature in social scientific and place branding domains suggests that a dialectical relationship between narrative and the symbolic meanings that publics attach to shared social spaces exists (Peel & Lloyd, 2008; Jensen, 2007). Hermeneutical readings of these narratives and discourses potentially reveal personal and public opinions of the city, and by extension, the city brand (Hudak, 2015; Peel &

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