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.

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).

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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

Figure 1.

Table I. The main features of the research design

Objective	Methodology	Questions	Hypotheses	Main results
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.	In order to identify the social representations of the brands (stems and logos) we used: 1) a **grid** has been created ad hoc to identify the **structural (distinctive) elements** of the brands. (structured tool)	1) Which are the **structural elements** of the stems and logos?	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: • **stems** have historic roots, which often date back to the origins of the city;	The **stems** origins from heraldry and evoke the prestige of the cities through rich combinations of different kind of **elements: royal, military, religious or symbolic/mythological and natural.** In many cases the history of the city contains 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.
			• **logos** were created in modern times, for well defined marketing purposes.	On the commercial **logos** complex figures disappear completely, leaving space to modern elements: **essential lines, abstract signs and circles innovating the brand and referring to socio-recreational, emotional, architectural and design aspects.** These logos aim "to sell the city product", starting from the assumption that places can be branded just like products to maximize their attractiveness and their enjoyment by visitors.
The research compares the **social representations** evoked by brands **(stems and logos)** of the ten European Capitals among potential first-visitors.	2) the **"associative network"** using as iconic stimuli both the stems and the logos of each of the ten Capitals, able to determine the structure, contents and polarity of the **Social Representations of stems and logos** (de Rosa, 2002, 2003,2005) (projective tool)	2) Which are the main **differences between the social representations evoked by stems and logos?** (Strengths and weaknesses; attitudes etc.)	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.	Referring to the evaluative 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.** In particular, the stems with the lower index of polarity are those of Berlin and Warsaw, while the institutional stem of Lisbon is the only case where the institutional stem has a more positive evaluation than the commercial logo. The reason has been found in the contents of the different brands: the richness of details -that take us back in time to the colonialism- and the predominance of yellow are the strengths of the stem; while, having taken over the central part of the emblem, using only the black colour and clean lines constitute leads to more negative evaluation of the commercial logo.
		3.Concerning **commercial logos, is it possible to improve** them and how?	• We expect that it is possible to improve some logos by taking into account social representations of the cities.	It is possible to improve some logos. I.e. while the commercial logo of Rome is not among the best ones in terms of approval rating, the idea of an increased focus on a city with which one can co-establish a communication able to evoke a more intimate relational dimension should reinforce -with a positive effect- the trend already registered for brands like Paris. To embody the emotional-relational dimension seems right also for other capitals, such as Helsinki, London and Vienna.

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