CONCEPT VARIATIONS ON DESTINATION, PLACE AND NATION MARKETING AND BRANDING

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Abstract: *This study presents the theoretical perspectives found in various specialized literature regarding the dynamics of branding forms. At the same time, the main principles that were the basis of the research development in the field of place branding, from the international scientific flow and from Romania are presented. Terms such as 'place marketing' and 'place branding' are examined, while also appreciating the occurrence of variations of the terms such as 'city branding', 'region branding' or 'country branding' and, from the analysis of tourism studies and marketing on vacations, the term 'destination branding'.*

Key words: *nation branding, destination branding, place marketing, destination marketing.*

1. Introduction

The knowledge flow devoted by literature to the issue of 'national identity', on one hand, and the effect of the country of origin, on the other hand, have merged relatively recently. An early manifestation of this convergence can be observed with the publication of a special issue in the *Journal of Brand Management* "the JBM special issue provided for the first time a focused forum on this topic and included papers by leading international scholars including Philip Kotler and David Gertner, Nicolas Papadopoulos and Louise Heslop, as well as papers by leading consultants in the field such as Wally Olins, Fiona Gilmore and Creenagh Lodge" (apud de Chernatony, 2008, p. 20). This issue generated such great interest that editors and publishers decided to create a new scientific journal, called *Place Branding*, which was launched in November 2004 and is dedicated strictly to the branding process of nations, cities or regions.

But the most important work, representative for "what has now become known as the emerging field of nation branding is the 1993 book *Marketing Places: Attracting Investment, Industry, and Tourism to Cities, States and Nations*" (de Chernatony, 2008, p. 20), signed by Ph. Kotler et al. Although this work is written from an economic perspective, focusing on marketing strategies, and not on the point of view of brand management

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paradigm, "it sets the scene for much of the work that has followed in the field. To put the evolution of nation branding into yet wider historical perspective, it could be claimed that nations have always branded themselves – through their symbols, currency, anthems, names and so on – and that it is just the terminology of nation branding that is new, rather than the practice itself" (de Chernatony, 2008, p. 20).

2. Destination Branding or Location Branding

In order to make the explanatory approach easier and to encourage the use of the term in one sense (destination = geographic location), we start from "the general supposition that a 'destination' brand denotes the tourism dimension of a place is widely supported" (Hanna and Rowley, 2008, p. 64). It's a concept "related to the marketing and branding of a place in terms of its leisure and tourism" (Hankinson, 2005 apud Maheshwari and Vandewalle, 2008, p. 4). To underline more this idea, we can accept the fact that "where branding using the term 'destination' implies a tourism perspective, place branding provides an even wider perspective that would include all interactions of a place with its environment, including political, outside investment, trade, immigration and media issues. Both destination branding and place branding could include country, region or city branding." (Govers and Go, 2009, p. 14)

The same characterization, more nuanced, is taken up by Kerr: "it is in the context of tourism that a geographic location is (or includes) a destination brand" (2006, pp. 276-277).

This author takes over the variant proposed by Ritchie and Ritchie (1998 apud Kerr, 2006, p. 277): "name, symbol, logo, word or other graphic sign that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of destination experience."

As stated above, branding can be applied to a destination, space or location, an idea underlined by Hankinson (2001): "The geographical areas to which branding is being applied thus vary considerably in size. The product itself can also be complex and consist of several locations (such as a collection of famous sites) forming a conceptual entity rather than a single place" (pp. 127-128). And Kerr proposes a synonym for this process: location branding, characterized by "a summation of the location's infrastructure, people, industries and quality of life" (2006, p. 281).

Two researchers at the Texas A&M University from the United States, Park and Petrick, conducted an exploratory research project with descriptive results in 2005 to synthesize the theoretical perspectives of destination branding practitioners using a sample of eight destinations of countries and US states (*i.e.*, Scotland, Singapore, Hawaii, Missouri, Oregon, Texas, Wisconsin and Utah) - out of 25 considered active at that time. They found the following synonyms for destination branding: (re)positioning, image creation, image reconstruction of a destination, and they proposed a new significance of destination branding as "selecting a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish a destination through positive image-building" (Cai, 2002 apud Park and Petrick, 2006, p. 262). From this definition we draw attention to the idea launched by 'positive image', this being also

revealed by the results of their research; thus, the respondents argued that the main reasons for them to support a destination branding project are: the opportunity to create a desirable image that can attract tourists; differentiating a competition destination and positioning it to attract tourists; managing an image; increasing the economic contribution of a destination through tourism.

The conclusion of the two researchers is that the branding of destinations is a means used by practitioners to create or change an image by using brand elements (such as the slogan or logo), but it is also necessary to consider the differentiation of this area of image management, arguing that destination branding involves more than just an image, "as it contains unique identity" (Park and Petrick, 2006, p. 263).

The perspective of Mundt (2002 apud Park and Petrick, 2006, p. 264) contradicts this differentiation, arguing that 'branding' is used as a substitute for the term 'image creation' or 'image building', in other words "an old wine in a new bottle", a different jargon that emphasizes the need for unequivocal marketing attention to a destination that attracts as many tourists as possible.

So, we can conclude that destination branding is the sum of a person's perceptions of a place (based on experience, prejudice or hearing), which influences attitudes towards destination at an emotional level. This last point highlights the dynamic relationship between destination and potential tourists, but also the emotional associations that exist between the two entities. It also indicates the difference between destination brands and manufactured products. And it is a practical definition that indicates the fundamental notion of competitive differentiation or "perceive a difference among brands in a product category (i.e., positioning)" (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011, p. 466), which is the main purpose of the branding process.

3. Place Marketing, Destination Marketing and Locational Marketing

The concept of place marketing emerged in the early 1990s and the works of Kotler et al. (from 1999 and 2002) were representative at that time, as they manage to "include a presentation of the best practices and a theoretical approach. In 2002, The Journal of Brand Management published a special edition dedicated to place branding and place marketing. Also in 2002, Anholt writes, in the preface of the above-mentioned journal, that 766 works have been published by 789 authors on the topic of place marketing, since 1950" (apud Nicolescu, 2008, p. 6).

Hankinson (2001) expresses a similar opinion: "A review of the literature reveals a broad range of academic interest with regard to locations such as countries, cities, towns and regions as the focus of marketing activity. As it might be expected, each perspective delineates its own domain and set of constructs, sometimes using different words to describe the same ideas. In contrast to the marketing of locations, there are relatively few articles to be found in the academic literature with regard to the promotion of locations as brands. This is in contrast to the increasing evidence in the press that branding, at least as a concept, is increasingly being applied to locations." (p. 129)

Place can be used as a term that would mean cities, metropolitan areas, regions, communities, countries, states, countries or nations. Also, "the term 'place' rather refers

to a much more holistic concept than to destination'" (Briciu, 2013, p. 9). Adding the term 'place' (or sometimes 'geographical') to 'marketing' term, it can lead to a type of specific product to which an ordinary process will be applied and not a totally different process. There are researchers who, due to academic training and practical experience in product marketing, consider that there is no practical difficulty in replacing physical products with places (see Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008, pp. 151-152). A place is defined by Kotler et al. (2002) as being "nation-state, a geopolitical physical space; a region or state; a cultural, historical or ethic bounded location; a central city and its surrounding populations; a market with various definable attributes; an industry's home base and a clustering of like-industries and their supplier; a psychological attribute of relations between people" (apud Azevedo, 2004, p. 106). In other words, "it is something that many cities, regions and countries across the globe are now actively engaged in, and uses techniques normally associated with the creation of classical product brands" (Ward, 1998 apud Maheshwari and Vandewalle, 2008, p. 4).

The same vision is shared by Deffner and Metaxas (from the University of Thessaly, Greece), who advocated adapting the generic and very popular model of '4p' (product, price, placement, promotion) defined by Kotler and Armstrong (2005), and "its performance in the procedure of place/ city marketing" (apud Deffner and Metaxas, 2007, p. 369); in addition, various regions "have been elaborating and implementing particular competitive policies, such as place marketing plans and strategic plans in order to attract the potential target markets (new investments, tourists, new residents, etc.)" (Deffner and Metaxas, 2007, p. 369). Also, the adoption of some "strategic marketing management tools and conscious branding" is to be noted (Kotler and Gertner, 2002, p. 253).

At the same time, Kotler et al. (2002) defined place marketing as "designing a place to satisfy the needs of its target markets. It succeeds when citizens and business are pleased with their community and when the expectations of visitors and investors are met" (apud Azevedo, 2004, p. 106). This is possible only when some added value is generated and "the place needs to communicate its features and benefits through a vigorous image and communication program" (Rainisto, 2003 apud Azevedo, 2004, p. 106).

Kavaratzis and Ashworth identify a variation of the term in the form of 'locational marketing', explaining that in many cases the product is a location, and what is sold is a geographical position, the 'locus': "Property agents and tourism promoters, amongst others, are clearly and unavoidably selling actual locations. In these cases, the typology begins to move away from the place as identifier to the place as product. It is not only a house or a holiday in a particular location that is being sold but in many respects the location itself. Marketing will often select, modify and manipulate geographical nomenclature to achieve a maximum benefit creating in effect its own geographies. In one sense, this is certainly place marketing as we define it here. Places are being treated as marketable commodities and exchanged in markets" (2008, p. 153).

A more recent point of view in the field of place marketing considers, as an alternative approach, the use of 'cultural planning' in the process of local development, which could benefit in defining or building the local identity and the promotion of cultural heritage or it may "contribute to the sense of place" (Murray, 2001 apud Deffner and Metaxas, 2007, p. 370) – all these, in fact, leading towards the evolution of place marketing to what is

defined as place branding. In the same context, we can also add the new "creative and innovative way of using digital media tools for engaging citizens" (Nechita, 2019, p. 161) in urban or place changes and local development.

Or, as a recent trend, place marketing has become a prominent feature of the economic development strategy, in terms of place development. Kotler notes: "Place development means the development for a place of a systematic long-term marketing strategy, aimed at identifying and developing the natural and potential attributes of an area or region" (Kotler et al., 2002 apud Nicolescu, 2008, p. 7).

3. Conclusions

From the point of view of marketing methods, branding (through place marketing, destination marketing, destination branding) has a single clearly defined purpose, to sell products, services, places and destinations – as the dynamic of branding perspectives shows us the differences between 'mind-share branding' (of mental associations), 'emotional branding' and 'viral branding' (Briciu and Briciu, 2016, p. 140). To achieve this, the steps taken in the branding process are related and thought of from the product perspective or in other words, in terms of supply, market and target group(s). "Marketers often like to think of brands as a psychological phenomenon which stems from the perceptions of individual consumers. But what makes a brand powerful is the collective nature of these perceptions. The stories have become conventional and so are continually reinforced because they are treated as truths in everyday interactions" (Holt, 2004, p. 3).

In order to synthesize the information previously expressed in this paper, we could state that the term 'nation branding' is introduced in the plan of the theory and practice by S. Anholt, in 1996, having as predecessors, since the 1990s, place branding and place marketing, as recognized fields of study.

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