

15th IAMB CONFERENCE

Lisbon, Portugal | April 17-19, 2013

Culture as a way of Redefining Image: Guimarães, European Cultural Capital 2012

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Abstract

In a highly competitive environment, where needs and desires of individuals are in constant evolution, one of the main challenges of cities lies in their ability to differentiate themselves and add value for residents, workers, visitors and investors. In order to attract potential target audiences (new residents, workers, tourists, investors) and maximizing the city's potential, place marketing actions and city branding techniques have become key instruments for local governments. Therefore, some cities have elected culture as a privileged means of gaining competitive advantage and disassociate themselves from an industrial tradition.

In this sense, the goal of this study is to understand how a medium-sized city with an industrial background can redefine its image through culture. Given the nature of the problem, it has been adopted a case-study research methodology, having been selected Guimarães European Cultural Capital 2012 (ECC 2012) brand as unit of analysis. The analysis was conducted using a mixed approach based on desk research and questionnaires to the brand's target audience (n = 938). More precisely, this study focused on the analysis the Guimarães ECC 2012 brand, in terms of its identity, objet and market. The study proved that the ECC 2012 event enabled to develop a strong, unique and distinct identity and renew the pride of its citizens. Simultaneously, the event permitted to add a new life to the city, which incited a visit of "old" and "new" visitors.

Keywords: city marketing, city brand, culture

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Extended Abstract

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Introduction

In a global economy, where competition between cities for foreign investment, visitors and residents has been strongly increasing, the simple adoption of strategies designed to promote the city is not enough (Kotler et al., 1993). Consequently, it is important for cities the adoption of a marketing strategy, instead of purely operational marketing initiatives focused only on the dissemination and promotion of the city. The formulation of a marketing strategy capable of creating a strong, unique and distinct identity for the city, that somehow is valued by its target audience is a way for cities to assert themselves in an increasingly competitive environment (Almeida, 2004). Therefore, for the city to position itself favourably in relation to other cities it needs to have a positive image and to be able to respond to a changing market. It is in this context of globalization and increasing competition between cities that the application of marketing techniques finds its foundation, in the sense that it allows cities to strengthen and sustain their position and achieve a competitive advantage. In this sense, culture and cultural events, such as European Cultural Capital (ECC), have been seen as a way to improve the city's image, strengthen its identity, attract new audiences and stimulate economic and social development and urban regeneration.

The aim of this study is to understand how a medium-sized city with an industrial background can redefine its image through culture. To this end, the study analyzes the Guimarães ECC 2012 brand in terms of its identity, object and market. Thus, the research questions of this study are the following: Q1: What is the identity of the Guimarães ECC 2012 brand?; Q2: How was the marketing-mix of the Guimarães ECC 2012 brand developed?; and Q3: What is the target audiences reaction to Guimarães ECC 2012 brand?

The research is organized as follows. Firstly, it is presented a briefly literature review on place marketing and city branding. Secondly, the research methodology is explained, regarding data collection and the analysis methods. Finally, the last section presents the main findings and conclusions of the study.

Literature Review

City marketing, as stated by Guerreiro (2008, p. 4), can be understood as a “process by which urban activities are planned and developed, as far as possible, from the point of view of demand (i.e. target audiences) in order to maximize the economic and social city functions, according to the goals set”. The application of marketing techniques to cities shouldn’t be seen only as a means of selling the city but as an essential tool in the planning and development of the city and the local economy. In this sense, city marketing can be an effective tool to turn the city attractive and competitive in its target markets (Metaxas, 2010).

According to Avraham (2004), city marketing operates for different types of audiences, including an internal audience that the city must retain (residents, workers and organizations installed in the area), and an external audience that the city needs to attract (residents of other cities, visitors, tourists and investors). For this reason, it is important to establish a link between the city and its target audiences (Kavaratzis, 2009). Thus, the crucial issue for the city marketing is the perception formed by the audiences in relation to the city (Graham, 2002). The encounter between the individual and the city produces a number of different messages, sometimes conflicting with each other, that form an image of the city in the mind of the individual (Kavaratzis, 2004). Therefore, the city’s image can be defined as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions of individuals towards the city (Kotler *et al.*, 1993). While the city’s image is the result of a passive process of communication on which the influence of the city is limited. The city’s identity is “a sum of characteristics that differentiate the place from other place” (Rainisto, 2003, p. 73).

In this sense, the formulation of a strategy capable of creating a unique and strong city’s identity, which is valued by its target audiences, is essential to improve city’s position (Almeida, 2004). As a result, the process of developing and managing a brand should be continuous, consistent and integrated into a global marketing strategy (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005).

According to Lencastre and Côte-Real (2007), the creation of a city’s brand must be founded on three fundamental pillars: brand identity, brand object and brand market. This perspective is central to our research.

Brand Identity

Brand identity is defined by the American Marketing Association as the “name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers”¹. Thus, Lencastre and Côte-Real (2007) distinguish three levels of brand identity (identity-mix): core identity (brand name), current identity (graphical expressions of the brand) and enlarged identity (other signs, such as the slogan or character).

Brand Object

The object of the brand can be “normalized as a series of concentric levels of marketing actions developed around the core product” (Lencastre and Côte-Real, 2007, p. 107). The product-mix of the brand can be more or less extensive depending on the number of categories the brand offers. For Kotler *et al.* (1993), city marketing-mix must be founded on four strategies, which represent the basis for a competitive advantage of the cities: urban design (place as character), infrastructure (place as a fixed environment), basic services (place as a service provider) and attractions (place as entertainment and recreation).

¹ <http://www.marketingpower.com/Pages/default.aspx>, accessed November 20th, 2012.

Brand Market

The third and last pillar of the brand is the market, i.e., the brand target audiences (public-mix) and their response to the brand (Lencastre and Côte-Real, 2007). Different audiences create different interpretations and reactions to the brand (response-mix). Based on these responses and their acceptance, it is possible to determine the assertiveness of the outlined strategy. In this sense, Anholt (2006) proposed a tool for evaluating the attractiveness of a city based on 6 P's: presence (city reputation), place (physical aspect of the city), potential (economic and educational opportunities offered by the city), pulse (city lifestyle), people (features of the local population) and pre-requisites (basic qualities of the city).

In this sense, some cities have invested in the identification of unique expressions of identity and used culture and mega events, as ECC, to reinforce its competitiveness and attractiveness (Sjøholt, 1999). This research analysis the last of these events: Guimarães ECC 2012.

Research Methodology

Given the nature of the problem, the research methodology adopted was the case-study. As unit of analyses, we have selected the Guimarães ECC 2012 brand. Guimarães is a medium-sized city, where the secondary sector is the main basis of both economy and employment. Additionally, the city has a vast historical and cultural heritage, as well as the visibility given by the title of European Cultural Capital 2012. Thus, the city has privileged conditions to enhance its image. Therefore, this study is intended to understand how this transformation has been developing and which has been the impact on its target audiences.

Research Design and Data Collection

The empirical analysis was conducted using a mixed approach based on both desk research and intensive application of questionnaires to the brand's target audiences.

The combination of data collected through desk research aimed to answer Q1 and Q2. For this study, it was adopted the three levels of brand identity proposed by Lencastre and Côte-Real (2007) and the variables of marketing-mix from the model of Kotler *et al.* (1993). The responses obtained by questionnaire were measured using five-point Likert scale and the indicators for measuring the image of the city (Q3) were adopted from Anholt (2006). The analysis of the questionnaires was performed using the IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 20, and the Microsoft Excel 2007.

Sample Design

The random sampling frame consists of 189 residents, 224 workers, 299 audience of ECC events and 226 potential visitors of the city. As a result, the effective sample size of the study was 938.

Findings and Conclusions

During the year of 2012, Guimarães was the hostess of the ECC event. Guimarães selected as central theme "Identity and Innovation" as a way to express the interaction between two perspectives: "the connection of the city to its past as the crib of the nation, the identity and the tradition; but at the same time it can be a creative, entrepreneurial, participative and dynamic city" (Fundação Cidade de Guimarães, 2010, p. 64).

The main objective of Guimarães ECC 2012 brand creation was extending the city symbolic value. To accomplish this, the city invested in a brand identity that intends to reflect

its cultural diversity, as well as, its historical legacy. Therefore, it is notorious that the city drawn the current identity (graphical expressions of the brand) on its positive and consolidated image as historic city and heritage. Likewise, it is clear that brand identity-mix appeals to the involvement of the brand audience and sense of belonging to the place, as well as to the creative ability, innovation, art and culture.

In order to enhance the city's identity, it is crucial that the city's physical appearance, the infrastructures, the services and the attractions convey a consistent message to the city's target audiences. As a result, and regarding to the question Q2, it stand out as the strongest elements of the city marketing-mix the continuing investment in the preservation of the city's heritage, the enlargement of the city's cultural offer and the development of projects and educational infrastructures that enable the creation of new cultural products.

In relation to the perception of brand target audiences, the majority of the respondents have a positive image of Guimarães, particularly as regards to its "heritage" and "beauty". From the six components defined by Anholt (2006), "People" has the highest rate and "Presence" has the lowest evaluation. This means that the city's target audiences have an excellent perception of city's residents and city's safety, but less good impression of the city's notoriety, namely its international notoriety. Despite the city's image as a cultural city isn't yet consolidated, there is already a positive perception of its cultural aspects.

The ECC 2012 event enabled to develop a strong, unique and distinct identity and renew the pride of its citizens. Simultaneously, the event permitted to add a new life to the city, which incited a visit of "old" and "new" visitors and create the bases in terms of infrastructures and knowledge to accomplish the goal of cultural city.

The main limitation of this research is the representativeness of the results, since it isn't possible to generalize the findings of a case study. In the same way, it isn't possible to extrapolate the findings to the universe of the target audiences of the Guimarães ECC 2012 brand, because the study focused only on residents, workers, audiences of ECC events and potential visitors perceptions, leaving aside cultural institutions, partners, sponsors and European market.

Given the limitations of this study, further research might examine in greater depth the image of the city with a broader sample (e.g. sample per share) that includes all of the target audiences of the brand (local community, audience of the events, cultural institutions, partners, sponsors and European market). Another research direction is to compare the results of this study with the results from future studies of other ECC, particularly in terms of the city's image.

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