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Title

Stakeholder engagement in the city branding process

Abstract

This paper explores **perceptions of** stakeholder engagement in the city branding process from the perspective of two post-industrial cities: Sheffield, UK and Essen, Germany. This qualitative research utilises a multi case study approach, which allowed for semi-structure interviews and semiotics to be used. Preliminary findings highlight that there are four stakeholder ‘levels’. Each of these stakeholder groupings is involved in the city branding process to some extent. Findings suggest that the degree of involvement strongly depends on the primary stakeholders, who are seen as key decision-makers in the branding process. These primary stakeholders select other stakeholders that ‘can’ be involved in the branding process. Although this may be beneficial it is vital to provide more opportunities and incorporate stakeholders that are willing to participate in the branding process. Alienating stakeholders may also lead to **losing** parts of an identity that is based on heritage. The focus is on two cities with a highly industrialised background, thus findings may not be applicable to cities without this heritage. The paper looks at both stakeholder engagement and city branding, thereby **proposing** four layers of stakeholder involvement in the city branding process.

Keywords - City branding, case study, stakeholder theory, Essen, Sheffield

Paper type – Research paper

Introduction

This article focuses on stakeholder engagement in the city branding process of two former steel and coal-mining cities: Sheffield, UK and Essen, Germany. Contributions of this research develop through expanding extant research, by focusing on primary, secondary, tertiary, and quaternary stakeholders, and exploring their understanding of and involvement in the branding process.

Although city branding has a long-standing history it remains vague, with gaps in theory and practice (Braun 2012). It has “become a prevailing activity within city management” (Ashworth and Kavaratzis 2009: 520), which is enhanced through the rise of globalisation, making it necessary for places, including cities, to differentiate themselves in order to compete for development funds, attract and retain residents, and appeal to the tourism industry (Braun 2012). Cities are not simply competing on a national level, but rather globally and continuously exploring new ways of promoting and showcasing themselves to their stakeholders, such as residents, tourists, businesses, and governmental bodies (Riza *et al* 2012). Within the European Union city branding takes centre stage and is incorporated within the wider policy agenda. Policy makers recognise that “cities play a crucial role as engines of the economy, as places of connectivity, creativity and innovation, and as centres of services for their surrounding areas” (EURP 2011: VI).

The purpose of city branding is to create a distinctive identity that distinguishes individual cities and creates a positive image in the stakeholders’ minds (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2005). Although city branding receives increased attention and is a vital tool in a competitive environment, cities struggle to implement effective branding strategies (Hankinson 2001). Challenges are: first, the effects of city branding activities cannot always be anticipated; second, clear allocations of responsibilities for each stakeholder group are lacking; and third, various stakeholder perceptions are not accounted for within the city branding process (Anholt 2008; Moilanen 2015). Although stakeholder involvement in the city branding process has been subject to previous investigations, extant research predominantly focuses on only one stakeholder group at a time (Merrilees *et al* 2012). This research contributes to the current debate by investigating multiple stakeholders and their understanding of the branding process:

- 1) How do stakeholders engage in the city branding process?
- 2) What are the similarities and differences of the city brand's perception among key stakeholders?

This study draws upon a cross-national comparison between two post-industrial cities that strove through their industrial heritage. As former manufacturing cities their images and reputations have suffered from negative connotations of being 'dirty' and 'grim', which still carries forward today.

Literature Review

City branding

City branding has received attention since 2004 yet it has not translated into the mainstream marketing literature (Merrilees *et al* 2013). Its importance becomes noticeable with city branding authorities emerging continuously, who strive to find new ways of setting their city apart from the global competition (Riza *et al* 2012). Cities have to update and promote their 'unique' offerings regularly (ibid). This can be challenging, as city branding concerns large numbers of stakeholders, who may lack an understanding of the process and show limited buy-in (Moilanen 2015), which might make catering for stakeholder needs impossible.

Although the AMA's (2014) definition of a brand as a sign or symbol that distinguishes products from others is commonly cited, it is rather limited in the city branding context, as it neglects the multifaceted identity and intangible elements forming a city and its vicinities (Skinner 2008). Boatwright *et al* (2009) highlight that a brand's requisites include being "consistent with the organisation's capabilities and its branded products" (p.38). This interpretation follows a major research strand within the city branding literature that sees corporate marketing at its core. Corporate marketing has a strong service and relationship focus that involves internal and external stakeholders across constituencies (Powell 2011). The notion of an emotional bond complements the city branding nature and has led authors (e.g. Braun 2012) to embed elements of corporate marketing within their city branding theories and practices. The transformational nature of cities is similar to those of organisations that continuously change their appearance and (in) tangible features. Although corporate marketing sheds some light on the city branding process, a difference is that cities develop strategies and guidelines in a collaborative manner that involves a variety of stakeholders with different agendas. Contrary to companies that have a manager 'enforcing' a clear-cut mission, cities need to consider a wider variety of participants (Merrilees *et al* 2013).

A further school of thought sees city branding as part of urban planning, which focuses on tackling issues concerning the signification and discourse of cities and their symbolic meanings (Löfgren 2014). The city and its vicinities are divided into various categories, such as districts, neighbourhoods, or buildings, each of which serve the needs of different stakeholders (Hankinson 2001). Cities such as London have a theatre district (e.g. Shaftsbury Avenue), shopping malls (e.g. Westfield), and sports centres (e.g. Wimbledon), which represent different facets of the umbrella

brand. Although ideally these vicinities cater for stakeholder needs, a political agenda guides the process and can affect the implementation of branding strategies. This implies that cities are strongly influenced by governance factors, which determine how far the various city facets comply with the wider branding strategy and thus, may not consider all stakeholders' suggestions (Braun 2012).

Tourism marketing is a further theme in the literature. The 21st century is shaped by globalisation, in which destinations compete globally for tourism, investment, and attractiveness (Gartner 2014). Destinations are increasingly treated as and transformed into brands that can create an emotional bond with stakeholders, by adding value to the overarching 'product'. Creating this relationship with stakeholders and establish brand saliency is vital for any destination brand and can influence the city branding activities (Warnaby and Medway 2013).

Although there is a debate within the literature that contends that places and consumer goods/services can be branded in the same manner, this seems to be general practice. A theme that emerges throughout the city branding literature is stakeholder engagement and subsequently creating an emotional bond that allows these destinations to create a unique selling proposition (USP).

Stakeholder engagement

Conceptual frameworks utilised to underpin city branding are those established within corporate branding (Braun 2012). According to Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2009) understanding cities as corporations facilitates the development of an identity that is multifaceted and portrays a positive image to its audiences. In order to create a successful city brand stakeholders need to have a common vision of the brand's core values and benefits, whilst furthermore have effective relationships that support ideas (Moilanen 2015). Challenges are not only knowing who the stakeholders are that are involved in the brand creation, but also being able to communicate effectively to different audiences (ibid), which was highlighted in a study that investigated the city of Bradford, UK. Findings indicate that different stakeholders prioritised different aspects of the place, which led to the development of conflicting objectives (Trueman *et al* 2004).

Past research predominantly explored how stakeholders can influence the city's image (Gopalan and Narayan 2010), the various levels of stakeholder engagement (Stokes 2008), and typologies of stakeholders, which looked at their ability to influence resource allocations (Ford *et al* 2009). Extant research fails to investigate not only the governance settings in which branding strategies take place, but also the effect decisions can have on the overall branding process and the implementation of various strategies (Braun 2012). The literature that links city branding and stakeholders is highly fragmented (Merrilees *et al* 2012). Although "brand value is dependent on a number of stakeholders" (Jones 2005: 28), the relationship between branding and stakeholders has not been validated empirically. Merrilees *et al* (2012: 1036) stress "the importance of multiple stakeholders for understanding city brands" both conceptually and practically. Moreover, Kavaratzis

(2012) calls for a more participation-oriented practice in the city branding context, as stakeholders are more than consumers in that they create meaning and legitimise place brands.

Methodology

This research investigates city branding in Sheffield and Essen by exploring stakeholder engagement, perceptions of the city brand image and the overall management process. Although case study research lacks generalizability it allows exploring these cities within their natural boundaries (Hankinson 2001). Primary data collection rather than conceptualisations form the basis of this article, which contributes to existing literature (Merrilees *et al* 2012).

Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with an average duration of 75 minutes, and leaflets collected for semiotic analysis (Table 1). The interviewees were split evenly between the cities and conducted in German and English. Challenges included: first, questions could not be directly translated, but had to be adapted for ease of flow, which led to slightly different information across interviews. Second, interviews had to be carefully planned and key phrases and paragraphs translated into English. The translation process took several days and was reviewed up to five times to guarantee that the content of the passages was neither falsified nor keywords and expressions missed.

Please insert Table 1 here

With multiple researchers coding data the process followed **the** seven-step guide (Easterby-Smith *et al* 2008) of familiarisation, reflection, conceptualisation, cataloguing concepts, re-coding, linking, and re-evaluation in order to guarantee continuity, coherence, and clarity. The coding process took several months in which each researcher analysed the interviews separately, before discussing emerging themes and patterns as a group. Data sets were iteratively coded up to seven times with categories and sub-categories being established throughout the process. Discrepancies were discussed in-depth and after careful consideration either brought forward for further analysis or dismissed. Findings that emerged, including those that did not find unanimous agreement, were presented to participants for validation.

Participants were purposefully chosen according to their ability to best answer the research questions. In order to strengthen the comparative aspects interviewees with similar profiles were selected, which limited the pool of potential participants. Although the number of interviews can be seen as a limitation, a majority of interviewees were able to provide information on both cities, having had personal interactions and/or work experience in both. The data sets collected were rich in nature and provided an insight into the research questions set for this study. Natural saturation of data was reached with no further new themes and patterns emerging from the data. The findings presented in this article are preliminary.

Sheffield and Essen have an industrial heritage that still resembles a strong manufacturing association in people's minds. Sheffield has historical connections with the steel industry dating back to the 18th century. Made famous for its stainless steel invention in 1913, Sheffield's industry was striving and made the city synonymous with high quality products (Power *et al* 2010). The 20th century saw a dramatic decline of steel production and changed Sheffield's industrial landscapes from a manufacturing based economy towards a service-led industry. Although the steel industry is no longer the main employer, the associations with its steel past and the 'grim' image remain.

Essen is the second largest city in the Ruhr conglomerate with an industrial history dating back to 1379 (RuhrGuide 2011). Although Essen's industrial past and its cultural heritage is older than that of Berlin and/or Dresden (Ruhr.2010 2010), Essen's individual identity is often overshadowed due to being part of the Ruhr. In 1812 Essen became the world's largest coal mining city (Essen.Marketing 2010), which changed the city's landscape and drove economic growth. Previously synonymous with a dirty coal-mining image, today, Essen seeks to portray itself as a city with 'Wohlfühlcharakter' (feel-good factor) after successfully bidding for the European Capital of Culture (ibid).

Research limitations are: first, the sample size, which focuses on two cities with a manufacturing background that are actively trying to change their image. This however, provides the opportunity to explore stakeholder engagement and perceptions in-depth. Second, the sample size is not a 'true' representation of the population, but rather was selected strategically.

Findings & Discussion

Stakeholder engagement in the city branding process

Stakeholders either affect or are affected by the objectives set for the city, and should be retained and/or attracted in order to strengthen a competitive advantage (Riza *et al* 2012). Ideally, stakeholders create an emotional bond with the city and establish brand salience (Hankinson 2006). A 'need for affiliation' emerged as a dominant theme from the data. This incorporates not only a common vision for businesses and other institutions involved in the branding process, but also creating a sense of belonging among locals, tourists, and residents. A challenge that was identified by a Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) manager was that *"I think the biggest mistakes lots of places made, the biggest issue with the place marketing is that people do promotion without having the product sorted"* (I-Sheffield). This implies that a strategic vision is essential in order to co-ordinate a coherent marketing strategy. With multiple stakeholders involved in the process this is challenging, as not everyone can and will be satisfied with strict guidelines. Both Sheffield and Essen have a strategic vision. Semiotic analysis states: *"It's 2020 - Sheffield is a city of global significance, distinctive, successful, inclusive, vibrant and sustainable. A great city, where people from across the world want to live, learn, work, invest, and visit"*. Similar goals can be found in Essen's marketing

communication (Semiotics). The brochures show images of stakeholders, including businesses, residents, and tourists to emphasise team spirit. Although the strategy was formulated in accordance with (primary) stakeholders, the DMO manager insists: *“my problem was all these stakeholders were all on my sort of... people who judge me were just thinking that is just too... cool”* (I-Sheffield). The DMO manager implies that although stakeholders were able to agree on an overarching strategy, due to its vagueness stakeholders were not convinced and did not actively commit to developing and maintaining the new strategies. This is supported by semiotics indicating: *“we know that the benefits of our success have not been shared equally across the city and that, as a result, the experience of and outcomes for local people can be very different”*. This concurs with past research suggesting that some stakeholders may not be represented within the city brand or lack buy-in (Moilanen 2015). Data show that there is a disconnect between the DMO, as the creator of branding strategy and stakeholders that make up the city, as only a minority of those living, working, and traveling in the city were part of the strategy formulation (I-Sheffield, Essen). Although residents and tourists are part of the marketing material, data suggest that they are not actively involved in the branding process, which reinforces a lack of affiliation with the city’s vision that is vague and indistinct (I-Sheffield).

Jones (2005) divides stakeholders and their priorities into primary and secondary groupings. We propose an additional two levels that distinguishes stakeholders according to their involvement in the branding process, which emerged from the data. The first dominant grouping is primary stakeholders. Although various stakeholders participate in the branding process those that ‘enforce’ the strategy make clear distinctions between stakeholders whose opinions ‘matter’. Findings suggest that primary stakeholders consist of governmental organisations and stakeholders with a prominent role in the city, such as City Councils, DMOs, the Chamber of Commerce, Sheffield’s Company of Cutlers, or Essen’s Wirtschaftsförderung. Similarities within these institutions are their connection to the city and their strong involvement. The DMO manager indicates: *“it’s still very difficult... the only way to do it, is to do the extensive buy-in at the start, involve people in brand development work... ensure that their voice is heard that they contribute... take them through the findings, get their agreement, but then retain them to have a structure to continue the whole dialogue... we have two groups that we work with on a long-term basis: we have an advisory group, which is made up of senior figures of the city that we work with... and the marketing advisory group”* (I-Essen). This reiterates that the involvement of stakeholders is selective with only *senior figures* involved in the long-term branding process. Semiotics confirm this finding by only featuring primary stakeholders’ logos in the promotional material.

Data suggest that primary stakeholders are the decision-makers in the branding process and responsible to create strategy that all stakeholders can align to (I-Sheffield). These primary stakeholders develop a brand message that ideally is coherently broadcasted across the city branding strategy (I-Essen). To ensure the implementation of this framework primary stakeholders carefully select secondary stakeholders that support and deliver this message. Secondary stakeholders are either

internationally and/or nationally renowned, financially independent and have the potential to boost the cities' economies, or have gained fame. It becomes apparent that primary stakeholders seem to focus strongly on capitalising on 'current' success stories rather than building them from the core. *"We work very closely with the city's... sporting icon - Jessica Ennis... who's got the sort of broad national and international appeal and who's an official ambassador of the city... and who's used in... a lot of our communication... and is used to promote the city as a destination for... major sports events"* (I-Sheffield). Although Sheffield has two football and an ice hockey club these are not part of the branding strategy as the football teams *"are separate organisations with their own remit [...] [and] the [ice hockey club] they are an ice hockey team but... they only have an audience of about 5000 fans... it's a very niche sport in the UK... doesn't have much media coverage... so it isn't the major sporting output of the city"* (I-Sheffield). This further reinforces that primary stakeholders carefully select, in their opinion, 'successful' secondary stakeholders to be part of the city branding process. The notion of a hierarchy emerged from the data in that not everyone has the same level of power to enforce their opinion. Whilst primary stakeholders create the strategy process, secondary stakeholders are utilised as consultants and executors of primary stakeholders' activities.

Examples of secondary stakeholders are festival organisations (e.g. Doc/Fest), the universities, museums, theatres, and business parks. Reasons for active involvement of secondary stakeholders in the branding process are their (inter)national reputation (I-Sheffield, Essen) and their attractiveness as leisure facilities that enhance the cities' profiles. Data also indicate that some branding objectives may be conflicting, as the individual cities centre their attention on local branding strategies, whilst secondary stakeholders aim for a global reputation. Secondary differ from primary stakeholders in that secondary stakeholders are associated with their respective cities, however, they merely see the city as a context that enables them to fulfil their goals. This implies that these stakeholders have their own separate identities and agenda, which are linked to the respective cities. A marketing manager highlights that *"what the University struggles with is the fact that no-one particularly internationally... knows where Sheffield is... because it hasn't got the identity that Manchester's got, because it has two football teams in Manchester... Liverpool is always well known because of the Beatles...so we haven't got that big heritage that people recognise. [...] The overall performance of other organisations... of the city have an impact on the city overall, which then impacts on us... We are behind anything that raises a profile of Sheffield the city... because it will – by implication – raise the profile of the University... Whether that means we would push everything that has to do with the city [...] we emphasise the fun stuff to do... the fact that you are near the Peak District... that we have the sporting heritage... that it's a safe city... it's a relatively cheap city all the positive things that you might kind of expect in marketing material when you are trying to sell something... what we wouldn't necessarily do is talk about the things that perhaps the city likes to talk more about... that it is a great place to do business. We may touch on it certainly when we are trying to emphasise [...] the enterprise aspects of what we do, but we wouldn't major as much on it as we would on what our customers like"*

(I-Sheffield). This reinforces that secondary stakeholders have their own agenda and only engage in city branding aspects that they are interested in rather than support all aspects of the process. This suggests a limited internal stakeholder buy-in (Moilanen 2015), as secondary stakeholders only promote what benefits them. By contrast, a University of Duisburg-Essen manager emphasises that they have a strong relationship with the city and see the industry as a USP for their degree courses (I-Essen). They highlight that their objectives are closely aligned with the city's branding strategy, which could be due to the fact that heavy investments were made to integrate the university campus with the actual city centre. That said, the university has two main sites, Essen and Duisburg, which implies that they promote and align with both cities within their advertising material (Semiotics). Thus, 'own-agenda' as a theme emerged strongly, which provides two pathways: the overall city branding strategy and an own-agenda that aligns with the former if benefits can be experienced.

Tertiary stakeholders are described as partially involved in the branding process and include football and ice hockey clubs, restaurants, and hotels. Although some of these tertiary stakeholders actively try to be part of the city strategy, but not selected by primary stakeholders, others were unaware of how to get involved. *"We had a meeting with the University... and were talking about [primary stakeholders] working close with them, because as a club we've never done it. When we first came to the city, twenty years ago... we were a brand new sport that got a bit of publicity, word-of-mouth spread. We had nine, ten-thousand people to each home-game. As a club, we've just relied on those people, and we haven't actively gone and promoted ourselves. We're the most successful sports team in the city... but we don't do enough to let people know that. I'm going to talk to those organisations. People all around the world know [us], through the fact that most of our players come from North America... but we just don't do enough to push ourselves"* (I-Sheffield). This quote has various implications, first, it emphasises that these tertiary stakeholders want to be part of the city brand, as they see themselves as internationally renowned. Interestingly residents highlighted that they had never heard of the sports clubs prior to arriving in the city, which contradicts the previous statement (I-Sheffield, Essen). Second, tertiary stakeholders believe they have a national/international following. This contrasts starkly with the opinion of primary stakeholders, who classify tertiary stakeholders as 'unsuccessful', as they are neither nationally/internationally renowned, nor have key attractions. Whilst there are partial efforts from tertiary organisations to be part of the branding process, this is blocked by primary stakeholders. Why primary stakeholders choose some organisations over others is beyond the scope of this article. A pattern that emerges is that of a laissez-faire approach, whilst some tertiary stakeholders seem willing to participate in the branding strategy, others neither know nor care enough to be part of it.

Quaternary stakeholders are seen to play no part in the branding process. *"Mapping who gets involved in discussions around the city is immense... there's just so much discussion about the same thing in different groups... to try an[sic] summarize it we've got the Executive Board... so that's an amalgam of the public and private... although it's mainly public sector bodies around the city"*

including City Council... police... but it's all the major public agencies plus the Chamber of Commerce, who in theory represents the private sector plus the Local Enterprise Partnership...LEP it's quite a good amalgam of the movers and shakers in the city... they're looking mainly at what can we do to regenerate from a kind of economic perspective... what jobs we can create and generally become less reliant on the public sector... The University has a seat on their council which... it's not the board it's kind of the wider representative group... it has about 40 members, sit on Council and obviously other people get involved... there is a new strategic and marketing group... and there is various other sub-groups, there is a city centre group that get together about branding stuff... they are the main ones" (I-Sheffield). It is noteworthy that other stakeholder groups do not mention quaternary stakeholders as part of the branding strategy. A reason is that quaternary stakeholders are represented through other organisations and/or uninterested (I-Essen). A resident (I-Essen) highlights *"I like being here. But I don't really see myself here after. It's just a convenient place for uni. It's nice what they did here, but I don't really feel that strongly about it"*. Although some residents insist they are part of the branding process and attend forums and meetings, a majority of quaternary stakeholders are described as 'disengaged'. Explanations are first, the fact that some of these stakeholders may not even be aware of how they can get involved in the city branding process. Whilst participating in meetings is a first step, some participants have indicated that this has no impact on the overall branding objectives (I-Sheffield, Essen) and feel that their participation *"doesn't lead to anything"* (I-Sheffield). Interviewees imply that this stakeholder group does not have confidence in the overall branding strategies and thus, stay out of their implementation (Moilanen 2015). Second, primary stakeholders feel that quaternary stakeholders are of less benefit in terms of providing jobs or international exposure. Whilst they promote the cities' brand image to a wider audience and are important players in communicating a coherent message (Vasudevan 2008), their involvement is limited to being ambassadors.

Identifying and communicating with core stakeholders is challenging (Merrilees *et al* 2012). Sheffield and Essen both have dedicated DMOs that focus on providing *'a framework'*, which is developed by primary stakeholders and provides directions for the cities' branding strategies. Interviewees highlight that it is *"a key ingredient. [...] It's a very high-level framework document that people of all sorts could align themselves to... It's a framework of what we're trying to achieve"* (I-Sheffield), which is why the DMO is seen as a key institution (I-Sheffield, Essen). Within these cities the DMOs decide on the overall branding strategies and decide the secondary, tertiary, and quaternary stakeholders. This is partially reflected in the literature, which emphasises that all city branding activities should be managed through DMOs, in order to achieve successful city brands (Hankinson 2006).

Various stakeholders insist that *"sing[ing] from the same song sheet"* is vital (I-Sheffield, Essen). However, data suggest that primary and secondary stakeholders enforce the song sheet, whilst tertiary and quaternary stakeholders sing the song provided. Primary and secondary stakeholders

highlight that they attend meetings regularly and feel part of the overall brand creation process. It is implied that these stakeholders are actively working together and create a brand image that not only benefits their objectives, but also is acceptable for others (I-Sheffield, Essen). Data also indicate that some stakeholders circumvent DMOs and give priority to their individual marketing efforts, which detracts from the strength of the city brand (I-Sheffield, Essen). Especially secondary stakeholders prioritise their own agenda and focus on their financial viability before contributing to the branding process.

Please insert Figure 1 here

Figure 1 summarises the key findings. Primary stakeholders seek to enforce a branding strategy that creates a need for affiliation, and actively communicate with secondary stakeholders. Secondary stakeholders communicate and consolidate with primary stakeholders, whilst at the same time follow their own agenda. Tertiary stakeholders follow a laissez-faire approach whereby some seek to actively engage in the branding process, but are dismissed as ‘unimportant’ by primary stakeholders. Quaternary stakeholders seemingly lack involvement and do not necessarily know how to get involved. Thus, there is a gap between creating the ‘ideal’ city brand and not only communicating this successfully to various stakeholders, but also involve them in the process. Data suggest that an elitist city brand image emerges that excludes various stakeholders.

Stakeholder perceptions of the city brand

Data indicate that Essen and Sheffield are both known for two opposing brand images. Various stakeholders stated: *“I heard rumours that it was the dirtiest city in England, like nobody wants to go here. I think a lot of it stems from it being, a lot of factories and industry”* (I-Sheffield). Sheffield is still associated with *“the ‘Full Monty’”* (I-Sheffield), which might make it unattractive, especially for businesses. A public sector organisation in Essen further emphasises that they advertise the ‘green city’ project, which was purposefully designed to move away from the *“grubby coal-mining”* image (I-Essen) and promote a more dynamic feel to the city (Semiotics). Advertising material in both cities feature ‘clean’ colours, such as blue and green and emphasise on the ‘Wohlfühlcharakter’. Although the cities still have some manufacturing businesses, neither of them are dirty. Nevertheless, this image persists within people’s minds (I-Sheffield, Essen). It is noteworthy that outsiders, those who have not been to these cities, hold a negative connotation towards the cities’ images. A question is whether this finding links to an overall *“lack of advertising [and] no promotion”* (I-Sheffield, Essen). Insiders describe the cities as ‘nice’, ‘lovely’, ‘offers high quality of life’, or ‘green city’ (I-Sheffield, Essen), which contrasts starkly from the outsiders’ views. An outsider versus insider perspective –or negative versus positive connotation- emerges from the data. In attempting to change their ‘outsider view’ both

cities have competed for (inter)national events to take place within their vicinities, which concurs with extent research (Hanna and Rowley 2007). Essen won the title of European Capital of Culture in 2010 (Ruhr.2010 2010), while Sheffield failed to secure the UK City of Culture in 2013 (Wainwright and McDonald 2010). One participant highlights that *“anything that raises a brand is a good thing. [...] Whether the City of Culture would have done that... possibly not, because it wasn't necessarily an international thing. But it can do no harm”* (I-Sheffield). Although Sheffield lost the City of Culture bid, it still hosts international events (e.g. World Snooker, European Senior Fencing Championship). An explanation for Sheffield's unsuccessful bid could be the 1991 World Student Games, which resulted in debts that currently remain unpaid (Sheffield Council 2015).

A challenge both cities face is the fact that they are continuously (re-)branding the city: *“Sheffield is in the process of trying to [...] rebrand itself out of that ‘City of Steel’ [image]. I've seen several incarnations of the city since I've been here. There was a big push to be ‘City of Sport’, now there's this push to be ‘City of Culture’. I think Sheffield is really interested in creating a new identity for itself”* (I-Sheffield). Similarly, Essen went from ‘Krupp City’ that was synonymous with coal-mining to the European Capital of Culture. Although this is positive, various stakeholders indicate that the cities are changing their identity too often and neglect their heritage. The majority of interviewees state that ‘heritage’ is important and they feel proud of their cities' history. However, a DMO manager insists that *“we have the centenary of stainless steel... since when it's been discovered in Sheffield... and one of the challenges with that... it's an important historical and cultural landmark for the city... it's an opportunity to get a message out across the world... I think in the past where Sheffield's fallen down is that it's been good at looking back... but hasn't always looked forward... what we're looking to is making sure that our content... looks to the future”* (I-Sheffield). Thus, the DMO seeks to create a modern outlook for Sheffield, which steers away from the steel heritage. A question is whether neglecting a deeply engrained part of history is beneficial.

In summary, outsiders and insiders have different perceptions about the cities' images, whilst the steel and coal mining industry has a negative connotation with outsiders, insiders are proud of their heritage. In order to be appealing to outsiders, primary stakeholders seek to change the image, which leads to neglecting the past.

Managing the city branding process

Data suggest that the city branding process is handled by DMOs, which provide guidelines and support on the *‘framework’* (I-Sheffield, Essen). The brand essence of Sheffield has been identified by primary and secondary stakeholders as *authentic* and *independent* (I-Sheffield), which describes *“what they felt you could comfortably sell Sheffield on”* (I-Sheffield). The theme of *independence* fits with Sheffield's history of political radicalism and independent viewpoints, whilst *authenticity* highlights the tangible aspect of the steel products. Although the logic of this consensus of *authenticity* and *independence* is apparent, there are weaknesses in the concept due to its vagueness. The Sheffield

brand is neither distinctive, nor provides a basis for stakeholder buy-in. Moreover, these descriptors differ from the promotional material distributed that sees Sheffield as “*distinctive, successful, inclusive, vibrant, and sustainable*” (Semiotics). Thus, the city brand is not only vague, but also incoherent. Extant research (cf. Hatch and Schultz 2003) suggests that only a city that has a USP can gain a competitive advantage, thus, brand essence cannot consist of *authenticity* and *independence*, but must specify what is authentic and independent. “*That strategy is fine to have but I don’t know another city in the world that wouldn’t want to write that. [...] Do you know, what our USP is?*” (I-Sheffield).

Similarly, Essen suggests city with a ‘Wohlfühlcharakter’ as its vision, which emphasises the fact that more than 50% of the city consists of parks and lakes (Semiotics). Not only has the skyline experienced a dramatic change from smoky chimneys to a modern appearance with minimal industrialization, but the industry itself has changed (Semiotics). It has moved away from coal-mining to a strong service sector, which hosts numerous tradeshows and is a preferred location for international businesses, due to its excellent infrastructure (Semiotics). Essen was described as “a shopping city, university city, commercial location and of course a cultural city. Even and especially after 2010” (Essen.Marketing 2011: 5), when it won the European Capital of Culture, which complements the city’s branding strategy. Nevertheless, stakeholders indicate that they cannot identify with the ‘Wohlfühlcharakter’, as it says “*everything and nothing at all. I mean, what is Wohlfühlcharakter? If I like parks that might make me feel-good about the city, but if I don’t like them does that mean the city is not for me?*” (I-Essen).

Please insert Figure 2 here

Data suggest that both cities follow a centralised brand management approach. The brand ‘frameworks’ created are vague and thus, allow for interpretations to be made. Figure 2 summarises the findings, which indicate that although both cities seek to change their brand image, by incorporating nationally/internationally established stakeholders their reputation remains ‘grim’ and ‘dirty’. This suggests that the overall vision of transforming outsiders’ perspectives has thus far been unsuccessful. Although this article only presents preliminary findings a feeling that emerges from the data is that current efforts centre too strongly on external perceptions, rather than internal buy-in. Due to the lack of involvement and integration of tertiary and quaternary stakeholders, primary stakeholders miss out on the opportunity to utilise the former as brand ambassadors, who can enforce a positive image to outsiders.

Implications

The global competition between cities will continuously increase in the future, which makes city branding strategies vital. Findings demonstrate a disconnect between the internal and external brand image, which brings forward various implications for practitioners: First, branding strategies need to focus on both internal and external buy-in. Sheffield hosts the World Snooker Championship, which is broadcasted on BBC Sport and Eurosport. Only more recently have efforts been made to emphasise on Sheffield as the host city, this could be further enhanced by inserting 'city life' video clips throughout the broadcasting time that emphasis on the multiple facets of the city as a destination of desire, thereby moving away from the 'grim' image. Similarly, Essen could enhance its 'Wohlfühlcharakter' by promoting leisure activities, such as cycling around the Baldeneysee or taking a boat trip on the Ruhr. Showcasing multiple facets of the city to an external audience can help to change the outsiders' perceptions. Second, generating buy-in across internal stakeholders is necessary to create a 'win-win' situation: if residents, public and private sector organisations, and workers are satisfied with the brand image, they can act as brand ambassadors and advocate their positive feelings to a wider audience. Internal participation in the city branding process could be raised by promoting forums and strategy meetings through organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce or MADE in Sheffield, or the Essener Wirtschaftsförderung. Raising awareness of strategy meetings concerning the city brand allows stakeholders to make a conscious decision to either participate in the process or not. Third, focusing on heritage is vital. With Sheffield having demolished Don Valley Stadium in 2015, the 'Sport City' image may have suffered, however, the annual Tramlines festival could be enhanced by inviting Sheffield based bands, such as Def Leopard or The Human League to the city, raising brand awareness and putting Sheffield 'on the map' (I-Sheffield). Essen on the other hand can capitalise on Zeche Zollverein as a UNESCO world heritage site as a tourist destination. Internal and external branding efforts need to be carefully combined to remove the perception gaps.

Conclusion

This article's preliminary findings highlight that these two cities seek to change their brand image by focusing on a modern outlook rather than grounding their branding strategies within a heritage theme. Although the strategies may create internal buy-in, it fails to change external perceptions. By focusing on multiple stakeholders this research allowed to map the city branding process of two industrialised cities renowned for their 'grim' past, thereby responding to a call for research by Merrilees *et al* (2013). The complexity of the branding process is not only apparent in the multiple facets of the cities, but also in terms of the stakeholders involved. Data indicate that city branding is not a strategy that can simply be enforced by a single institution, but rather is a lived experience (Löfgren 2014) that continuously evolves and is ideally advocated by brand ambassadors. We highlighted four levels of stakeholders that are involved to varying degrees within the city branding process. The findings suggest an extension of Jones' (2005) two levels of stakeholders to including tertiary and quaternary stakeholders. Each of these groupings distinctively developed from the in-depth interviews and

allowed to provide descriptions and aspects of the individual groupings' engagement and responsibilities. Due to the sample size of this study further research is necessary to validate the findings.

The two research questions for this article focus on how stakeholders engage in the city branding process and what the differences of the cities brands' perceptions are among key stakeholders. In answering the first question, the preliminary findings highlight a mixed engagement in the overall city branding process. A hierarchy seems to emerge that sees primary stakeholders enforcing a strategy that is executed by secondary stakeholders and ideally taken on board by tertiary and quaternary stakeholders. Although the latter two groupings are represented within secondary stakeholder organisations there seems to be a disconnect which fails to create buy-in and support for the overall strategy. Linking this to the second question posed, overall 'internal' stakeholders, those that are engaged with the city, living, and working in the vicinities have a positive connotation towards the city brand. On the other hand, this positive image has thus far not translated to outsiders, who still associate the 'grim' and 'dirty' image with the respective cities. A contribution of this article is in identifying the dynamics between individual stakeholder groupings and the notion of the insider versus outsider perspective.

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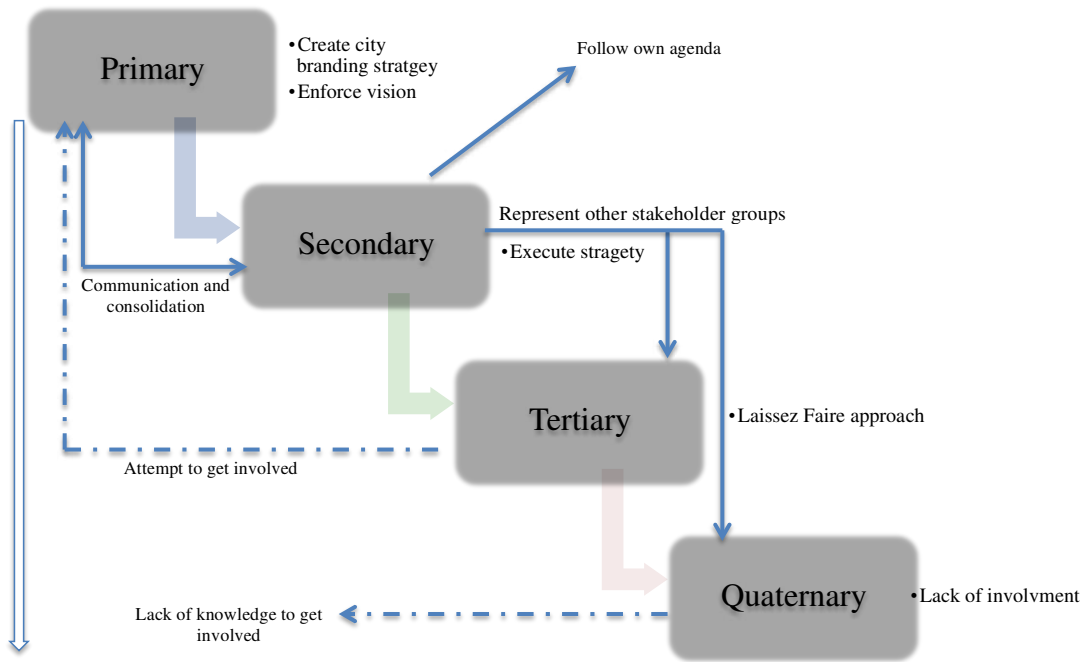
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Table 1: Data collection summary

City	Organisation	Position	Semiotics	Abbreviation
Sheffield, UK	City Council	Marketing Manager		I-Sheffield
	DMO	Manager	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Chamber of Commerce	Managerial Position	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Sheffield First Partnership	Managerial Position	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	MAC Sheffield	Creative & Performing Arts Manager		
	Made in Sheffield	Board Member	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	University of Sheffield	Marketing Manager	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Sports Club	Marketing Manager		
	Resident	N/A		
Essen, Germany	City Council	Marketing Manager		I-Essen
	Ruhr.2010	Manager	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Business Development Organisation	Managerial Position	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	DMO	Managerial Position	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	University of Duisburg-Essen	Marketing Manager	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	University of Cottbus	Board Member		
	Multinational Retailer	Manager	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Sports Club	Manager		
	Private Sector Organisation	Marketing Manager	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Resident	N/A		

Figure 1: Summary of findings



City branding strategy that creates need for affiliation

Figure 2: Summary of findings

