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Abstract

Place branding strategies contribute to policy decisions that shape a city. Little research, however, investigates how 'place marketers' influence the decision-making of those higher up in the value chain. Drawing upon Bourdieu's theory of cultural intermediation, we identify where these professionals exhibit influence in a city branding endeavour and what impact they have on policy decisions. We report results of semi-structured interviews with senior place marketers at 13 cities around the world and find that policy decisions are influenced in unofficial, hidden and non-systemic ways, including identifying and working with key stakeholders behind the scenes, playing politics, and applying a promotional lens to policy endeavours. We discuss these findings and their implications on theory and practice.

Key words: place branding; place promotion; governance; legitimacy; stakeholders

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Power struggles and playing politics: An application of Bourdieu's cultural intermediation theory to place marketing

INTRODUCTION

Place branding, with tourism promotion at its heart, has the potential to become an effective strategy to boost local economic development (Cleave et al., 2016). Place branding has been defined as the strategy of identifying valuable assets that a place has to offer, developing these assets and delivering their value to attract investors, visitors, and new residents (Dinnie, 2011). The increased attention towards city branding in particular in the last two decades has driven both theoretical and practical enquiry into its strategic management processes, emphasising that these processes impact cultural, social and economic outcomes (Warren & Dinnie, 2018). 'Place marketers' who work in place branding encompasses tourism, attractions, economic development and culture, occupy a relatively invisible, yet highly influential, role in shaping these processes. The decisions that shape city branding policy – the application of public funds for government intervention into promotional strategies – and the kind of development that is encouraged as a result of these strategies stem from a cohort of individuals with a great deal of symbolic capital who have recently been positioned as 'cultural intermediaries' within a city branding context (Bourdieu, 1991; Warren and Dinnie, 2018). In this role, place marketers are the communicators and meaning-makers who encourage destinations to remain innovative and competitive.

Despite the political dimension of city branding strategies and their capacity to drive policy decisions, it is rarely questioned who makes the decisions about interpretation, representation, and dissemination of image-based symbolic information about a city. Couldry and McCarthy (2004) argue that 'some concentrations of symbolic power are so great that they dominate the whole social landscape and as a result they seem so natural that they are misrecognised, and their underlying arbitrariness becomes difficult to see' (Georgiou, 2013, p. 27). The work of place marketers is largely invisible and often misrecognised, situated as it is within the complex urban governance and stakeholder environment and spanning across sectors such as economic development, tourism, culture, community development and resident engagement.

Place marketers act within a 'circuit of culture', where their influence is most heavily felt in the articulations between representation, regulation, production, consumption, and identity in the commodification of the destination (du Gay et al., 1997). This follows Johansson's (2012: p. 3624) assertion that city branding is a 'politically constituted process that unfolds in relation to dominant discourses and symbols that are in circulation' and which affords a significant amount of power to those whose job it is to create and disseminate that symbolic discourse.

To date little research has explored the occupational activities of these actors – those who work in a public sector capacity in marketing, public relations, advertising, communications and branding and whose responsibility includes imbuing the city with a 'brand' that resonates with target audiences. Several scholars have applied the circuit of culture concept to tourism (e.g. Jenkins, 2003; Salazar, 2012, Gyimothy et al., 2015). Norton's (1996) and Giovanardi's (2011) use of Johnson's (1986) 'circuit of culture' model of cultural communication explores the process of encoding and decoding tourism marketing messages in an adjacent framework for understanding how producers of those messages can influence the intended consumers in their tourism buying decisions. Following from this, Edensor (2001) identified tourist guides 'performing' their cultural intermediary roles in processes of commodification, regulation, and representation for the benefit of tourist audiences, and Ateljevic (2000, p. 372) posited that tourism sits in the nexus of production-

consumption place-making circuits, where producers and consumers ‘feed off’ each other in endless cycles of creation, imagination, perception, and experiences. This work does not go as far as du Gay et al.’s (1997) framework in demonstrating how these messages might relate to broader place-making and governance structures in destination marketing, and there has been little reflection on how Bourdieu’s (1984) or du Gay et al.’s (1997) theories might apply to the strategic management of tourism or place branding processes.

This research seeks to address this omission by investigating the myriad ways marketing professionals play a significant role in shaping urban policy and planning decisions that impact a destination’s long-term strategic objectives. The goal is to uncover the important ‘behind the scenes’ work of place marketers, identify their influence in place branding and tourism strategy and draw a parallel to their work with the benefits gained by the community or region. As this paper will demonstrate, the work of these actors is strategic, multi-faceted and pervasive, and bears a significant amount of influence over policymakers, politicians and other senior stakeholders within a city’s promotional and policy value chain. A city’s strategic planning processes is highly complex owing to both organisational paradoxes as well as competing strategic priorities among stakeholders (Braun et al., 2017; Brorström, 2017). Although the bulk of place branding, public administration and place management literature encourages the centrality of promotional strategic thinking into planning, policy and political processes, in practice there rarely exists a mechanism or legislation to support this (Eshuis et al., 2013; Zavattaro & Adams, 2016). Thus, it is a significant omission in the place branding and tourism literature that the work of marketers who promote the city remains largely under-researched and under-theorised.

This research makes both theoretical and practical contributions to the areas of tourism and place branding. First, it extends Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of cultural intermediation – recently established to include city branding and place marketing – to a more global context, establishing commonalities across geographic and professional space (Warren and Dinnie, 2018). Second, it strengthens the theoretical framework with the inclusion of du Gay et al.’s (1997) ‘circuit of culture’, positioning these actors firmly at the junctions of production, consumption, regulation, representation and identity of the destination-as-commodity. This also offers novel way of theorising tourism marketing practice and represents a new research direction in tourism studies. Practically, it uncovers the mostly invisible yet highly influential occupational considerations of marketing professionals working in destination promotion. The research demonstrates an understanding of the largely non-systemic, unofficial, and poorly understood practices that promotional intermediaries employ when working at senior strategic management levels in place branding. We recommend that if place marketers are properly placed within the policy value chain in a city, the needs of tourists, residents and investors will be met as a result.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE RESEARCH

Place Branding as Policy Instrument in a Complex Stakeholder Environment

Place branding has been conceived as a multi-layered and complicated endeavour that relies on many more factors than the promotion of logos, tag lines, key messages, and compelling imagery. The literature points to place branding as a holistic, community-driven, and collaborative stakeholder approach that draws on elements of urban planning, cultural geography, business and economic development, and destination promotion (Anholt, 2003; Dinnie, 2016, 2011; Govers and Go, 2009). As an academic area of inquiry, it draws from the disciplines including, but not limited to, marketing, public relations, urban development, tourism, public administration, and sociology (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Zavattaro, 2018). For the purposes of this paper, the terms place branding and city branding will heretofore be

used interchangeably, as scholars have allowed that 'place branding' can refer to any component of geographic space, whether a nation, city, region or even neighbourhood (Dinnie, 2016; Govers and Go, 2009). The focus of measurement in this instance is confined to cities and the urban environment. Place branding scholars generally agree that place branding should be an integrated part of urban policy and planning, acting as a cornerstone of urban governance (Oliveira, 2016). As place branding has established itself as a driving factor in place management, it has begun to be seen as a vital tool in strategic urban governance and policy development in cities around the world (Eshuis and Edwards, 2013; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015).

Following this, Oliveira (2016: pages 51-61) argues that place branding should be a central instrument in spatial planning, actively engaging with stakeholders to improve the quality of a place, enhance its assets and uncover and nurture its *genius loci*, or central spirit. The 'how' this is communicated to potential investors, tourists, workers, inhabitants, and other target audiences is secondary to the 'what' and 'why' — requiring place marketers to have a strong influence on both the material and immaterial aspects of urban governance, urban policy, and urban development (Boisen et al., 2018). Thus, for place branding to be effective as both a communication device as well as a meaningful policy instrument, it must not be treated as a separate organisational entity and requires a deep integration into the internal stakeholder environment among actors who address policy and planning problems, but through a promotional lens (Boisen et al., 2018; Eshuis et al., 2018; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2016).

City branding inherently involves a complex network of stakeholders within which place marketers occupy a central position. The idea that stakeholder involvement enriches a place brand permeates the literature (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). For marketing and branding strategies to be successful, marketers need to actively navigate networks and manage the multi-dimensional interests of a diverse group of stakeholders who are keys to the city's success (Eshuis et al., 2018; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). Tourism literature points to the forms of power enacted by actors who must leverage forms of persuasion and demonstrations of authority in order to achieve unity and collaboration among stakeholders in a destination branding process (Marzano and Scott, 2009). Without a strategic commitment on behalf of key senior stakeholders in a city's policy value chain to pursue an advanced understanding of the place brand, a city's image will continue to develop, albeit in a form that might fail to realise stated social and economic development goals (Cleave et al., 2017). To achieve this commitment, practitioners need to rely on a broad base of support from both senior bureaucratic management as well as politicians in order to enact the policy changes that need to occur (Eshuis et al., 2018). Ryan and Zahra (2004) further demonstrate the political aspect of destination branding within tourism, highlighting the role played by the government and the public sector through the power of regulation and legislation. Thus, when conceived as a stakeholder management process integral to governance practices, place branding is most effective when viewed as a public management endeavour (Laidler-Kylander and Stenzel, 2014).

For this reason, it is crucial to understand the broader public sector stakeholder environment and decision-making processes that offer an intricate and interconnected landscape in a city's promotional efforts. The nature of places necessitates the inclusion of the political dimension in the hierarchy of decision making (Govers and Go, 2009; Johansson, 2012). Perhaps no stakeholder relationship is more fundamental to the job of place brand practitioners than with politicians. Place branding is inextricably intertwined with the political ebb and flow of a city brand — both as a driver for economic development, but also sitting at the mercy of funding priorities and policy directions laid down by political actors. This follows from the findings of Eshuis et al. (2018) who assert that civil servants

and politicians are especially important in helping to decide place branding strategies and marketing activities, but that their involvement might also hinder and complicate brand endeavours, due to political interests taking priority over promotional ones. This puts political considerations as central to brand governance and requires place marketers to 'play politics' to ensure promotional efforts are prioritised in urban planning (Lucarelli, 2018).

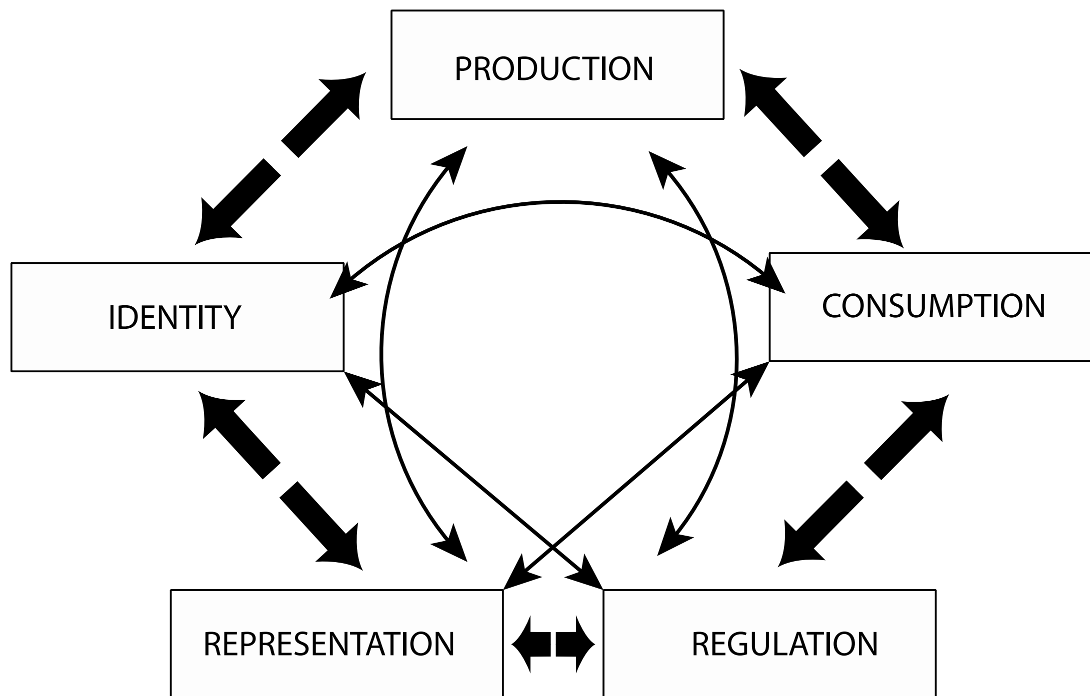
Theoretical Framework

This paper draws from the work of Warren and Dinnie (2018) that positions place marketers as 'cultural intermediaries' who utilise a distinct and highly personal set of occupational resources that assist them in establishing legitimacy and influence their work. It is positioned within a wider academic exploration of the promotional occupations as cultural intermediation that is currently occurring in the fields of sociology, public relations, cultural studies, and marketing management, with an academic and interdisciplinary foundation in the social sciences. Bourdieu's (1984) original sociological theory of cultural intermediation was largely concerned with how certain occupations appeared to possess more power than others in determining how social structures are formed. They do this by exerting social and cultural capital within certain fields, which affords them a degree of broadly recognised symbolic power within those fields. In a place branding context, this could mean that these intermediaries can exert their influence over fields such as the public sector, political sector, private sector, and in the realms of hospitality, attractions, sport, art, culture, education, festivals/events, and food/gastronomy (Warren and Dinnie, 2018).

Cultural intermediaries draw on their relationships, lifestyles, personal tastes and experiences, and the instrumental enactments of legitimacy as key occupational resources in their work (Bourdieu, 1984). They act as early adopters in the consumption and communication of new lifestyles and trends. More recent scholarship on cultural intermediaries still holds Bourdieu's work up as relevant, but there is a greater inclination to place it within a cultural economy context, pairing it with notions of 'professionals of qualification' who operate within production and consumption models of markets, and who leverage 'taste' as a key occupational resource in the global exchange of goods and services (Matthews and Smith Maguire, 2014, p. 3). While it has been noted that scholarship has not shifted entirely to the cultural economic model, most theories around cultural intermediation employ a hybrid approach to thinking through the historical context of the work, its material functions, and impact (Matthews and Smith Maguire, 2014). This hybrid model pulls from du Gay et al,'s (1997) 'Circuit of Culture' where they argue that all 'forms of economic life… depend on meanings for their effects' (p. 6), and that those meanings are 'produced at several different sites and circulated through several different processes and practices' (p. 10).

The circuit acts as a central analytical model to observe a number of distinct practices and processes that occur within the market where buying and selling takes place; it is a relational model that focuses on the interplay of 'articulations' or 'moments' within the circuit, made up of representation, production, consumption, regulation and identity. Originally conceived as a pedagogic tool to introduce difficult theoretical themes within media and cultural studies, it has since been expanded to include cultural/economic geography and management/organisation studies, among other spheres (du Gay, 2013), and whilst it has yet to be applied to a tourism context in this formulation, it offers a useful framework to understand the work of city branding.

Figure 1: The Circuit of Culture



Adapted from du Gay et al., 1997

This paper synthesizes the cultural intermediation theory of Bourdieu (1984) with the circuit of culture theory of du Gay et al. (1997), utilizing a distinctly cultural economy approach to understand processes within place branding. The premise underpinning this framework is that cultural intermediaries exert certain forms of capital at specific junctures within the circuit of culture; where they are most influential is in the intersections between. Their taste-making functions, legitimated through displays of cultural and social capital, interject in both the supply and demand sides of commodity consumption, working 'through' the place as commodity (Davis, 2013). When it is a place that is being packaged and sold, we can begin to use this framework to contextualise the relationships that occurs between promotional and policy actors in the development of cities. For example, in an attempt to better understand the interpersonal mechanisms that lie behind such policies, or the promotional considerations that might be embedded within place management decisions. The circuit thus provides an epistemic platform to analyse manifestations of influence as demonstrated by place marketers in various fields throughout the place.

Despite the legitimacy afforded to them through their position as cultural intermediaries within these complex political and public sector fields, the ability of place marketers to hold a position of influence over key decision-makers is frequently undermined by their need to position themselves as legitimate in defining taste and guiding consumption patterns (Warren and Dinnie, 2018). This research both offers vital new insights into how place marketers are able to work around these constraints in order to achieve results.

Study Methods

Given the exploratory nature of this research, a qualitative approach was adopted within an interpretivist paradigm, which seeks to understand people's feelings and experiences. This method of interpreting people's accounts of their own experiences – interpretive phenomenological analysis – is inspired by the philosophy of phenomenology and draws from the interpretivist philosophy in that it places experience as central to an

analytic understanding of a subjective first-person account (Griffin and May, 2012: p. 447). A key feature of mainstream phenomenology is the necessity for researchers to 'bracket assumptions' before delving too deeply into the life-worlds of participants (Schutz, 1972). This requires them to examine their own beliefs and values, and then 'bracket' them so as not to cloud their understanding of the experiences of participants (Daymon and Holloway, 2010). Whilst the lead researcher of this study had previously worked in a similar city marketing management position to the interviewees and thus had an understanding of the potential challenges they faced, several years had passed between this previous work and the interviews. Also, the researcher took significant effort to reflect on those assumptions and set them aside before engaging with participants. This required a degree of reflexivity that occurred throughout the interview process and into data analysis. The researcher compartmentalised their own experience as unique to the past role, and whilst it served as a catalyst for future academic and theoretical research into the area, the commonalities that might have been apparent were perceived as collegial and practical, with a focus on day-to-day materialities rather than theoretical universalities. During data analysis, it was decided to allow the data to speak for itself in order to minimise interviewer bias – the extensive use of verbatim comments below attests to the thorough attempt at this bracketing endeavour.

The study used semi-structured interviews to better understand how place marketers manage their work in order to influence urban policy decisions. Such interviews allow for the exploration of the perceptions, perspectives, and personal experiences of the subjects (Bryman and Bell, 2015) and are also flexible to enable a greater understanding of what is happening on the ground (Daymon and Holloway, 2010). Multiple personnel working in senior promotional roles in the following cities were interviewed: Amsterdam, Dublin, Edinburgh, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Toronto, Vienna, Reykjavik, Tel Aviv, Edmonton, Ljubljana, York and Maastricht. The criteria for inclusion for these particular cities was based on two factors: first, the city was located in the global West, where scholars have defined the professional practices of place branding to be more developed than in other parts of the world; and second, the cities had been identified in place branding literature as either having an established city brand or had publicly undertaken a high impact brand-building or promotional campaign within the last decade (Dinnie, 2011; Lorentzen and Hansen, 2012; Middleton, 2011; Moilanen, 2015). The titles and contact details of potential targets were discovered by visiting the websites of the Destination Marketing Organisations as well as the municipal governments of the cities listed above. Most of the professionals targeted for inclusion were those whose work revolved around tourism and destination promotion. Those professionals whose titles listed senior management roles in communications, public relations, marketing, public affairs, promotion, or stakeholder engagement were targeted. A preliminary introductory email was sent with a follow-up; subsequent phone calls were also placed.

A sequential, purposive approach to sampling was pursued after initial contact was made. The goal of purposive sampling is to choose participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions being posed (Bryman and Bell, 2015). In total, 19 interviews were conducted with personnel working in city promotion in 13 cities around the world, either within a city's Tourism and Convention Bureau, organisations responsible for economic development or tourism, or organisations dedicated to city branding and conventions. Each respondent met particular criteria for inclusion; namely that they worked in a promotional, communicative or representative capacity in a senior role that included marketing, public relations, communications, social media, stakeholder management or a C-level position in an organisation that is responsible for any of the above – with the expressed mandate of city promotion, economic development, tourism, culture or civic engagement. Table 1 provides detailed characteristics of the participants.

Table 1: Interview Participants

Title	Sector	City	M/F	Age	Years of Experience	Reference Name
(Former) Director	Tourism	Toronto	F	55-60	25-30	P1
Communications Director	Place Branding	Toronto	M	40-45	15-20	P2
Director	Tourism	Reykjavik	F	35-40	15-20	P3
CEO	Consultancy	Edinburgh	M	60-65	30-35	P4
Director	Place Branding	Maastricht	F	45-50	20-25	P5
VP Communications	Tourism	Toronto	M	40-45	15-20	P6
CEO	Tourism	Vienna	M	60-65	30-35	P7
Director of Marketing	Place Branding	Amsterdam	F	45-50	20-25	P8
CEO	Place Branding	Tel Aviv	F	40-45	15-20	P9
Director	Tourism	York	F	45-50	15-20	P10
CEO	Public Policy	Toronto	M	40-45	20-25	P11
President & CEO	Economic Development	Edmonton	M	40-45	20-25	P12
Head of Marketing and Commercial	Place Branding	Edinburgh	M	45-50	15-20	P13
Director	Cultural Policy	Toronto	M	55-60	25-30	P14
Regional Director	Economic Development	Edinburgh	F	50-55	20-25	P15
General Manager	Tourism	Ljubjlana	F	45-50	20-25	P16
Stakeholder Communications	Place Branding	Dublin	F	30-35	10-15	P17
Media Relations Director	Tourism	Philadelphia	F	45-50	20-25	P18
VP, Communications and Public Relations	Tourism	New Orleans	F	45-50	20-25	P19

Interviews occurred in person where schedules and proximity permitted, and on Skype or telephone when timing or geographic distance made an in-person meeting impossible. The interviews typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were recorded using either an iPhone, if conducted in person or using Call Recorder, if conducted via Skype. Data collection was halted when it became evident that theoretical saturation had been reached. Further, the data was beginning to point to a level of *moderatum generalisation*, where aspects of the focus of enquiry 'can be seen to be instances of a broader set of recognisable features' (Williams, 2000: page 215). Great care was taken to formalise the interview process, through the use of guaranteed anonymity, a templated interview guide being sent to participants beforehand, recording and transcribing the interviews, and conducting all correspondence in a formalised and professional manner that ensured a clear understanding between researcher and informant. The interview guide is found in Appendix 1. Whilst the respondents all held different positions within different institutions and occupational structures in different cities, there was a deep commonality in their experience and outlook, which allowed for the triangulation of data to occur. All ethical considerations were made paramount in the recruitment and interactions with participants, ensuring their participation was voluntary and that the documents they provided were freely committed. The

‘contextual uniqueness’ from which they offered their stories – for example, whilst each participant works within a different city structure, with myriad diverse political, economic, social and cultural frameworks that might impact their decision-making day-to-day – did not necessarily translate into widely diverse or divergent experiences. This is likely because the strategic and practical materialities of place branding, particularly in North America and Europe, rest on guiding principles such as stakeholder engagement, audience segmentation and promotional practice; thus, due to the commonalities inherent in the profession, a measure of transferability of the data was soon apparent (Bryman and Bell, 2015: p. 402). However, the distinct perspectives stemming from differing particularities relating to political climate, acceptance and understanding of marketing principles and the organisational culture within which each professional operates cannot be overlooked and are addressed where relevant.

The interviews were manually transcribed, anonymised, and entered into NVIVO. An initial reading provided a ‘thematic review’, looking for patterns, themes and exceptions that emerged through language and positioning (Cameron and Price, 2009: p. 437). Sequential readings, along with the closeness to the data gained through manual transcription, allowed to identify the common themes that emerged as related to the theoretical literature. Using NVIVO, an existing cultural intermediation framework – with a focus on forms of capital, fields, and constructions of legitimacy – was used as a starting point to identify main themes. As similarities in the data emerged, a more detailed system of codes, nodes and classifications were used to identify key phrases, insights and ideas related to the certain themes identified, including *understanding stakeholders*, *working with politicians and the private sector*, and *the use of occupational mechanisms to wield influence*. These themes were then further interpreted using du Gay’s et al.’s (1997) circuit of culture – identifying where articulations of this influence were felt in the intersections of identity and representation, or production and consumption. The use of theory-driven codes in NVIVO during the analysis enhanced the validity of the study (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011).

It is important to mention that the research design of this study used solely qualitative and phenomenological approach which focuses on the individual experiences of practitioners from their perspective and does not take into consideration how their work might be perceived by external stakeholders and politicians. Thus, further research might benefit from a single case study approach that triangulates the experiences of politicians, senior stakeholders, and marketers in understanding how they work together to enact a city’s branding efforts in a particular context.

Findings

Beyond Logos and Taglines: Production and Consumption

The findings of this research reinforce the analysis of Eshuis and Edwards (2013) Zavattaro and Adams (2016) and Moilanen (2015), with respondents lamenting that their best attempts to get high-level decision makers on board with the long-term vision and implementation of the brand strategy ran into constant roadblocks – mostly due to limited internal buy-in from political masters, and the difficulty in securing sufficient funding for the scale and scope of the project.

A common theme that arose when speaking to respondents is how little their strategic policy input was valued, in comparison with the more visible, creative, or impermanent aspects of marketing. Despite the literature pointing clearly to the fact that place branding is a broad strategic endeavour that involves many touch points across all sectors of the city (Govers and Go, 2009), practitioners in this study lamented that their work was frequently only seen in terms of its creative outputs – logos, tag lines, marketing collateral or PR activities. This tactical work, places them firmly within the articulations of production and

consumption within the circuit of culture (du Gay et al., 1997), and re-establishes their previously identified position as integral to the production and consumption of promotional imaginaries in the tourism literature (Salazar, 2012).

Whilst this is important promotional work, many respondents expressed dismay at the lack of respect and understanding they encountered from key stakeholders, with such statements as:

> *I think the most important thing is that they expect that we create advertisements, or we create a promotional campaign for them. And that by telling their story also try to boost [the city]. But it's in fact the other way around. We ask them to communicate about [the city] and the added value of [the city] from their point of view of personal success, or success from their organisation. And that's the way that we want to boost [the city]. I think in general that they expect us to be a basic communication agency and we are much less concrete from that point of view, for them. (P5)*

Whilst respondents in this study expressed confidence in their work, identifying ways it provided value, economic impact or formed an integral part of the service offering of their city, they also just as frequently expressed frustration that their work was undervalued, especially by the political class. Among stakeholders from the private sector, there is a tacit acceptance and support, as revenue-generating businesses understand the need for promotions to underpin and drive profits. But in the public sector, where cost-centres like marketing and promotion are more difficult to quantify and act as a direct draw upon public financial resources, it is much harder to make the case.

Constructing Legitimacy: Identity and Representation

One of the first tasks for these cultural intermediaries is building legitimacy for their place brand strategy by inserting themselves into the articulations of both identity and representation of the city brand, using their unique blend of social capital to identify key stakeholders who can help identify the brand identity as well as help promote it through their own respective channels. Representation is the process within which symbolic systems such as language are used to present potential meanings in a ‘shared cultural space’ and used to convey messages that convince tourists, residents, and investors that they are purchasing the intangible assets of that place (Britton, 1991). Identity refers to the stories that occur within a societal context that resonate within that space (Hall, 1997). The requirement of practitioners to leverage their social and cultural capital to manifest strategic relationships with stakeholders who buy in to this symbolic representation and identity is top priority, especially at the senior levels within a city.

It is common for place marketers to begin their environmental research by conducting a stakeholder audit, identifying as many of the key organisations, and the personnel within them, who might need to be consulted or communicated to when a brand strategy is executed (Cerda-Bertomeu and Sarabia-Sanchez, 2016). This is imperative for two reasons; first these stakeholders offer a wealth of information about the product offer – the actual activities (cultural, political, social, economic) that are constantly occurring within disparate sectors across a city – as well as the audience to whom they are targeting their outreach (students, residents, tourists, business sectors etc.). Secondly, these stakeholders offer a complex interwoven communication landscape that offers a vital network for message uptake and distribution. Thus, practitioners make it a key priority to both know who they are, what they do, and how they can help in a place branding endeavour:

> *We make sure that we work with stakeholders across the city, be that*

private businesses, local authority, the universities, to find out exactly what it is they're doing, how they would like to see [the city] positioned. If there are collective common narratives that we can work to. And just lots and lots of talking and trying to get everyone under the same tent. (P1)

To do this effectively, practitioners must ensure they are seeing and being seen in a variety of professional contexts, with their social capital acting as a key occupational resource (Warren and Dinnie, 2018). Stakeholder relationships require a long-term, consistent commitment to implementing the types of activities that facilitate the development of these relationships – holding stakeholder engagement meetings, attending conferences and events, visiting stakeholders directly in their place of work, offering digital information channels for feedback, and constantly being available to offer information when called upon. Cities such as Toronto, Edinburgh, Philadelphia, and New Orleans, where brand principles and a prevalent marketing vision are embedded across stakeholder institutions allows for this type of crossover to occur more easily. However, it might be more challenging in cities such as Tel Aviv, where most brand activities occur outside of governmental paradigms (P1, P2, P15, P9, P18, P19).

Where this is also important is in having a key list of contacts to draw upon when information or participation is required from disparate sectors of the city who may not work together on a regular basis. As place marketers provide a bridge-building function in their role as cultural intermediaries, they might be able to pull stakeholders together who may not meet for a common purpose otherwise (Warren and Dinnie, 2018).

We do have much more active, easy, quick relationships with the planning department, the economic development department, parks. All of the departments area available to us, as is the Mayor's office and the other two levels of government. But beyond that, we're powerful as an organisation because we can bring the private sector to the table, where they can't. (P11)

This presents a unique set of challenges for place marketers, as the levels of power and decision-making they operate under might not follow a clear linear or strategic path, as in the private sector, where revenue generation or a profit motive act as a guiding force. Sometimes this looks like a careful negotiation of understanding one's place – when to engage, and when not to.

The work of securing a firm position where their legitimacy is unquestioned, and their strategic inputs are consistently valued, is a long-term ongoing proposition that is never fully realised. Similar to Marzano and Scott's (2009) study, the respondents in this study expressed regret that they did not hold as much sway over policy decisions as they thought that they should, given the wealth of research and knowledge they held about the city, its inhabitants and its target audiences. But a commitment to continually working within the political structure to wield a greater degree of influence was omnipresent, and celebrated with small wins, such as being seen as experts or authoritative voices on areas of strategic import pertaining to urban development. As one senior official stated,

I think I could have a lot more impact! But I think that's just about building the trade part of the organisation, building the relevancy of the organisation, for all stakeholders, so that we are increasingly seen as the go to people for information, for guidance, for steering, for decisions. And we'll never reach the end of that. It will always be an ongoing position I suspect. (P10)

Once an understanding of the stakeholder environment and relationships within it are established, place marketers can get on with the business of establishing their influence over key decision makers. The influence that promotional actors have is non-linear, invisible, and generally acts adjacent to official channels. Nonetheless, it is present and pervasive. One senior interviewee stated it this way:

> *Having been in the business that was very policy led, we're not that involved in policy officially, but we definitely are by virtue of what we do. What we do is being recognised as informing decisions and therefore policy, but there's no official structure for us to engage with policy development. But that doesn't mean we're not at the table. (P13)*

This is where these cultural intermediaries really fight for position — at the articulations between identity, representation, production, and consumption, which have the greatest impact on the meaning-making forces at work in the creation of a city brand. By moving through the circuit, demonstrating influence among other articulations such as production and regulation, their influence is more broadly felt.

Playing politics: Production and Regulation

The practitioners in this study work in highly complex political environments, in a unique confluence of the application of private sector principles in a public sector context. Understanding the political cycle and working with political masters is central to the job.

Those respondents who work in senior management and in highly strategic positions expressed a keen awareness of the political and public administration context in which they work. Those working in public service generally have a responsibility not just to achieve economic objectives and respond to market demands, as in the private sector, but to combine this with a commitment to social objectives, justice, and equity (Zavattaro, 2018). For those working in place marketing, there is an understanding that the market orientation of their position will only extend so far, and that eventually, they are beholden not only to the larger citizenry but also to those democratic representatives that hold political office and are responsible for political and public sector outcomes. This work positions them within the circuit of culture firmly between the articulations of regulation and representation, as their promotional work will constantly be filtered through a regulatory framework (du Gay et al, 1997). As Elliott (1997, pp. 41-42) explains, even those working in the tourism sector must operate within a highly charged political context of legislation, government policy statements and objectives, upholding impartiality, due process, and procedures that support national, regional, and cultural values.

Those respondents in this study demonstrated their understanding of the political tightrope they walk, and the long-term focus needed when working with politicians whose vision is limited by election cycles. What became apparent in the interviews is that respondents understood that their success as marketers was determined not only by traditional metrics of marketing efficacy, but also through the approval and respect gained from political masters and putting them 'in the position to shine' (P5). As one politically savvy respondent noted,

> *The thing you always have for politicians is that you always have to make clear what the added effect of our marketing work is on the politician. How does the success matter to them? Their priorities are sometimes different. But we can help them and say – 'ok I know you're a politician, and you want to be re-elected so in 3 years you need to show results,' I can think of that part for my story-telling how I can help them with a result that also helps my marketing. If you present it properly, then you don't have to get*

into the fight with them. (P8)

Questions about how participants work with politicians offered illuminating responses about the psychological manoeuvres they underwent to accomplish their goals. Even in cities such as Amsterdam, with an established reputation for brand building, marketing professionals need to walk a fine line between politics and promotion. (P8) None of these manoeuvres could be considered illegal or even under-handed; but they do demonstrate a canny and perhaps subtle manipulation and powers of persuasion to achieve professional ends.

Understanding the political landscape in which they operate, and the priorities that political leaders might have for the economic, cultural, and social development of the city can act as a guiding force for place marketers who understand that their success in implementing their strategy is tied to the larger political climate. This is a reciprocal relationship — for senior strategists, they are as interested in whether or not political leaders adopt place brand messaging as they are in adapting their messaging to accommodate policy direction. Thus, the strategy of message alignment between place branding and politics becomes an integral indicator of success for an enduring narrative. As one CEO put it,

> *We watch carefully about what the Mayor speaks about. How on message he is. He's the most powerful guy in the city. He's my boss, not really, but every day I wake up, I serve the Mayor. The more I can see the two of us aligned, great things happen. If we become not aligned, the city will suffer. You can't get things done. And so, when I look at – how do I know we're effective is if we're changing that culture of city administration, in terms of when we have a foreign investor coming in, is how fast and how well did they react? (P12)*

In cities such as Edmonton and Ljubljana, strong support from a city Mayor committed to branding principles and who sees the value in brand endeavours was identified as one of the leading factors for getting brand buy-in across the city (P12, P16).This echoes the contention of Eshuis et al. (2013) and Eshuis and Edwards (2013) that local governments are learning that place branding and marketing have become key governance strategies that offer legitimacy and foster inclusion between government officials and local stakeholders, when message strategies and development goals are aligned. This alignment does not occur easily or directly — in fact it requires a great deal of behind-the-scenes work and meeting time in identifying priorities, looking at the broader picture, and encouraging senior public management to agree. One respondent discussed how priority alignment comes about:

> *Last week I just came from a meeting where we were talking about a City Hall plan of attack to deal with some things, we want to get accomplished. It's essentially a shopping list of priorities, they have their priorities, and we basically go back and forth trying to figure out how we can make things work for them, and with that team that's there. It's a long process, and one we spend a lot of time and energy on, to get it right. (P14)*

When considering where place marketers might have the greatest impact in bridging the communication between policy makers and their audiences, the articulations between regulation and representation on the circuit of culture are fraught with challenges related to power imbalances. Savvy marketers understand this and leverage their social capital with influential stakeholders to establish a more dominant role within the circuit, constantly striving for position.

Working Behind the Scenes: Production and Identity

Where the need for political savvy is most pronounced is in the promotional actors' ability to resolve the tension between short-term political goals and long-term place branding objectives. Within the political field, politicians tend to occupy front-line communicative positions in the promotion of their city, whether at home or abroad. However, their focus tends to extend the length of a political cycle and may not align with long-term strategic city branding objectives in place over a time period of several years or even decades. Promotional actors appear to understand that without political backing, little can be achieved. This can lead to some taking a 'behind the curtain' approach, allowing political actors to command the spotlight on promotional endeavours, but firmly present in guiding the result:

> *I often think of us as back-seat drivers. We're definitely not sitting in the front seat, we're not steering. The Mayor is doing that, along with a bunch of other people. But we are provoking from the back seat. Or we're creating the parade. With a completely different metaphor. Wildly different metaphor. But we're building that parade for them to participate in. (P11)*

Previous research has described these practitioners as 'Honest Brokers,' whose role is to act behind the scenes to broker relationships between key stakeholder groups, bringing them together in a common pursuit of a public goal (Warren and Dinnie, 2018). The ability to do this effectively derives from the maintenance of objectivity in stakeholder relationships, with a focus on the bigger picture as it relates to branding strategies and carefully navigate the power relations inherent in certain fields.

This is where the circuit of culture begins to manifest, in circular and more integrated ways, for example, between representation and identity, or production and consumption, or representation and consumption, or identity and production. These cultural intermediaries are able to leverage their social capital to engineer interventions between decision-makers and influential stakeholders, guiding meaning-making practices through the force of their political and social machinations. Their interventions in these articulations are not always obvious, but they are demonstrative in the representations of the brand that ultimately occur.

Promotional Means that Achieve Strategic Ends: Regulation and Consumption

Beyond the strategic management of key stakeholder relationships, the respondents in this study suggested that one of the greatest contributions they could make was in their ability to influence policy and planning decisions by looking at them via a communicative lens. By applying a market logic to urban design problems in certain neighbourhoods for example, or by applying the 'tourist gaze' (Urry, 1995) to policy problems, they were able to offer a much-needed change of perspective to urban planners who might not have considered how experiences shape perceptions. As one respondent stated,

> *So, people in the Communications team have come up with design solutions for problems. We have actually not just communicated the solution but actually developed the solution. And that is fantastic because that shows that you don't have to be a designer or architect or planner to solve these problems, you just have to understand how to get humans to change the way they behave. (P2)*

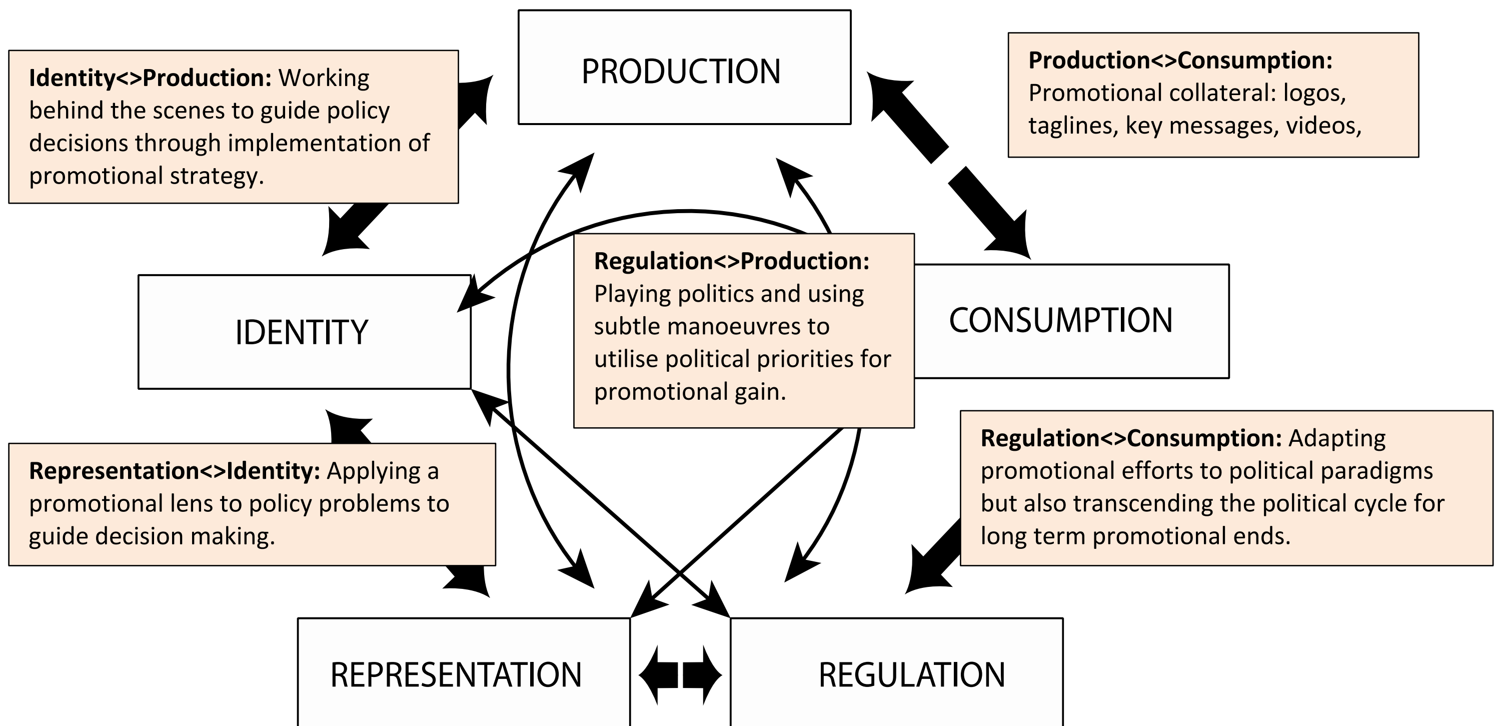
Another informant talked about how way-finding initiatives, originally created purely for the tourist experience, assisted the city in developing design solutions for signage to key attractions that assisted residents as well. This echoes Moor's (2014, p.85) contention that

branding consultants are able to exert a considerable influence in specific domains, as they operate in the physical three-dimensional spaces of consumer culture. By linking these conversations to bigger issues that face the city, place marketers are able to sway planning outcomes in a more citizen-focused direction. Sometimes, the 'tourist gaze' offers a perspective that planning officials had ignored in favour of economic expediency. Framing the argument as helpful and pragmatic tends to get policymakers on side, when all else fails:

> *Well they don't really get the marketing either. The marketing is just a way to an end. It's the end game that is important. Obviously, the marketing plays an important role in delivering it. For them it's just an apparatus that we 'do'. But it's saying to them, well, if you had thought about maybe putting in a pedestrian walkway here, that might make things more pleasant for people. … So, it's trying to do that kind of advocacy. (P15)*

This is where a cultural economy perspective on the work of place marketers really begins to take shape, as we can observe how their influence works through the articulations of not only production and consumption, but also representation and identity, and through the application of their promotional lens, actually change the physical and spatial nature of the place itself. They intervene at various points within the circuit, working behind the scenes, leveraging social and political relationships, and acting as an objective honest broker to guide decision-makers to enact policy decisions that ultimately serve promotional purposes. This means that urban planning begins to take on a promotional logic through these unseen interventions. These interventions can be demonstrated through the diagram in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The Circuit of Culture in City Branding



Adapted from du Gay et al., 1997

Place marketers act as powerful individuals and groups with the ability to influence perceptions of reality through the articulations of production, consumption, regulation, and representations, to the point where the brand identity they manufacture in the shared cultural

space seems natural and authentic (Champ, 2008). They operate in the articulations of production and consumption via the creation of symbolic artefacts – advertisements, brochures, logos, taglines, and other promotional materials that convey meaning through discourse. Working behind the scenes to guide policy decisions through a promotional lens, their work manifests in the articulations between identity and production, as well as identity and representation. Their ability to 'play politics' using subtle manoeuvres to utilise political priorities for promotional gain places them in the articulation between production and regulation. Finally, transcending political cycles whilst also adapting promotional endeavours to political requirements positions them firmly at the articulations of regulation and consumption, codifying practices of consumption and controlling practices related to other processes in the circuit in ways that align with political paradigms.

CONCLUSION

Recent scholarship has positioned 'place marketers' as central to successful place branding processes (Warren and Dinnie, 2018). Little research has explored the occupational activities of these public sector professionals who tend to work in highly complex, political, and bureaucratic structures, largely with a focus on tourism and destination promotion. Despite the unique geographic, political, cultural, and social contexts in which they operate, there is more that binds rather than separates their professional experience. They must constantly negotiate their position of legitimacy and powers of persuasion and influence if they are to have an impact on policy and planning decisions. They are beholden to myriad stakeholders, straddling the divide between public sector accountability and private sector promotional discipline. As such, their work can occupy a challenging web of public/private partnerships, balancing the need for exposure with the need to be perceived as unbiased and committed to the public good. Yet, despite the broad significance of their work, their input is largely overlooked in a city's policy and planning decisions. While most cities now understand that those who work promotionally have a role to play in attracting tourists or creating attractive brochures, websites or marketing collateral, the broader strategic work largely goes unnoticed or is under-represented in political and policy discourse (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Moilanen, 2015; Zavattaro and Adams, 2016).

This research sought to uncover the predominantly invisible work of place marketers and identify the methods by which they overcome these challenges. Our findings indicate that place marketers must be vigilant in their construction of legitimacy in the face of institutional invisibility, conflicting priorities, accountability to diverse stakeholders, and the breadth of exposure the role entails. They do this by working closely, consistently and behind the scenes with key senior stakeholders, contextualising promotional pursuits among the city's larger political and policy priorities and demonstrating political savvy. This way practitioners can succeed in *influencing upstream*, facilitating the inclusion of a promotional lens on policy decisions that positively impact the city in the long term. Thus, this research not only contributes to our current understanding of city branding, but also, vitally, facilitates knowledge exchange between policy makers and place marketers, cementing practitioners' seat at the senior political table in a city's policy value chain.

Whilst this study focused mainly on the experiences of marketers, a limitation is that other perspectives, such as those of other senior officers working in the domains of economic or policy development, were not considered. The goal of this study was not to compare the holistic understanding of all personnel invested in a city's brand; rather it was to understand the specific lived/working experience of promotional professionals. Future research expanding the scope of the interviews to offer a counterbalance might mitigate the inherent

interviewee bias that might have been apparent through this limited focus alone. Further, whilst this research points to hidden non-systemic and practical ways that place marketers might have an impact on a city's image by influencing decision-makers upstream, it is arguable that with limited or stretched resources, small, dedicated teams of professionals, and a lack of central legitimacy in planning processes, their work is overshadowed or even overlooked. More research is needed to identify the specific outcomes of the work, both in shaping discourse, as well as in the more material cultural and economic outcomes of policy decisions.

The findings of this research point to the unofficial, multi-layered, and non-systemic ways that promotional actors might influence urban policy and development decisions in a city's active marketing efforts. Theoretically, it builds on recent research that positions these actors as cultural intermediaries, shedding a more detailed light on the practices they employ in influencing upstream (Bourdieu, 1984; Matthews and Smith Maguire, 2014; Warren and Dinnie, 2018) while also extending the theory via the integration of du Gay et al.'s (1997) circuit of culture and taking cultural economy approach to city branding by observing points of influence exerted by cultural intermediaries. These promotional actors are able to deftly move between articulations on the circuit, applying a particular market logic that underpins public policy decisions and cements their position of influence between both culture and the economy. Practically, this work offers a clearer picture of how cultural intermediaries are positioned within the larger social processes of tourism, destination management and urban planning, as they leverage communicative processes and promotional thinking to assist in city planning and policy decisions. If practitioners are properly placed within the policy value chain in a city, and offered adequate strategic influence, all facets of urban planning – well beyond tourism considerations – might be positively affected, from parks, recreation, education, wayfinding, festivals/events, residential development, retail, etc. Thinking promotionally – identifying and working with key stakeholders, understanding the needs of target audiences, and creating messages that appeal to them in a variety of communicative vehicles – can only assist in making policy decisions that work for citizens and visitors alike.

This research answers a call for a better understanding of the professional challenges faced by place marketers (Zavattaro and Adams, 2016), as well as the need to establish commonalities among actors working in different geographical contexts, in order to establish generalisability and a fuller understanding of their common experience (Warren and Dinnie, 2018). It is suggested that politicians and senior public sector management and policy makers might offer promotional actors an increased role in urban/regional/national planning decisions, recognising their input to be both strategic and stakeholder focused. This provides opportunity for further qualitative and quantitative research into substantiating this position, shedding light on how occupational structures might impact place brand strategies in future, and why it matters.

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