



Bridging the gap between culture, identity and image: a structurationist conceptualization of place brands and place branding

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Abstract

Purpose: Although place branding is getting increasingly popular in research as well as in local, regional and national political agendas, the theoretical foundations of the place branding discipline are still underdeveloped. By embracing the stream of identity-based studies, the paper attempts to demonstrate that place brands can usefully be approached through an emphasis of their cultural traits and the practical connection between culture, identity and image.

Design/methodology/approach: To build our theoretical arguments the paper challenges the place branding model suggested by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), and uses practices as a unit of analysis. The paper offers a brief review of the principal tenets of practice theory(ies) and uses structuration theory as a theoretical device to demonstrate how this theory is suitable to provide a (still lacking) theoretical anchorage to the place branding process.

Findings: The usefulness of structuration theory to understand and make sense of the place branding process is analysed at both the strategic and the tactical level through two illustrative examples. Structuration theory emerges as a solid theory through which the constitutive elements of the place branding process, i.e. culture, identity and image, are linked together, opening the door to further theoretical elaborations and empirical efforts grounded on this theory.

Originality/value: This is the first article in which practice theory(ies) in general and structuration theory in particular is employed to explain the place branding process. The theoretical arguments reported in this paper are offers valuable guidance for further theoretical elaborations, and empirical applications.

Article type: Conceptual paper

Keywords: Place branding, practice theory, structuration, culture, identity, image.

Introduction

In this article, we examine the formation and operation of place brands under the theoretical light of practice theory and, specifically, of Giddens' (1984) structuration theory. In doing so, we aim at advancing the theoretical understanding and grounding of place branding by emphasizing the central relevance of what we see as the main constituent of place brands and of the main element that may form the groundwork of the place branding process: practices. The use of structuration theory allows us to explore in depth the dynamics of place brands at several levels: First, at the strategic level where the place brand is treated as the strategic vision for the development of the place. Then, at a tactical level of specific place branding initiatives and actions aimed at communicating the place brand. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, at the level of individuals and their mutual influence on the place brand, its formation and communication. Using structuration, we are able to provide a strong anchorage to practice theory and understand how people's practices ultimately shape what is to become the place brand.

The need for an elaborate discussion of theories relevant to place branding stems from our agreement with the criticism raised (amongst others) by Ashworth *et al.* (2015) that little theoretical refinement seems to have occurred in the last twenty years, despite the proliferation of studies in the field. Place branding is thought to support place development through the establishment and maintenance of a favourable and consistent image and reputation of the place (Papadopoulos, 2004). This has led some to attempt to formulate managerial processes to exploit it and increase the competitiveness of the place (Van Ham, 2008; Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009; Rojas-Méndez *et al.*, 2015), while others have treated it as part of an implicit political agenda that exacerbates social problems (Colomb, 2012; Greenberg, 2008). A large part of the literature has focused on attempts to define place branding and its potential (Govers and Go, 2009; Anholt, 2010) and discussions of how this might be put into practice (Braun, 2012; Eshuis *et al.*, 2013). This article attempts to position itself amongst another series of publications characterized by a cultural approach to place branding aiming at establishing

cultural explanations of the process through which place brands are created (Askegaard and Kjeldgaard, 2007; Kalandides, 2011; Mayes, 2008).

In particular, we draw on the 'identity-based place branding' model suggested by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) to simultaneously challenge it and complement it. Using structuration theory as our theoretical device and practices as our unit of analysis, allows us to bring an additional focus and nuance to their description of the dynamics of place brands.

Despite of its theoretical nature, and despite this article has been developed with the aim to reinvigorate the theoretical debate in the stream of place branding research, it also offers a new light under which the practice of place branding can or should be seen. By emphasizing the need for place branders to focus more on practices in the development of their branding strategies and in the deployment of place branding tactics can allow place branders to better address their branding efforts, to prevent brand failures and to develop brands that are more solidly linked to what the place actually is and how external audiences should see it.

The article starts with our perspective on the place branding process that highlights the actions and practices that constitute the place brand. We then explain how practice theory in general and structuration theory in particular informs our understanding of places. Following this, we demonstrate how structuration theory can help to achieve a better theoretical understanding of place culture, identity and image indicating that the interplay between the three occurs through peoples' practices. Two illustrative examples of different levels of place branding activities (strategic and tactical) are then presented to explain the theory in practice. Cases are used as practical illustrations to support the theoretical and empirical relevance and plausibility of arguments proposed and to illustrate the working of the underlying mechanisms (Siggelkow, 2007). Finally, we outline the main implications of our theoretical proposition particularly regarding the contested nature of identity claims and taglines and the fallacy of the persistent division between internal and external audiences for place branding activities.

Understanding the place brand: From logos to culture

Although scholars have not (yet) reached an agreement on the meaning of place brands or the process of place branding (Gertner, 2011; Kavaratzis, 2017), the literature of the last two decades reveals progress in defining place brands and a gradual scholars' shift from a normative inspired, to a cultural rooted definition. The first definition of place brands adopted was the same provided by the American Marketing Association for the brand in general by simply substituting the terms 'goods' and 'services' with that of place. Accordingly, a place brand has been defined as 'a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination [that] conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination [and that] serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience' (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998:103). This definition highlights the brand's functions of identification/differentiation, and adds some elements related to the experiential value of the place for brand recipients.

More recently, place branding has been more compellingly defined as the process of building the brand of a given place by drawing on its identity and by promoting the formation of a positive place image (Anholt, 2010). By acknowledging the limits of the 'AMA inspired' definition, scholars have gradually moved toward a focus on the cultural foundations of the place brand, and criticised normative approaches to place branding (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009).

Place brands are now increasingly analysed in terms of the cultural values they carry, and the place branding process is regarded as a production of cultural meanings (Campelo *et al.*, 2013; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015). Parkerson (2007:263) clearly stated, '[...] place brands are inherently different from products and product brands and conventional branding models and approaches are insufficient. Viewed through the lens of culture, in its many meanings and manifestations, place branding takes on a new complexity'.

The growing acknowledgment that brands are cultural artefact (Cayla and Arnould, 2008; Schroeder, 2009) created through a negotiation of meanings between individuals (Lury, 2004; Merz *et al.*, 2009;

Ind and Coates, 2013) has also been transferred to the place branding field (Warnaby, 2009; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). Scholars have underlined the necessity of connecting place branding activities with the local culture (Morgan *et al.*, 2003; Hankinson, 2005; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2015), and emphasized the connection with the place identity (Houghton and Stevens, 2010; Therkelsen *et al.*, 2010). If the brand of a place is not anchored to its identity, the process of place branding will lead to an empty brand, meaningless especially to its internal audience (Pasquinelli and Teräs, 2013). In other words, the starting point for developing the place brand is the place's identity (Kavaratzis, 2004; Zimmerbauer 2011, 2016). The adoption of this perspective also requires framing the notion of place in a different way. Places cannot be simplistically identified with geographical and/or political borders (Harrison and Dourish, 1996) but should be regarded as imaginary representations of social relations constituted by sedimented social structures and cultural practices (Escobar, 2001).

Drawing on this ontological perspective of places, Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) have theoretically outlined the identity-based process of place brand creation. The brand of a place, they argue, emerges as an outcome of the process of dialogue between stakeholders which is at the core of the development of the place identity. In this sense, the brand cannot be considered a managerial variable place branders can fully control (Gardner and Levy, 1955), but as an entity created through the syncretic meeting of stakeholders (Askegaard, 2006; Hatch and Schultz, 2010). A better understanding of identity is of paramount importance also at a practical level, i.e. to 'execute' the place branding process and to compose a specific and appealing market proposition (Medway and Warnaby, 2014). A better understanding of the place identity can prevent place branders to incur in brand failures in their attempt to give place brands a unique (but detached from its identity) brand image. For example, Vanolo (2008) have shown that a main reason why the process of rebranding an industrial city like Turin from its former image as the 'automotive capital of Italy' to the 'city of creativity' has largely failed due to the lack of a clear identitarian connection between the new positioning and the place sedimented identity. Early in 2009 the city of Hamburg faced great resistance and witnessed even the

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3 birth of an antagonistic movement (i.e. Not in our name, brand Hamburg) toward the branding
4 strategy pursued by the municipality that was trying to rebrand the image of the city toward an
5 emphasis over creativity to appeal the creative classes. The main argument behind the anti-city
6 branding protest against the city's strategy to market Hamburg as the city of creativity was largely
7 motivated by the residents' perceived inconsistency between the projected but not actually existent
8 image and the actual identity of the place (see NION, Brand Hamburg, 2010; Zenker and Beckmann,
9 2012).

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11 However, the fact that the image of a place should be aligned as much as possible to its identity,
12 should not let to think to place identity as a fixed entity (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). Rather, a
13 place's identity is a dynamic 'object' that changes throughout the passing of time, and throughout a
14 continuous 'dialogue' between internal and external stakeholders, as outlined in the next section.

30 **Place branding and place identity: the missing link**

31
32 Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) outline the dynamics of place identity and place brands by drawing on
33 the framework of identity formation by Hatch and Schultz (2002). This process is composed by four
34 sub-processes occurring simultaneously and involving both internal and external stakeholders.
35 'Expressing', that encompasses the process through which culture makes itself known through
36 identification. 'Impressing', that refers to the impression that identity leaves on others. 'Mirroring',
37 i.e. the process by which the image of others is reflected on identity. 'Reflecting', that signifies the
38 process by which identity is embedded in cultural understanding (Figure 1).

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51 - Insert Figure 1 around here -
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56 As Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) claim, effective place branding should allow or enhance locals to
57 express cultural features that already form part of the place identity (*expressing*), tap the images of
58 others by mirroring their impressions and expectations (*mirroring*), leave positive impressions on
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others (*impressing*) and, finally, instil new meanings and symbols into culture according to the dynamics character of the place identity (*reflecting*). In line with this reasoning the most important element of place branding is neither the brand, nor the identity; rather it is the place brand construction process undertaken by stakeholders (both internal and external) through the interplay between culture, identity, and image (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013).

We attempt in this article to build on this model and improve what we see as its drawback, i.e. its inability to explain how each of the four sub-processes and the interplay between them is materially enacted leaving several questions unanswered: How does identity express cultural understandings? How does identity mirror the images of others? How does identity leave impression on others? How is identity embedded in culture?

Starting from these questions, we claim that the place branding process suggested by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) will benefit from a better understanding of practices that are enacted within a given place. We thus embrace a theoretical stance similar to Kornberger (2010) according to whom brands are far more than object but are rather the result of a set of practices. What we suggest Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) fail to describe is that the four sub-processes occur through practices which are central to the development of the place identity (*expressing*), to the reflection of such identity on cultural change (*reflecting*), to the development of a positive image (*impressing*) and to the process of adaptation of the identity to the image it renders toward the audiences (*mirroring*). And, we argue, it is by means of a close look to these practices that we can give theoretical and empirical answers to the questions previously displayed, i.e. How does identity express cultural understandings? How does identity mirror the images of others? How does identity leave impression on others? How is identity embedded in culture? These practices are the means by which individuals create the place across time and space (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992) and make its brand meaningful to both internal and external stakeholders. For example, the aforementioned case of rebranding Hamburg as the ‘city of creativity’ failed because the branding strategy was designed to emphasize some local practices to impress visitors, while neither taking into serious account the very basic cultural principles on which Hamburg

collective practices are built on, nor offered a convincing and suitable opportunity for local citizens to adapt their practices to better fit with the desired image. Place culture in this sense becomes the enactment of these practices, serving both as a guide for and as an outcome of social conduct. Place identity, similarly, is intended as medium and outcome of a process of negotiation between self and social identity and between individual biographies and dominant social projects (Pred, 1984). Finally, place image can be considered as the result of reflexive understanding of routinized practices enacted in a given place, typical of that place, carried by knowledgeable actors either belonging or not belonging to that place. Thus, being the place of creativity means that the culture of the place has a thick orientation toward creative practices, e.g. a number of 'creative class' people that is higher compared to other places, that people living in that place see themselves more creative than other in force of the creative actions and practices that are enacted therein individually and collectively, and because non-locals are actually able to differentiate the place from others (even equally creative) because of the peculiar or distinctive place-specific creative practices there enacted.

The link between place culture, identity, and image is accordingly made possible by practices. These practices, being prevailingly routinized, give shape to the culture of a place which results from the unique combination of (past) historical patterns that shapes present and future actions and interactions within it (Karababa and Ger, 2011; Kravets, 2012; Rojas-Méndez, 2013). Put in this way, the concept of culture becomes instable encompassing a relentless dynamic of change instantiated through human actions and interactions (Bourdieu, 1977). If the link between culture, identity, and image is untangled in this perspective, practice theory(ies) emerge as useful theoretical devices as they emphasize the influence that culture plays in determining both social action/interaction and the wide range of micro and macro social processes (Reckwitz, 2002). In addition, since practice theories are characterized by a common effort to provide a solution to the centuries-old dispute of the primacy of action over structure and vice versa (Schatzki, 1996), they are well suited to make theoretical and empirical sense on how the existence of a place brand is capable to affect people's behaviour and, on the contrary, on how people behaviour is able to change the very existence of the place brand. Differently stated,

practice theories offer a solid theoretical argument and respective empirical agenda to regard (place) brands as socially constructed entities. Furthermore, since practice theories have a common tendency to shifting the focus from the outcome, i.e. the brand, to the process and to the activities through which such outcome is produced (see Vargo and Lush, 2015 for a similar argument), the usage of practice theory to theorize about place branding is suitable also to strengthen the link between place branding research and practice.

Several sociologists and philosophers can be clustered within the group of practice theorists. These include Giddens, Bourdieu, Lyotard, Foucault, Taylor, and Schatzki among the most eminent. Although the provision of a compelling review of practice theory goes beyond the scope of this paper (see Reckwitz, 2002 for a review), these authors share several commonalities. They all situate practices as the very mean through which social life is chronically produced and reproduced. They all reject the dualisms between agency and structure. They all consider (social) relations mutually constitutive, i.e. always exist in relation with each other (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011).

Despite practices are a primary unit of analysis in branding research (Cayla and Eckhardt, 2008; Thompson and Arsel, 2004), applications of the theory of practice to the study of branding are still scarcely available (Warde, 2005) and non-existent in place branding research. Research in fact has largely approached these practices from a subjectivist perspective, giving limited attention to the existing links between individuals' experience of brands, and the context(s) in which these brands are experienced (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011). However, although the existing theories of practice have similar theoretical roots the "Structuration Theory" proposed by Anthony Giddens and the "Theory of Practice" outlined by Pierre Bourdieu (1977) are undoubtedly the most widely used in social research (Everts *et al.*, 2011). In this article, we deliberately draw on Giddens' (1984) social theory and preferred this theory to the Bourdieu's theory of practice due to our epistemological support to those critics that unveiled an objectivist bias in Bourdieu's theory (Schatzki, 1987, 1997; Jenkins, 1982; Mouzelis, 1995; King, 2000; Lizardo, 2010). This pitfall, poses serious constraints to our effort to propose a convincing theoretical conceptualization of place brands as social processes constructed

through a dialectic interplay between stakeholders. Related to Bourdieu's objectivistic tendency, to be accused is especially his problematic theorization of power that emphasizes agents' struggle to achieve domination over others. Power in Bourdieu's mind-set is thus approached to explain social differences and unequal social structure (Bourdieu, 1994), rather than to make sense of individual's willpower (Navarro, 2006) downplaying their ability to change social structure (Calhoun *et al.*, 1993).

As we are going to better highlight in the proceeding of this article, Giddens assumes a more 'neutral' understanding of power according to which even social stability is a form of social change.

As the branding literature reveals, the relationship between individual actors and brands is not necessarily permeated by power dominance or social struggles. Rather, this relationship can be shaped under the forces of a process involving the brand, the consumers, and other stakeholders (Merz *et al.*, 2009), where none of these parties seeks to achieve dominance over the others.

In addition, what makes structuration theory particularly suitable to the study of brands (regardless of whether they refer to a brand or to a corporation or to a product) and of how brands shape and are shaped by human action, is the way in which the theory frames agency, i.e. as the capacity to do otherwise. In the consumption realm, consumers' agency is the capacity to freely, voluntarily and deliberately decide to erect a brand as an identity-signifier (Kuenzel and Vaux Halliday, 2008), to allow the brand to influence their way of thinking (Schroeder, 2009), or to attach the brand meaning that are more traditionally associated to human beings (Fournier, 1998). Thus, choosing to act in a brand-aligned way not only reinforces the role that the brand plays in one's life, but it also contributes to reinforce the brand's role as a potent influencer or shaper of individuals' lives. This way of framing individual agency is not only important to properly disentangle how consumers relate to brands and vice versa in general, but it is particular useful when place brands are under scrutiny as their primary recipients, i.e. local citizens, are implicitly involved in the process of co-authoring the brand's meanings.

There are at least three important reasons suggesting the appropriateness of structuration theory to advance current understanding of the place branding process. First, structuration theory leads

directing attention to which local practices may constitute the very essence of the place brand. Second, it permits to evaluate how these local practices are synthesized into intangible brand meanings and are accordingly communicated. Last, it offers a solid theoretical lens to illuminate whether and how human agency is somehow influenced by the very existence of the place brand.

In line with structuration theory we contend, the existence of a place brand cannot be taken for granted or assumed to exist because the brand is reified or advertised as long as the place is transformed into a structure, i.e. when the presence of the place brand is taken into account (more or less intentionally) as a guide to action.

Hence, while recognizing that Giddens' structuration theory is not free from drawbacks (see Archer, 1982, Stinchcombe, 1986 and Clegg, 1989 for fierce critics of the theory), we believe that this theory is well suited to make sense of the place branding process and – particularly – to bring together place culture, place identity and place image. The principal undertakes of structuration theory are concisely reviewed in the next paragraph.

Structuration theory

The theory of structuration attempts to describe the relations between the overarching structures that influence our lives and our own ability to exercise agency (Cresswell, 2004). Structures for Giddens depend on our actions to exist and our actions are given meaning by the structures that lie beyond them (Cresswell, 2004). Individuals are engaged in structures they transform in the action process (Sewell, 1992). Structures exist only as memory traces, are instantiated in action, and exist insofar as practices are conducted (Giddens, 1984, 1986). Structures characterize social systems as they form the rules of actions that individuals follow in a specific place so that some practices can become institutionalized and assume a taken for granted nature, while others are not carried out, deemed inappropriate or illegitimate.

According to structuration theory, structures assume three different forms: signification, legitimation, and domination (see Figure 2).

- Insert Figure 2 around here -

Structures of *signification* enable and constrain agents to make sense of the context they act in and to communicate these meanings and their views of ongoing practices to others drawing upon *interpretive schemes*. Thus, signification refers to discursive and symbolic rules that govern the way in which people talk and use interpersonal communication. Agents also refer to structures of *legitimation* via *norms* that imply some form of sanctions incurred when not respected. For Giddens, signification and legitimation are procedures of actions, therefore, aspects of praxis. The awareness of these structures is the very core of knowledgeability of human agents. To say that individuals are knowledgeable means that actors know how to act in certain situations and adjust their actions accordingly. They are able to monitor their actions continuously and expect others to do the same (*reflexive monitoring*). They are able to maintain a continuous theoretical understanding of their actions (*rationalization of action*) and to act purposefully (*motivation of action*). Agents' knowledgeability is thus an important aspect in practice routinization since actors have a natural tendency to reproduce the social order that gave them the capacity to act. Yet, although motivation, knowledge and reflexivity are considered central principle of human agency, these should not lead to think that every human action is thoughtfully undertaken and that Giddens has actually a subjectivist stance of human action. Actually, many of the social interactions and social practices that we perform on a daily basis are enacted in force of what Giddens calls practical consciousness. Think for example to how we use a structure of signification like language (see Haslett, 2012). When an individual utters a sentence, s/he draws upon various linguistic rules that are sedimented in his/her practical consciousness of language usage. These structural features of the language are the medium whereby individual generate utterances. But in producing a syntactically correct utterance they simultaneously (although largely unconsciously) contribute to the reproduction of the language as a whole. This is why Giddens claims that structures (such as language) and action (such as the act of speaking) have to be distinguished. Speech presupposes a subject, while language is somehow subject-less as it exists only in so far as it is known

and reproduced by its speaker via its usage. The same applies to how individual refers to structures of legitimation, e.g. legislative norms, that despite they come into actual existence only when transgressed (in the form of sanctions), every time people are discouraged to act in a way that does not align to the norm produce the effect of reinforcing the structure of legitimation they refer to.

However, the very fact that for Giddens agents have a general tendency to reproduce the structural conditions that allowed them to act, should not lead to conclude that change is impossible in the structuration frame of reference. Change for Giddens is made possible through the enactment of power. For Giddens, action logically involves power as power is prior to subjectivity and is not a resource itself. Power is for Giddens related to *structures of domination*, i.e. 'the media whereby transformative capacity is employed in the routine course of social interaction' (Giddens, 1979:92). Therefore, if actors are powerful enough, their actions may have the consequence of transforming the structures that gave them the capacity to act, also limiting power exerted by others. Accordingly, the enactment of power presumes the existence of relations of autonomy and dependence between individual and/or collective actors within the context in which social interaction occurs. This does not mean that when the actor is in a situation of no choice to act otherwise, power ceases to be salient (as in Bourdieu's theory). Power for Giddens is a transformative capacity also in the case in which it cannot be deployed. Thus, no change is always change as it consists in the practical re-production of the same structural dimensions that inhibited actors' willpower.

Time and space are of paramount importance in Giddens' theory as structuration occurs in spatially and historically contingent (Giddens, 1991; Pred, 1984). The passing of time is necessary for practices and interaction to become routinized and for structure to be institutionalized. Space is of equal importance as the process of structuration occurs in geographically bounded places (Giddens, 1979; 1984). However, as he observes 'it is usually possible to designate locales in terms of their physical properties ... but it is an error to suppose that locales can be described in those terms alone' (Giddens, 1984). According to Pred (1983, 1984), in any given place there are certain institutional projects that are dominant (i.e. assume priority over others) due to the impact they have on individuals' social

conduct. The accomplishment of dominant institutional projects is intertwined with individual biographies that bring continuity to the structuration of social systems. Thus, dominant projects and individual biographies are both means and end of one another. Structures of domination and the constituent interaction dimension of power relations between individuals, groups and institutions, determine to a great extent the nature of projects that is possible or impossible to enact, the tension/resistances between individual biographies and institutional projects, and the quality and amount of resources that can be mobilized for the achievement of the objectives of such projects. Although power is prior to subjectivity, power is anyway also the capacity to force individuals to participate in particular projects, under specific distributions of power. On the one hand, the institutional power has the ability to force individuals to behave in a certain way by producing or reshaping the structural conditions of micro-settings of actions and interactions. On the other hand, actor can act individually or in social groups to push the institutional order to act differently (see Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). Whatever the source of power and the social actor responsible for change, this change can become a structural property of the social system only if it becomes institutionalized and routinized. Within a structuration frame, the place, in its abstract and physical essence, comes to acquire identity through individual actions, which then become institutionalized practices through reflexive monitoring and purposeful actions of knowledgeable actors. Seen in this way, the physical place becomes the natural setting constructed by individual biographies and institutional projects perpetuated through the passing of time (Jones and Fowler, 2007).

Structuration theory and the interplay between culture, identity and image

Giddens' social theory can advance our understanding of place branding. First, focusing on the recursive interplay between agency and structure, it allows avoiding to consider the brand of places as astray structures detached from the social reality that make up them. Place brands – as structures – are first and foremost the locus of action. Thus, it can be argued that the meanings that a place brand holds, are neither settled, nor independent from its recipients (including both internal and external

stakeholders that contribute to the brand's creation, formation and maintenance). According to Giddens' theory the brand and the meanings it carries are continuously (re)negotiated and (re)shaped making the place brand the result of both discursive and performative practices. Discursive means here that the focus is on signs and language that coordinate action, while performative means that the focus is more on material and bodily enactments.

Structuration theory also allows framing places at the crossroad of institutional projects and individual biographies. The place does not exist separately to individual and collective practices that are enacted within it. Each place is characterized by a culture that exists only insofar practices are conducted. When individuals act in a place, they refer – implicitly or explicitly – to the culture of that place, boosting the process of structuration of culture. The concept of culture thus, assumes a meaning that goes beyond its role of shaping and providing meanings for the ways of doing things in a given society (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013) but encompasses the practices that are enacted in a given place enabled and constrained by the structural features of that place. The process of structuration is bonded with the knowledgeability of actors which consists in reflexive monitoring of their actions and that of others, in the continuous understanding of their actions, and in the motivation of action. Although individuals might be unaware that by acting in a certain way they are producing/reproducing the structure that enabled them to act in that way, they are able to maintain control over the motives that prompted their action, and to maintain an understanding of their behaviour and of that enacted by others. Culture can thus be analysed in terms of structures (of signification, legitimation and domination) and by the prevalence of one of these structures over action. For example, in some places structures of legitimation can be more prevailing than in others in which, sanctioning aspects in interaction are less influent. In some other places structures of signification, e.g. the hierarchical distance that features class division, can be particularly resilience to change affecting the way in which social shifts take place.

Structuration theory can also explain place identity and its relationship with culture. As far as identity is concerned, Giddens' theory stresses a conception of social identity which is the result of the

interplay between the individual's identity in society and the society in the self. Identity and social structure are continually mingled, created and recreated through the intertwining of dominant institutional projects, individual biographies and the structural properties of the social context. For Giddens, identity is 'implanted' into agents by their membership in a collective and the traits constructed by a specific culture that leads it toward specific social conducts. When agents see themselves culturally bonded to a collective, this will be reflected on their self-identity, on their level of participation to institutional projects (Campelo *et al.*, 2013) and can even result in feelings of place attachment (Altman and Low, 1992). Individuals' identity is also built by their need to perceive themselves as linked with the social identity of a group, i.e. to consider themselves as active participant of place identity formation (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Thus, as Giddens (1991) stated, identity can be considered a project involving a continuous interplay between the self, the collective, and the place's structural properties.

Regarding place image, for Giddens, the structural properties possessed by a given place, are the main elements agents refer to, to make sense of that place. Thus, these structural properties – routinized and instantiated into action – constitute the main elements upon which stakeholders (whether natives or visitors) form their perceptions and images of a place contributing to further institutionalize these properties and the actions they enable and constrain.

This means that culture, identity and image are linked by practices and by the recognition of practices enacted within a given place. Place culture does not exist as such but is brought into being by actors' practices enabled and constrained by structures of signification, legitimation and domination. Culture contributes to shape both individual and collective identity that are indissolubly interrelated and made concrete in individual biographies and institutional dominant projects. Identity is subject to a process of institutionalization through reflexive monitoring, theoretical understanding and motivation of action. Image, in turn, is reflected in structural properties of a given place that allow stakeholders to distinguish that place from others and to make sense of the interactions occurring within it.

The above structurationist approach underlines that the interplay between culture, identity and image occurs through (individual and collective) actions that both shape and are shaped by the wider structures constituting the place. Given that the place brand is formed through this interplay (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013), it becomes evident that the place brand is constituted, enacted and made meaningful by means of peoples' everyday practices. The place brand only pre-exists peoples' actions as a frame that implies the structures to refer to when people interpret it and put it to their own use, which in turn re-shapes the frame of these structures. Differently stated, the practices of people that facilitate the interplay between place culture, place identity and place image are the same practices that form the place brand. At the same time, the place brand as the wider frame of the culture-identity-image interplay shapes how people act within this frame, and how they interpret the culture of the place, its identity and its image. Thus, the place brand itself becomes a structure that shapes peoples' agency becoming a vehicle that helps people to understand the place and form a relationship with it.

The dynamics of place brands and the four sub-processes that link culture, identity and image can hence be reframed as depicted in Figure 3. In the following sections, we use two illustrative examples to show how structuration theory advances understanding of place branding. It has to be noted that cases are used as practical illustrations to support the theoretical and empirical relevance and plausibility of arguments proposed and to illustrate the working of the underlying mechanisms (Siggelkow, 2007). Thus, they should not be intended as empirical attempts to validate the argument proposed but rather as illustrations of how structuration theory and its focus on the recursive interplay between action and structure that make up place culture, place identity and place image can advance the current understanding of the place branding process and open-up a practice oriented approach to the study of place brands.

--Insert Figure 3 around here --

Structuration at the strategic level: Sustainability as place branding strategy for Stockholm

The first example is at the broad, strategic level of place branding, i.e. to the process of designing the positioning of the place brand by focusing on the identification and exploitation of a brand value that can be leveraged to bestow the brand with a peculiar or unique positioning (Kotler and Gertner, 2002).

A process that in place branding practice is often driven by a top-down approach guided by public administrator and materialized in a narrow-scope set of communication tactics to appeal external stakeholders (Hudson, Cárdenas, Meng, & Thal, 2016), and is less often deployed to seek involvement and consensus of local citizens (Zenker, Peterson & Aholt, 2013).

The illustrative example we propose relates to sustainability, a value that place branders can pursue (Middleton and Hawkins, 1998) and that involves public administrators, companies and the society at large (Dryzek, 2013). An increased number of place branders is attempting to position places as 'sustainable' (Braun, Kavaratzis, & Zenker, 2013) since sustainability was proven to be of paramount importance for both resident and non-resident brand's recipients (Merrilees et al., 2009).

Sustainability is tightly linked with the behaviours individuals enact within a given place and is formalized as institutional projects pursued by many public administrators (Spaargaren, 2003). Sustainability therefore, cannot be seen as a natural quality of people, places or brands. For example the morphologic qualities of a country like Finland allow the national touristic office to brand the country as the 'Land of a thousand lakes' independently by any individual and collective effort as the presence of a myriad of lakes is an objective quality of the place. Rather sustainability is a guide to conduct, reflected in practices 'designed' by public administrators, rooted in both individual and social identity, reflected in people's routinized practices. These practices reflect cultural traits that, once enacted, become the means through which the sustainable place is created, shape the place identity and project its image toward external stakeholders.

Framed in this way, sustainability goes far beyond institutional claims and assumes a practical meaning. Thus, the claim of being sustainable is not sufficient to brand the place as such if the relevant practices are not enacted and are not visible to stakeholders. In addition, being sustainable is somehow

a place value that is by its very nature developmental, i.e. always 'in becoming' as it requires a continuous, ongoing and routinized commitment by people to keep the brand value consistent across time. For these reason, structuration theory is well suited to explain how sustainability becomes a main constituent of the place brand, how it is maintained, and how it evolves throughout the passing of time.

A successful example of the strategic use of sustainability as a core brand value can be found in relation to the City of Stockholm that owing to its continuous effort and commitment to place sustainability on top of its political agenda has been awarded with the prestigious the title of European Green Capital in 2010. According to Stockholm's Final Report (2015) this goal has been achieved thanks to the dominance of sustainability issues into the political agenda of the city, and to the successful involvement of citizens in the sustainable objectives fulfilled. As the jury that awarded the Swedish capital commented:

'Stockholm has an outstanding, long historical track record of integrated urban management also confirmed by its ongoing credible green credentials. Ambitious plans for the future clearly demonstrate continuity'.

Sustainability has been a strategic priority for the city of Stockholm since a long time. The Swedish capital hosted the first conference of the United Nation on the environment in 1972 and already back in the mid-20th century investments were initiated in finding efficient and new solutions to create a modern city such as the design and built of an integrated metro system to discourage the use of private cars, the implementation of a district-based heating system, and the built of an infrastructural system designed to avoid traffic congestion in the city. And, most importantly, the fulfilment of sustainable goals for the city of Stockholm has been envisioned since the very beginning to necessitate involvement of the citizens: back in 1997, the citizens of Stockholm were invited by the office of the municipality to discuss and define sustainability indicators from their own perspective. A campaign was launched in the city of Stockholm via leaflets in public transports and via a web site to collect citizens' suggestions and preferences of what they wanted to be included as sustainable priorities for the city. More than 11,000 ideas and suggestions were received from the public sorted by the office

in a set of indicators (named '*Stockholmarnas indikatorer för hållbar utveckling*', i.e. the People of Stockholm's Indicators for Sustainable Development') defining the most important issues related to sustainability to work with and setting the action-plan template that citizens and public administrators had to follow. As Mineur (2007) argues, these sustainable indicators were though primarily as tools to stimulate citizens' actions, to make the public feel engaged and committed to their fulfilment, and to influence the citizens by creating a feeling of responsibility at the individual level.

As far as the involvement of the citizens the Stockholm's Final Report (2015) reports:

'One challenge was to find ways to make the people of Stockholm aware of the award and proud of it. The Stockholmers were already heavily committed to the city's environmental work but were not aware of the European Green Capital Award' (p.7).

What emerges from the quote above reported is that the individual biographies of citizens of Stockholm are aligned with the institutional project of its public administrators and vice versa. Thus, being 'sustainable' is salient for both Stockholmers' individual and collective identity. The challenge for public administrators to cope with was not to push citizens to act sustainably but rather to make Stockholmers aware of the award, and to commit citizens toward the collective achievements necessary to winning the prize. Put it differently, the challenge was to involve citizens to become active participants of the place branding process, and to let them take part in the co-creation of the brand.

Commenting the results reached five years after winning the prize the executive office of the city of Stockholm comments in its final report (2015):

'The City of Stockholm strives to incorporate sustainability into every aspect of the city life, but to come all the way, it is necessary to have the Stockholmers on board. And they are! The citizens of Stockholm are deeply involved in their city. Nine out of ten believe it is important to have a long-term strategy for Stockholm's development. Seven out of ten are interested in environmental issues and believe the city should impose strict requirements on its residents with regards to environmentally friendly living. Eight out of ten use and are satisfied with the public transport system in rush hour' (p. 16).

The title of European Green Capital also pushed the commitment of Stockholmers toward the environment even further as it is reported that:

‘30% of Stockholmers think it is more important for them to do their bit for a better environment since Stockholm was declared European Green Capital’ (p. 41).

The place brand thus became a cultural referent (i.e. a structure) that push people to act differently converting them into active participant of the branding process. Turning citizens into active participants of the place branding process hence, stimulated citizens to act ‘on behalf’ of the brand, prompting its structuration, and making it a guide of conduct for both individuals and collective actors. As the report states:

‘Sustainability enhances the Stockholm brand. Being named the first European Green Capital is a fantastic acknowledgement of Stockholm’s long-term efforts and future ambitions (...).The award is now clearly an integrated part of our brand (...)’ (p. 17).

What vividly emerges from the illustrative example of Stockholm above reported is that the development of a place brand around a core value that hinges upon enacted practices (like sustainability) cannot be effectively realized without seeking and exploiting a proactive involvement of citizens in its concretization. The strategy of developing the brand cannot be devised as a top-down agenda designed by public administrators where some strategic objectives are imposed on citizens. Rather, the place branding strategy has to be set with the involvement of internal stakeholders by letting them to take part in the definition of the strategic objectives to fulfil, and by making them aware and conscious that the fulfilment of these objectives is largely owed to their practices. If this is done, the creation of the place brand emerges somehow as an ‘objectification’ of a set of routinized behaviours that form the basic elements upon which the place brand is built, capable to guide (more or less reflexively) how people’s agency should be deployed to guarantee the brand’s survival in the long run. The structure (the sustainable place brand) hence, becomes as such because it guides actors to act in a sustainable way and to adjust their behaviour accordingly, because it forms the basis to enact *reflexive monitoring* of action, i.e. to monitor their actions and those of others to evaluate whether behaviours are aligned or not with the brand’s value, because it allows to maintain a continuous understanding of their actions and that of others (*rationalization of actors*) and because it pushed people to act purposefully for the safeguard and maintenance of the brand and of its value

(*motivation of action*). The role that public administrators have to play is to eventually enforce some structures, e.g. structures of legitimation and of domination to sanction behaviours that are not aligned with the core brand value for example by embittering sanctions for non-compliance to environmentally friendly actions, while favouring every other behaviour that is intentionally and purposefully addressed to reinforce the structural features of the brand. In the case of Stockholm – as shown before - this was done by finding new and engaging ways to reach a higher level of involvement of internal stakeholders in the process of brand development and by emphasizing the role they play to its creation and maintenance especially in brand communication. Citizens in fact - as the example reported show – may be aware that their actions and behaviour are necessary to grant the place a peculiar collective identity, but can be less aware or even unconscious that their behaviours may contribute to the creation and value of a brand that project a peculiar image to stakeholders.

Structuration at the tactical level: North Dakota's controversial poster

The second illustrative example relates to a tactical activity, namely a promotional poster and the reactions it caused in social media, made in the city of Fargo, the largest city in North Dakota located on the banks of the Red River, which was intended to promote and enhance the city's image as a nightlife-friendly place. The example is here used to illustrate how the development of a place brand that is to some degrees detached from the practical culture of the place and to the constitute elements of its identity can lead to a bad execution of the place branding initiatives. The poster (available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2087621/Sexist-North-Dakota-tourism-board-advert-pulled-sleazy.html>) showed two men and three women flirting in a bar and the slogan read 'Drinks, dinner, decisions. Arrive a guest leave a legend'. The promotional poster that was one of a series of images developed by the city's tourism division that included others like one showing couples shopping and hiking, a pair of men playing golf and a young woman and her daughter leaving a historic wooden for, was meant to be 'a little flirty, a little fun,' declared Pat Finken, president of Odney Advertising, the agency that created the ad to a journalist of the Daily Mail.

Once posted on social media the ad quickly drew criticism and many viewers, outraged by the sexual connotation, called it a campaign fail, 'sickening', 'racy' and inappropriate (Johanson, 2012). The public's reaction brought extensive local, national and even international media attention and soon after its release, the state's tourism division decided to pull the ad from the Facebook page and remove it from a digital version of the visitors' guide for 2012 (Kim, 2012). The director of North Dakota's tourism division explained to the Associated Press that the ad was pulled due to the number of negative comments coming across in social media.

A practice that presumably is part of life in Fargo (i.e. flirting) was used in a way that did not appeal to a certain part of the audience (i.e. residents) although the ad was created to appeal to a different target audience (i.e. potential visitors). Sara Otte Coleman, director of North Dakota's tourism division, declared to the International Business Times, 'North Dakota has branded itself as "Legendary" for over a decade and tourism officials hoped to branch out from the traditional images of North Dakota as a destination only for nature-lovers.' Thus, what the tourism division aimed at with the promotional poster was to project an image of North Dakota that could attract different target of visitors. In the words of Coleman 'the ad was never meant for a U.S. audience. It was actually created to draw Canadians down to the state for a fun weekend getaway.' (Johanson, 2012)

For the critics, the practice of 'flirting' should not be considered a constituent of the local identity and therefore should not be used to project an image. The individuals who enacted their objections to the ad by posting negative comments and complaints, managed through this practice to bring about change in the social structure that allowed them to enact their practice in the first place. If the tourism division had not posted the posters on Facebook or had prevented feedbacks, then arguably the critics would not have been able to complain. Thus, the structure that implied the particular practice as element of Fargo's identity was actually re-shaped by the action of the critics, demonstrating that individual power can indeed bring about institutional change. However, this change only became such when the action of the critics was institutionalized by the structure itself (i.e. when the tourism division pulled the ad) producing as an (unintentional) effect the reinforcement of North Dakota's

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3 cultural traits as the place in which some practices despite exist are not deemed to be appropriate to
4 be communicated to shape a different place image. It is also interesting to observe the pathway of
5 change.
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10 What started as a reaction to a structure of signification (the dislike towards what the poster implied),
11 was transformed first into a structure of legitimation (the complaint deeming the poster unacceptable
12 and demanding the 'sanction' of withdrawing it) and, when institutionalized, further transformed it
13 into a structure of domination (the withdrawal of the poster although other groups might have liked
14 it).
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20 Even after the ad was pulled, comments from North Dakotans and others continued to pour in
21 on Facebook and on comment platforms of the news websites that reported the story. However,
22 this time it was to condemn the act of pulling the ad and 'giving in to the critics'. Commentator
23 Ben said:
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30 'The only thing that upsets me is the fact that the Tourism Board bowed to the infinite
31 minority complaining about this and pulled the ad.'
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34 So Ben is actually insulted by the institutionalization of the critics' act and the fact that this became
35 a structure of domination. Fargo resident Katherine commented that,
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39 'They're trying to get a certain age group to look into the nightlife in North Dakota (...).
40 It wasn't supposed to be some sleazy, racy photo.'
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43 What she is saying here is that the practice depicted in the poster is actually a real practice occurring
44 in the place and there is nothing wrong with highlighting it. Lawrence, also a resident of Fargo,
45 commenting on the Daily Mail's (2012) platform said:
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49 'I really don't see what the noise is about honestly. ... It looked very innocent. This is
50 even more conservative as compared to what you see at night. [...] These people know
51 how to have fun.'
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54 Another commentator (Megan) instead was supportive of the ad and explicitly and positively
55 commended the attempt of the tourism division to try to establish a different image of North Dakota
56 toward non-local audience. She wrote:
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3 'How long do residents really want to perpetuate the belief that North Dakota women
4 still wear wool petticoats and don't leave the kitchen? I think the nightlife ad was
5 great.'
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9 So, again we have both residents who agree that the depicted practice is indeed part of the place's
10 identity, and others that found value in the ad's attempt to project a new/different image of the place
11 compared to the one which is largely institutionalized. It is obvious that some commentators see their
12 individual biographies to be intertwined with the wider structure of Fargo as a place for nightlife,
13 entertainment and flirting and this allows them to accept the institutional project of enacting the
14 specific element of place identity (i.e. the tourism division's promotional poster). Others instead, i.e.
15 those that condemned the poster, did not see themselves and their individual biographies to be
16 properly represented in the communication campaign and felt insulted by this latter. The dialectic
17 debate that divided North Dakotans into the group of supporters of Fargo's image as the city of
18 'flirting' and the group of those that opposed the idea of depicting the city as such can actually lead
19 to think that the practice of flirting in Fargo has some sort of sub-cultural overtones and that it is
20 somehow in contrast with the institutionalized cultural orthodoxy of the place. What was though as a
21 'a little flirty, a little fun,' promotional poster became the terrain of dispute between promoters of a
22 new place image more attuned to an evolving place identity, and those instead that assume a more
23 conservative stance and obstacle the process of emancipation of the place identity toward a more
24 'sophisticated' image. The act of pulling the ad by the tourism division is thus more than a reaction
25 to address the discontent of those that found the campaign 'sickening'. The act of pulling the ad has
26 had as a side not intended outcome, that of reinforcing some cultural traits of the place (a latent
27 righteousness of locals that see flirting as a discredited act), that reflects on the place image and that
28 inevitably led some recipients to (re)affirm a largely institutionalized idea of the place image. Peter,
29 commenting on the ABC News's comments platform, captured extremely well how the act of pulling
30 the ad affected this dynamic:
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61 'For years I thought North Dakota had very little to offer, so I did not visit. When I saw
62 this ad, I thought it looked mildly sophisticated and an interesting place to visit. Now

that I've seen the reaction in North Dakota, I've decided I was right in the first place and I don't need to go. Seems a little backward there, don't you think?'

Conclusion and implications

This paper proposes a structuration-based conceptualisation of place brands, which has significant implications for place branding theory and practice. The one main implication that can be drawn from the theory itself and from the two illustrative examples reported is that the place brand and place branding processes are practical in nature. The place brand is constituted by the interplay of culture, identity and image as they are performed in actions and practices. Therefore, place branding claims need to either refer to practices that are already part of the cultural repertoire of the place and constitute its identity, or refer to prospective practices that will be enacted by locals and/or other stakeholders as part of the place's (projected) identity and culture. If the focus of specific place branding activities is on this second type of claims, then the clear need is to first enable and facilitate the enactment of relevant practices within the place and only afterwards attempt to brand these to others. In alternative, to make the enactment of these practices by people living in a certain place on top of the institutional projects set up by public decision makers. This can be facilitated if political actors can rely on structure of legitimation and of domination to favour the convergence of individuals' behaviour with such dominant projects. The second major implication is that purely externally oriented messages and campaigns are best avoided. The example of the city of Fargo above reported vividly shows that selling a place brand by focusing on practices that are designed only to appeal to external audiences while not taking into sufficient account how this affects internal stakeholders may lead to brand communication epic fails. However, despite the negative consequences that a bad communication about the place brand may have for internal stakeholders and also for external audiences (the media at first), failed communication tactics have the paradoxical effect of positively affecting the process of structuration of the place brand and of its features, both reinforcing the structure of the place brand anchored to its culture and identity, as well as by making citizens of Fargo more aware about the existence of the place brand and of its connection to the

identity, and place branders more conscious that every attempt to communicate the brand has to be closely aligned with institutionalized practices that shape the place's culture and identity.

A practice approach indicates how the distinction between external and internal audiences and, therefore, the distinction between identity and image is only analytical. It is the same sets of practices that constitute both image and identity. This also means that there can be no such thing as a message that only reaches external audiences as internal and external are actually inseparable. Therefore, place branding activities need to account for this inseparability and be designed accordingly. Both these implications bring attention to a third one, namely the fact that the local populations are crucial for place branding as they shape the very meanings the place brand comes to assume through their practices. A structuration approach highlights the central role that residents play in branding the place through their own interpretations of the place and its brand, through their own actions in which they enact practices that legitimate or reject the place brand and through their interactions with visitors and other outsiders but also with each other. In particular, the effective intertwining of institutional projects and individual biographies is a necessary precondition for the place brand to become meaningful for both residents and strangers. The example of Stockholm shows that the Green Capital award is not simply the result of sustainable political programmes, but rather is the result of the fulfilment of these programmes achieved through active participation of citizens that, acting in a 'green' way enact their identity of Stockholmers. Of course, the mutual co-existence of dominant institutional projects and individual biographies is not always free from disputes, controversies, and resistances. The North Dakota example shows very vividly that place branding activities are subject to a process of meaning negotiation involving a wide plethora of stakeholders - and as many possible reactions – and a multitude of individual biographies that can in some cases align and in other clash with the pursued institutional project. However, while this concept seems to be widely acknowledged in the current branding literature, the application of structuration theory (and of other practice theories) offers several theoretical hints to inspire almost limitless empirical efforts aimed at showing how this social construction actually takes place. A promising line of research consists in conducting

longitudinal studies of place branding development grounded on structuration theory. As Miles (2012) suggested, in order to apply structuration theory in empirical research, two types of analysis can/should be conducted: strategic conduct analysis and institutional analysis. The former involves exploring how various practices are routinized within a given social context and – as such – have the power to affect individuals' interaction at different societal levels, i.e. in face-to-face dyadic encounters as well as in broader relational circles. The latter, is instead fruitful to investigate what are the routinized features of a given social context that favor or inhibit, the establishment of a place brand that is meaningful for both residents and strangers. Institutional analysis involves exploring how structures of signification, domination, and legitimation influence each other, and the interaction and practice pattern enacted by individuals. In particular, historical institutional analysis can help researchers to understand the process through which structures of a certain place emerged, consolidated and eventually changed over time and formed the very features of the place brand. Comparative institutional analysis instead can be used to compare different places and unveil the motives that determined similar or different evolutionary patterns that are responsible for making place branding simpler or more challenging compared to the same practice enacted in other places.

A second line of research relates with further theoretical efforts aimed at either providing other critical accounts of how other practice theorists can inform our understanding of the place branding process and of the practical connection between place culture, identity and image. For example, the Bourdieusian conceptualization of power can be fruitfully applied to shed lights on the antagonistic practices enacted to resist eventual institutional projects that do not fit with the place's culture and identity and, as such, generate social disputes. We see great potential to apply Bourdieu's theory of practice to gain a better understanding of those place branding strategies that – one enacted – generated fierce opposition by internal stakeholders like what took place in Hamburg after the city's attempted to brand itself as the city of creativity and the subsequent birth of the 'not in our name' antagonistic movement.

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Appendix A – Exemplary comments on the North Dakota promotional ad extracted from online platforms

Comments extracted from the Daily Mail Platform¹

Christopher, Canada, 7 years ago

The ad promotes obesity so I'm surprised it was deemed inappropriate.

Stuart, Canada, 7 years ago

I think the ads are sweet. Hey big girls need love too

CF, Canada, 7 years ago

You can go there and have all the nightstands you want, but if you get pregnant, don't try to get an abortion there...

Vovov, England, 7 years ago

I think the problem here is one of contextuality. Beside the other adverts, a common theme is clearly being continued. However, by itself the unfortunate implications of the word "legend", which maybe don't translate that well to Americans/older people, clearly make the advert distasteful. Due to the slangy use of the word "legend" and what it means to "be a legend" in colloquial terms, the implication of the advert seems crude. While I'm sure that those in charge of creating it did not pick this up, a good proportion of people would see it in this offensive way, and it was right to be pulled.

William Rae, Scotland, 7 years ago

Dinner, drink ... more drink, more drink, more drink ... wow, they're now thin, ha ha!

JB, Scotland, 7 years ago

People will complain about anything ...

Luca, England, 7 years ago

Oh it's such a shame they pulled it. That's a great ad. Arrive a guest, leave a legend. It sounds and feels good. I think that their decision to pull the ad was wimpy.

Jeremy, England, 7 years ago

Well at least the ad attracted some publicity. Must be tough to get visitors to come to North Dakota. I should imagine that Mount Rushmore (in neighbouring South Dakota) is the main attraction to the region.

Welshgit, Wales, 7 years ago

Anyone else thought this was a condom advert?

¹ Comments are retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2087621/Sexist-North-Dakota-tourism-board-advert-pulled-sleazy.html>.

Mors Magne, England, 7 years ago

North Dakota - that well known cesspit of depravity! ;o)

Toto Kubwa, Cyprus, 7 years ago

God I must be so naive I just saw young people having fun. I keep forgetting to be offended.

Alvaro Flores, USA, 7 years ago

Who would wanna go to North Dakota??? I didn't think people vacation there other than you know ppl from there.

Egbert Schwump, USA, 7 years ago

Why did they use fat girls in the ad?

John Wanye, USA, 7 years ago

The only people complaining is house wives.

Lawrence, Fargo, 7 years ago

I really don't see what the noise is about honestly. I know the girls are hurt by the reaction. It looked very innocent. This is even more conservative as compared to what you see at night. Nonetheless, I find nightlife to be the best here. More than I have experienced even in big cities. These people know how to have fun.

Comments extracted from the ABC Platform^{2 3}

Michael, 7 years ago

Well, now we know why no one visits North Dakota. It's full of a bunch of backwards country nutcases.

Jim, 7 years ago

In the "nightlife" ad, what are promoting? That if I travel to North Dakota, hang out at a bar, there is a good chance I can hook up?

Karen Lee, 7 years ago

Seriously?????

Peter, 7 years ago

For years I thought North Dakota had very little to offer, so I did not visit. When I saw this ad, I thought it looked mildly sophisticated and an interesting place to visit. Now that I've seen the reaction in North Dakota, I've decided I was right in the first place and I don't need to go. Seems a little backward there, don't you think?

JrzWrld, 7 years ago

I think the people who objected to the ad are saying more about their own character flaws than anything else. But I'm still not visiting North Dakota.

Jim, 7 years ago

Seriously?! Are you kidding me right now; people are upset about this? I wonder if the same people are upset by world hunger, our numerous wars abroad, diseases threatening millions of lives throughout the world on a daily basis...etc.

Greg, 7 years ago

Wow! I was expecting something overtly sexual by the headline. But for people to be upset by this? Those nutjobs make the Christian Right look like liberal extremists!! Hahaha. Maybe their slogan should be "North Dakota...where we never flirt with anyone!" Talk about uptight!

What, 7 years ago

I would rather go to North Dakota for vacation, go out whatever, and have people that act real and will talk to you, rather than some other places to be "hip" and fake and get ripped off and what not!! What's wrong with REAL PEOPLE???

Ben, 7 years ago

Do these same people have a problem with the Vegas ads? I can't believe people are actually upset with this ad. There is nothing vulgar or inappropriate about it. The only thing that upsets me is the fact that the Tourism Board bowed to the infinite minority complaining about this and pulled the ad. STOP GIVING IN TO THESE PEOPLE!!!

Val, 7 years ago

Can someone from North Dakota PLEASE explain to me what is so racy about those ads?

DBLNN, 7 years ago

I'm from North Dakota and I don't see an issue with the ad, the people are not nutcases or backwards just very conservative, old school, the old folk still run the state, the community. There is change happening throughout

² Comments are retrieved from <https://abcnews.go.com/Business/north-dakota-tourism-too-racy-for-some/blogEntry?id=15379501>.

³ The location of the commentator is not visible in the ABC platform.

the communities but it's a slow change. The only issue I see about the ad is the alcohol, casual drinking is all that most of the small communities have because the state is desolate, nobody wants to see the truth in their face let alone advertised. idk, it's a nice ad and very welcoming with friendly people.

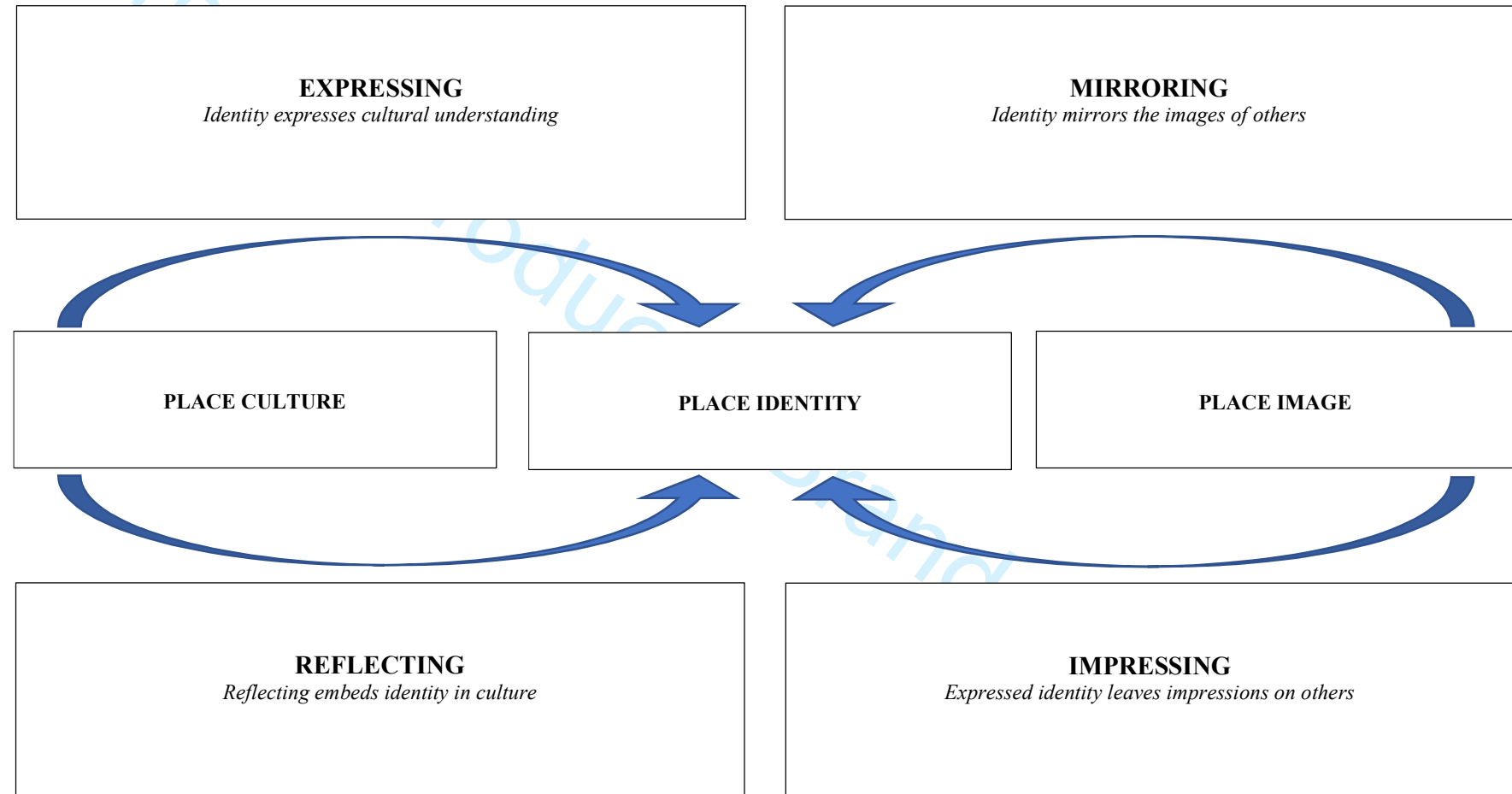
Bri97, 7 years ago

People need to grow up and realize that in the real world that is what sells more. This type of ad shouldn't been pulled. So the ads that same the same thing showing people golfing, does that mean I'll become a pro golfer. Now doesn't that sound silly. Everyone needs to quit complaining about the stupid stuff and concentrate on what's more important in their lives. Gosh people get a life will ya.

BR9KD, 6 years ago

I am from North Dakota and while I agree that it is not an exciting place to visit...or a place I would want to vacation at ... I am NOT backwards!! Don't judge people and places you've never been to. There are crazy, backwards, stupid people everywhere ...

Figure 1: The dynamics of place brands



Source: Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013)

Figure 2: Representation of structuration theory

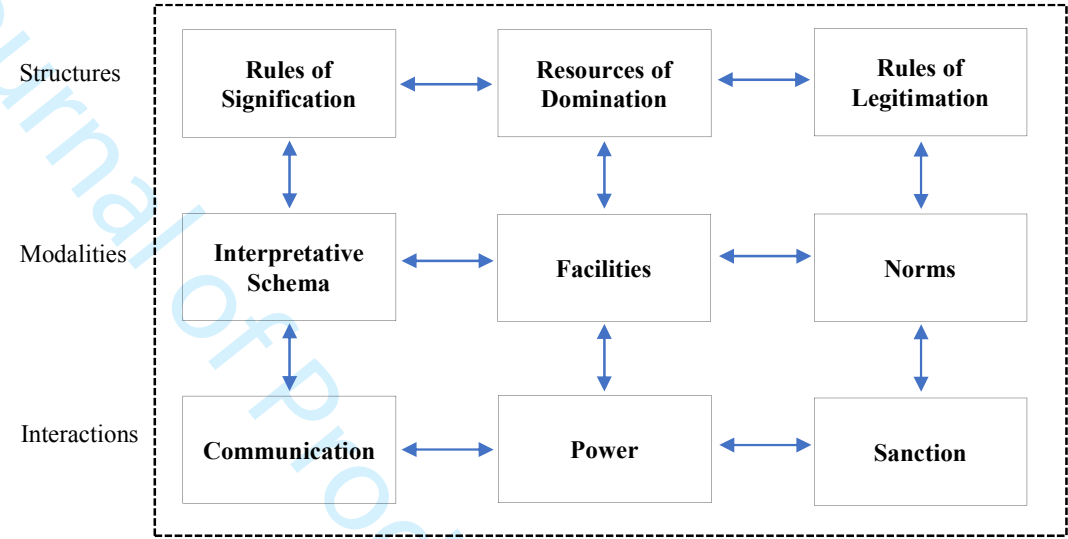
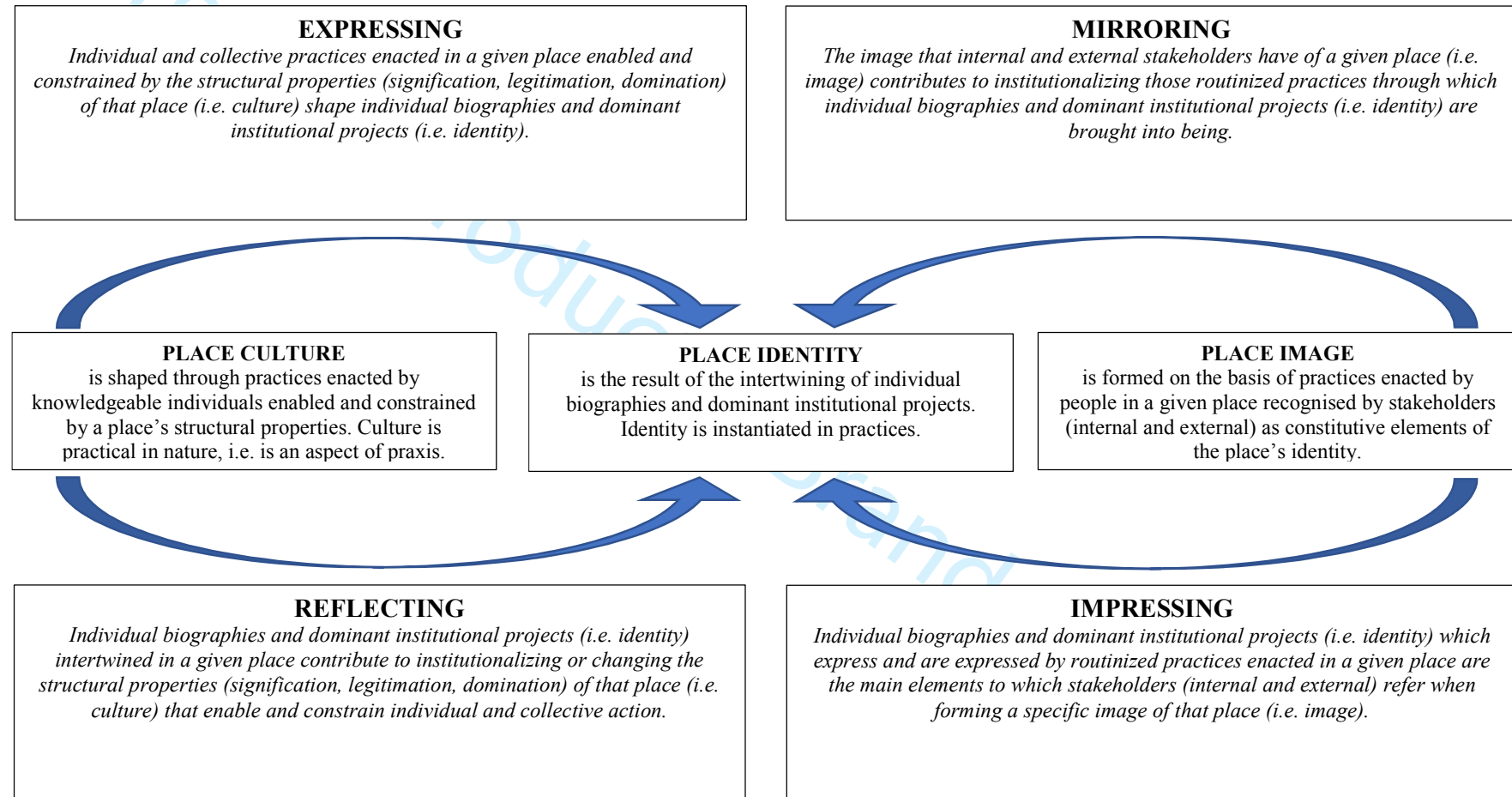
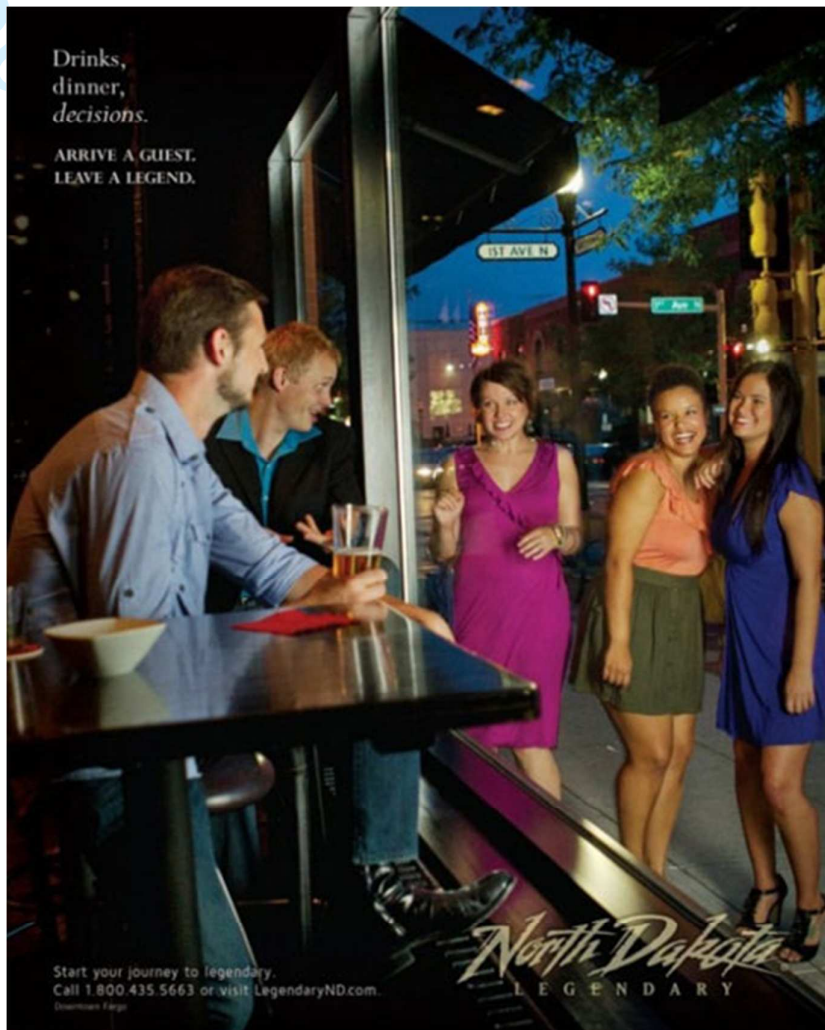


Figure 3: The structurationist dynamics of place brands

Source: Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013)

Journal of Product & Brand Management

Figure 4: The controversial poster of Fargo's nightlife



Source: retrieved online from www.adweek.com/creativity/north-dakota-baffled-outcry-over-tourism-ad-137602/