

Spatial planning and place branding: rethinking relations and synergies

Kristof Van Assche, University of Alberta, Canada and Bonn University, Germany vanassch@ualberta.ca

Raoul Beunen*, Open University Netherlands and Wageningen University, the Netherlands
raoul.beunen@ou.nl

Eduardo Oliveira, Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium eduardo.dasilva@uclouvain.be

*Corresponding author

Abstract

Spatial planning and place branding are allies in the discovery and creation of place narratives and assets as well as in contributing to spatial transformation or the improvement of the socio-spatial and spatial-economic conditions of a place. However, the existing and potential linkages between spatial planning and place branding are yet to be explored by both scientists and policy makers. The objective of this paper is twofold. First, we reflect upon the central themes of this special issue by placing them in the context of larger debates on the position of place branding and spatial planning in society. Secondly, we show that this requires attention to the many ways in which planning and branding can cross-fertilize each other and to the embedding of both in evolving spatial governance structures. We then conclude with a typology expanding the understanding of this linkage between spatial planning and place branding.

Keywords

Governance, Assets, Narratives, Place branding, Spatial planning, Value creation

Introduction

Although spatial planning and place branding have largely overlapping and related interest concerning the use, organization and meaning of space and place, they have often ignored each other, or have been quite critical of each other (Vanolo, 2017; Hae, 2017). Whereas planning has diverse roots in architecture, modernist management methods, land reclamation and engineering (Albrechts, Healey & Kunzmann, 2003; Gunder & Hillier, 2016), place branding was originally considered in the frame of marketing, as destination marketing, first for tourism development, later for more general economic development (Kavaratzis, Warnaby & Ashworth, 2015; Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010; Ashworth & Voogd, 1990). Both spatial planning and place branding have developed from rather narrow technical roots over the decades to fields of practice and reflection

which understand themselves as eyeing larger goals and the public interest. With this shift, planning and branding more and more came to understand themselves as part of spatial governance structures (Go & Trunfio, 2012). Their shared focus on space and place narratives also brought them closer (Van Assche & Lo, 2011; cf. Throgmorton, 1996). It seems rather obvious that the two fields can enrich each other, and deserve to be considered together as approaches to spatial governance and community development in a broad sense.

In this special issue, we explore the relations and synergies between spatial planning and place branding in the context of widely varying governance systems and their evolution over time. The different contributions show that many relations are imaginable and practicable. The exploration draws on rethinking key concepts of planning and branding and their linkages, identifying possibilities and pitfalls, and furthering the understanding of how different strategies work in diverse and changing governance contexts. Exploring the relation between spatial planning and place branding is useful and important for several reasons.

First, one can notice that in many cities and urban regions spatial planning, especially strategic planning for the long-term, is something that is difficult to grasp and to implement in practice (Hersperger et al. 2018). In many places, spatial planning never has been an influential field, while in many European countries the former centralized planning systems have lost much of their power due to legal and political reforms (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013; Gunn & Hillier, 2014; Niedziałkowski & Beunen, 2019). In those situations, where existing forms of planning are not effective or supported, the insights from place branding can enrich the search for new planning approaches, with place branding strategies as a valuable addition to the toolbox of planners (Oliveira, 2015), urban policy makers (Lucarelli, 2018; Kavaratzis, 2018) and place managers (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2018; Ntounis & Kavaratzis, 2017; Cleave, Arku, Sadler & Gilliland, 2017).

Secondly, much of the literature on place branding either under- or overestimates what branding can actually do to support local business, improve infrastructures and the physical condition of a place, and to contribute to job creation as well as job maintenance and talent retention. This is partly because of underlying ideological assumptions (Gotham, 2007) and partly because of a lack of insights in the functioning of governance. This is for example reflected in simplistic recipes and approaches in which place branding is reduced to a marketing strategy through a one-size-fits-all approach and the all too often blind and frenetic rush to attract investment, talent and tourists

(Oliveira, 2016). It is also reflected in some of the critiques on place branding that focus on the negative consequences of commodification of place (Boland, 2013; Warren & Dinnie, 2018; Van Assche et al. 2016). The insights from planning literature can enrich understandings of the way narratives, assets, and space can be governed, with an eye on democratic decision-making on long-term perspectives (Healey et al. 2006).

Thirdly, theories of spatial governance, of planning and place branding, can be furthered if they integrate insights from neighbouring disciplines, and not in the least from each other. Planning could use the insights in place-based value creation stemming from place branding, and place branding can offer more realistic strategies if it includes insights in how places might actually be changed or preserved through coordinated intervention (Lucarelli & Brorstrom, 2013).

Bringing planning and branding closer together in theory and practice means seeing their relation in the context of governance, the processes of taking and implementing collectively binding decisions (Go & Trunfio, 2012; Van Assche, Beunen, & Duineveld, 2014a). Planning in this view is spatial governance, defined as the coordination of policies and practices affecting the organization of space (Van Assche et al. 2014b; Gunder & Hillier, 2016). Place branding is defined here, among other possible definitions, as the creation of value in space by reinforcing and representing the assets of the place in a cohesive manner, in an image and a narrative of the place itself (Anholt, 2008; Kavaratzis et al. 2015). The potentialities and limits for spatial planning and place branding strategies relate to the presence or absence of what can be described as assets, spatial qualities, features, products or flows which can have a value for community development.

In the following sections we will first reflect on the endeavour of finding synergies, after which conceptualization of assets in place branding and planning are explored. These sections lay the basis for a further exploration of the linkages between spatial planning and place branding in the context of governance. This exploration will focus on the role of narratives and the possibilities for spatial coordination. It draws from the various contributions to the special issue, reflecting the various authors' expertise, and relevant insights from the literature on spatial planning, place branding, spatial governance, but also on corporate branding, public administration and communication studies.

Finding synergies: a tough job

Practices of spatial planning and place branding are extremely diverse, focussing on different spatial and temporal scales and accommodating an enormous range of ambitions and goals. Planning ranges from administrative regulation, through integral design to market-based development perspective, while branding can include everything from place making to marketing and integral design. Caution is thus required when dealing with the labels 'spatial planning' and 'place branding'.

A key argument throughout this special issue, is that realizing fruitful synergies between spatial planning and place branding requires a thorough understanding of planning and branding practices and the embedding of both in governance. This means looking beyond the labels, and beyond the self-presentations of both sets of professionals, and mapping out in detail how planning and branding really work in the given location. It also means that the actual position of each in broader governance configurations requires attention in order to better understand the current impact of both planning and branding, as well as their current relations and possibilities for re-configuring those relations.

The contributions included in this issue share this basic perspective, yet differ in many other ways. They focus on different methods of linking planning and branding in institutional design, on procedural questions, such as the recurring issue of participation in planning and branding, on difficulties in defining assets and identities, on various spatial scales and frames and their susceptibility to branding, planning and a combination, and on governance mechanisms involved in accommodating new combinations of planning and branding. One can quickly notice the disciplinary diversity present in this issue, with marketing experts featuring side by side with geographers, planners, sociologists, public administration and policy experts, and economists.

Assets and narratives in place branding

Place branding in the narrow sense is about selling existing stories or about creating narrative assets out of material assets (Denning, 2006). The field of place branding nevertheless, has evolved in a way that allows for a much broader understanding of the different assets, of paths connecting them, and of possibilities for creating new ones and thus creating value (Anholt, 2008; Jensen, 2007). A key insight of place branding is that a place such as a city or a region, can be seen

as a product, but also as composed of various products (Van Assche et al. 2016). It soon became clear, however, that places are not just 'baskets' of products and place branding is not merely a matter of selling these products (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010).

An assumption of place branding approaches is the emergence of several positive feedback loops between assets and place, or virtuous circles in the construction and maintenance of assets and place through place branding (Van Assche & Lo, 2011). First, if the place itself becomes more recognized and surrounded by positive associations which are linked through a narrative, then existing products can benefit through association and distribution of that narrative (Pasquinelli, 2010; Rantisi & Leslie, 2006). Therewith the narrative and products are more likely to survive and thrive. Secondly, new products might be created by association with place and with other products (Donner et al. 2017; Ashworth & Voogd, 1990). They too might benefit from association with place and narrative. Thirdly, the physical attributes of the place itself that are turned into assets in and by the narrative of place, can more likely to be preserved thanks to the co-presence of narratives and products in a coordinated place branding effort (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010).

The virtuous circle then is a situation in which place branding assists both in the recognition and maintenance of existing assets, and in the creation of new assets out of existing ones. The products that are derived from other assets, both physical and narrative, can become assets themselves, just as people who like the Italian region of Tuscany might start to appreciate its olive oil, and people who appreciate olive oil might start to like Tuscany, and just as Tuscan pesto can attract interest because of familiarity with the olive oil (Van Assche & Lo, 2011).

In order to achieve such virtuous circle of asset creation and place stabilization, and before the brand becomes strong enough to sustain the self-fulfilling prophecy (Treggar, 2011; Van Assche & Hornidge, 2015), a true balancing act has to occur. In this balancing, one can start to discern potential linkages with spatial planning. For assets to generate other assets through place branding, one needs to balance:

- Physical and narrative assets. On the one hand narratives about a place hold value as long as they to some extent reflect physical assets. Although one can certainly tell many stories about a place, there are limits to the credibility of place narratives. On the other hand a place and its physical assets can be adapted to existing narratives. Balancing physical and narrative assets is an ongoing and sometimes risky process. Focusing narratives on one style of architecture,

for example, can undermine a powerful story, if that style is not well represented (anymore) in the built environment;

- Physical assets and local products. Focusing on an attractive landscape, in an aesthetic or ecological sense, for example, can draw the attention away from local products less tied to that landscape;
- Narrative assets and local products, with some products functioning as place-based assets themselves. A particular history or historical event, for example, can draw attention to local products, but it might also obscure the connections between place and products.

In order for the virtuous circle of asset creation to work in practice, the balancing to be undertaken requires stability and a measure of control that is not likely to exist or work for a long time in many places (Vanolo, 2017; Yea & Borner, 2018). Places are complex and heterogeneous entities and in a permanent state of change. Narratives change, and narratives lose their discursive embedding and persuasive qualities (Throgmorton, 1996; Kavaratzis, 2018). Products might survive as only ones out of basket, out of a tradition, and the whole tradition can vanish in a generation, leaving little trace. This does not undermine the value of place branding as such. It points at the necessity of adaptation and the application of tailor-made and place- and time-specific strategies (Hospers, 2017). It also reveals the usefulness of ‘ingesting’ place branding in the context of governance, not only for democratic legitimacy, but also to avail of the tools of governance, including spatial planning.

Assets and narratives in spatial planning

Spatial planning has generally neglected assets and paid little attention to context in general (Gunder & Hillier, 2016; Throgmorton, 1996; Sandercock, 2003). The concept of ‘assets’ came in with a vengeance, through hybridization with traditions of community development, with applied anthropology and sociology, through internal critiques of modernist assumptions (e.g. Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Van Assche et al. 2015). Being more attentive to local context then became translated as ‘asset-based’ planning or development, with the scope of assets gradually expanding to include landscape and historical assets, economic activities and later also narratives (Huang, Dan, Xu & Tong, 2018; Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015; Hillier, 2010).

In places where spatial planning includes spatial design, either under the ‘label’ planning or under landscape architecture or urban design, there tended to be more sensitivity for local context, its

specificity and its assets (Van Assche et al. 2012; Dawson & Higgins, 2009). This included attention to the physical character of site, place, or region that as quality and obstacle, shaped the design of the place.

The arrival of more participatory approaches to planning and the growing complexity of planning systems, including more forms of expertise, also brought a further diversification of ‘assets’. Talking to more people, is bringing in more stories, more narratives of place, and of assets as the qualities and positively interpreted elements of the place (Hospers, 2017; Sandercock, 2003; Oliveira & Hersperger, 2018). Such diversification also brings attention to conflicting place narratives, competing ideas on the nature and ranking of assets, and different perspectives on the value of the existing landscape for its desired future form (Harries, Byrne, Rhodes and Wallace, 2018; Mayes, 2008). In some planning traditions, the conclusion was that planning ought to be about constructing narrative of place, later influencing the organization of space (Hospers, 2017; Eshuis et al. 2014), while in other places the immediate focus remained on organization of space, with long term projects on narrative identity and community development perceived as detracting and distracting, and unfeasible for the existing bureaucracies (Sager, 2011; Van Assche et al. 2016).

It is worth to mention that the main competition in the definition of assets in planning is very often not that between ‘expert’ and ‘local knowledge’, however defined, but rather between different forms of expertise. The competition between forms of expert knowledge is often invisible for most players, even the experts themselves, as most forms of expertise claim objectivity for themselves (Gunder & Hillier, 2016). Thus, the actual competition between expert discourses, between their ideas of assets, risks and opportunities, is more thoroughly opaque for all. Systems dominated by engineers tend to enshrine roads as assets, systems open to ecologists might see natural areas, or processes, or species, or diversity, as assets. Evidently, the unique asset construction in a planning system makes for different possible connections with place branding.

A second observation to make here is that spatial planning is in many countries, regions, cities an site of policy integration (see in this issue Pasquinelli & Vuignier, 2020; see also Van Assche & Djanibekov, 2012; cf. Jordan & Lenschow, 2010), whereas place branding is not really institutionalized, i.e. not translated into bureaucratic actors and institutions (Warnaby, 2018). Most towns do not have place branding departments, and even where place branding strategies are embraced, their impact on governance tends to be rather limited, since they are not

institutionally designed as the places where other forms of policy are coordinated, integrated, and synthesized. Spatial planning evolved in many governance systems as a way to not only work on environmental issues and protect property values, but also as a site of policy integration towards community development (Healey et al., 2006). Comprehensive planning means planning envisioning a variety of common goals and tackling a set of collective problems. The more comprehensive the form of planning, the higher the burden (and opportunity) of policy integration, as more and more policy domains are touched and have to be taken into account (cf. Candel & Biesbroek, 2016).

This brings us to a different limitation of planning, brought up by generations of critics of modernist planning and of comprehensive planning: the assumed measure of control often does not exist (Olesen 2014; Gunder & Hillier, 2016; Healey et al. 2006). Planning has varied degrees of success, and different degrees of control and steering. Many reasons have been discussed in the literature, but for the present discussion, we highlight the limits of planning to change community narratives, its limited interest, traditionally, in identity narratives of places and groups (Sandercock, 2003; Van Assche, 2004; see in this issue Belabas et al., 2020). Spatial planning thus has traditionally overlooked many existing assets, as locally defined, and missed many informal institutions, locally existing coordination tools, which might have helped to move a plan forwards (Easterly, 2006; Parker & Street, 2018). This blindness has alas survived beyond modernist planning and blueprint planning, and has crept into more participatory versions of planning (Gunder & Hillier, 2016).

A focus on narrative dynamics increasing the understanding of value dynamics, as narrative underpins any construction of value (Kavaratzis, 2012). This is true in a general sense and in the localized sense described above, with local values inspiring local products and narratives of the local selling products and possibly inventing new ones (Feagan, 2007). Spatial planning has often been blind for many discourses on place and value, and even if it had not, there is a theoretical limit to the degree of comprehensiveness achievable. In other words, planning as policy integration is not only selective (prioritizing this policy domain over that, this value over that), it is also necessarily limited by the complexity of the enterprise of policy integration (Collie, 2011; Candel & Biesbroek, 2016). Its lack of interest in economic issues, and especially in the potential for place-based economies, for value creation in place, cannot be remedied by claiming a central space for value creation or for place branding in the frame of policy integration. Internally, this would lead to problems, to probably undesirable trade-offs, e.g. environmental issues moving

down the ladder (Jordan & Lenschow, 2010). Externally, new competition with other sites and frames of policy integration would occur: one can think of economic development policy (Easterly, 2006; Van Assche & Hordnige, 2015).

Place narratives reconsidered

Many critics of place branding have argued that it is essentially a neo-liberal activity that reduces everything, everyone, or every place to economic value (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015; Van Assche & Lo, 2011). From this critical perspective, place branding is seen as an advanced form of commodification, making everything circulate as ‘material’ things with a value attached, in a globalized economy (Vanolo, 2017). We however, would say that indeed the economy is globalized and people are willing to pay for a variety of goods and services, including experiences and places, but that such does not imply that everything is reduced to a price. Value creation takes place, whether one is aware of that or not, and both planning and branding have partial sets of tools to manage the relation between value creation and places such as cities and regions (Kavaratzis et al. 2015). Putting a price on things is not a panacea, but under certain circumstances it can help to create (dis-) incentives to act, to buy, to travel, and (dis-)incentives to maintain certain narratives of value (Cleave et al. 2017). Being blind to processes of value creation in place, and refraining from even attempting to manage it, does not stop it, and does not prevent the uglier consequences of capitalism (Van Assche et al. 2016).

Every value is created through narratives (Throgmorton, 1996; Sandercock, 2003; Van Assche, 2004). Some narratives are more interesting or persuasive or attractive than others, and every asset varies in value accordingly. The essential role of narratives brings light to a natural limitation of branding: narrative, as discourse in general, is always partly unpredictable in its evolution. It can never be entirely controlled (Collie, 2011; Donner et al. 2017). The images of the place, of products, or of desirable lifestyles, might change and the connectivity between product, place and narrative will be re-assessed and reconstructed all the time (Lund et al. 2018; Gotham, 2007). Furthermore, narratives, including place brands, are always selective, highlighting particular aspects of a place or an asset and ignoring other ones. In the broader context of governance, there will always be actors that adhere different narratives and the ongoing competition between different narratives will in one way or another impact place brands. One can think, for example, about the critiques on place brands as solely representing the perspective of hegemonic actors and the ways in which such critiques influence both the place brand, as well as its potential impact

(Sadler, 1983; Warnaby, 2009). If narratives change, certain assets might become a liability, or something that eludes observation (Van Assche et al. 2012; Van Assche & Hordnige, 2015). If narratives change, other places might become more attractive, and all the products associated with the place might have to re-evaluate their connection to the place (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990); or, there could be a collective effort to rethink, rebrand and reorganize the place.

Controlling the narrative is never entirely possible. Some narratives are however more stable than others. This stability partly depends on the linkages to other narratives, to underlying ideologies, or identity narratives and their linkage to places (Mayes, 2008; Van Assche, 2004). Yet no place is entirely stable, and in this direction, narratives can be among the stabilizing factors that soothe the place (Eshuis et al. 2014; Donner et al. 2017). Here one can think of stories of beauty, of importance, of the good life, or of identity and roots that make people conserve a place, a particular spatial configuration, and elements in that place.

Within these narratives, assets are those elements that count as something of value. Place-based assets are those assets that are context-specific and tied to a place (De San Eugenio-Vela et al. 2017; Rantisi, 2006). They might have pre-existed a narrative, as physical objects or features, then discovered and framed by narrative, or they can be the product of narrative in a literal sense, becoming embodied as new product after activities inspired by narrative (Harries et al. 2018; Inch & Walters, 2018). Existing products, then, might become assets of a place when connected to the place through narrative. They can add something to the place brand, and the brand can add value to them (Anholt, 2008; Kavartzis, 2008). One could distinguish then between virtual and actualized assets, with narratives delineating or suggesting the potential value of something, its position as an asset (cf. Shields, 2013).

Both planning and branding strategies are likely more effective when they are based on an awareness of locally existing narratives and asset definitions (Van Assche et al. 2016; Sandercock, 2003; Healey, 2006; Jensen, 2007). Existing local narratives can be reinforced through embedding in larger place brand narratives, through place branding strategy, through spatial change triggered by planning, for instance by protecting, connecting or creating assets (Van Assche and Lo, 2011). Thus, both narrative and physical space, and the physical conditions of a place, are to an extent amenable to coordinated intervention, to intentional change, to re-design (Oliveira, 2016). With change in one possibly affecting change in the other.

Both narratives and spatial transformation occur for many reasons and the limits of spatial planning and narrative design are thus multiple and not always transparent. The articulation of a narrative makes it subjected to the strategizing by actors, and might trigger change in other narratives, including identity narratives, and narratives of history and place. The act of branding a place, as rendering a narrative more visible, distributing it, including others, can create its own resistance, from mockery to economic counter- strategy and search for alternative images and identities (Gotham, 2007; Lucarelli & Brorstrom, 2013; Ntounis & Kavaratzis, 2017). Similarly, the act of planning, which includes plan-making and plan-implementation exercises, is bound to trigger alternative plans and counter- narratives (Flyvbjerg, 1998). Moreover, the fact that spatial planning directly affects property values and the set of economic activities possible in a place, is an additional reason why planning, even if sensitive for narrative dynamics, is likely to create new and unanticipated dynamics (Van Assche, Duineveld & Beunen, 2014). If spatial plans or place brands are becoming disconnected from dominant narratives and asset versions in the community, they are not likely to have a sustainable effect, even if outsiders like the communicated stories.

Relating spatial planning and place branding: a typology

In the context of governance, different possible relations between planning and branding can be envisioned and assessed. We discuss below a typology of this linkage between spatial planning and place branding through the lenses of governance:

1. **Integrated strategy.** One type of strategy is a combined planning and branding strategy, which might work well when the above mentioned virtuous circle seems within reach. Such joint strategy, which could emphasize either planning or branding depending on the case, does not necessarily require a pre-existing tradition of branding places. It would, however, benefit greatly from a pre-existing planning tradition, which enables spatial transformation (Healey, 2006; Albrechts, 2015). When assets are already recognized, and already seen in the light of a unifying narrative of place, a combination of planning and place branding in a unified strategy is easier to envision and accept (see in this issue Porter, 2020). Furthermore, strong articulation between place actors, civic participation at the local level and the coordination of spatial policies are also key for effective joint planning and branding strategies.

2. One part of the other. Despite our warnings against simply subsuming branding under planning or the other way around, against making one simply part of the other, in some circumstances this might be the way forward. For example, Oliveira (2015) explores the roles of place branding as an instrument for the attainment of strategic spatial planning goals but acknowledges also that place branding can play a ‘dominant’ role over spatial planning strategies. Our argument is that this cannot be a general recipe, without studying the governance path and configurations of each place. When, however, there is a strong planning tradition, with planning aiming at broader community development, when this tradition is proven to be flexible and open to new perspectives, and when it is in touch with local perceptions of assets and narratives of place, planning could provide the frame for branding activities. Place branding can make planning more sensitive to value creation then, help it to look forward, towards constructing new identities building on existing ones. Or, when planning is weak, yet there is a strong civic tradition of cooperation towards common goals, a new branding frame might be more achievable, and within this frame, elements of spatial planning can come into being (see in this issue Deffner et al., 2020).
3. Shared focus. One can also relate planning and branding strategies by means of a shared focus. This can be a type of asset especially important locally, either to preserve or to create, or, possibly related to the first, one policy domain especially relevant for the community such as environmental protection, landscape conservation, agriculture and food production, water quality and economic restructuring (see in this issue Porter, 2020; Jordan & Lenschow, 2010; Van Assche & Hornidge, 2015). It is still possible then to institutionalize one (planning or branding) differently from the other, more lightly than the other, so it supports the activities in the other strategy. This then is an example of policy coordination as a light form of policy integration (Candel & Biesbroek, 2016; Van Assche & Djanibekov, 2012). Branding could be a flanking measure of planning, and light institutionalization can also be positive for more autonomous decision-making (and budgeting) and for flexible adaptation (e.g. by means of project organizations with limited lifespan).
4. Design as the link. Design can be the linking element between planning and branding (see in this issue Radosavljević et al., 2020; Van Assche, Beunen, Duineveld & De Jong, 2012; Dawson & Higgins, 2009). Specifically, in such form of the relation, branding remains blissfully ignorant of some of the more legal-bureaucratic aspects of planning, but pays attention when design comes into play, since this can affect the image more directly. Branding can also inspire,

argue for, more design-oriented approaches in planning, with design not restricted to one scale or to new developments, but including issues of preservation of landscape and other elements in new structures, or protection and construction of new landscape structures. ‘Design’ can then take the shape of a separate actor, a brokering organization, or it can be a selectivity in the projects and policies coming through planning, and signals in the direction of planning when branding sees the need for spatial interventions.

5. Participatory and less so. A different relation can emerge or be established when spatial planning or place branding is more participatory than the other. One can think of a scenario of transition or reinvention, where a community wants to rethink itself, its future, its assets, and thus a more radically participatory exercise in governance might be in place. This could be a transformation of, or an offshoot of, the planning arena, yet, it could also be a new arena for community reinvention, which can take the character of place branding, in its recent emanations i.e. involving community change, beyond representation and marketing (see in this issue Grenni et al., 2020; Kavaratzis, 2018). If one is much more participatory than the other, this can provide a combination of rigidity and flexibility in governance, a structure allowing for creativity and institutional experiment, while keeping an eye on the necessary rigidities, i.e. the stabilization of expectations (see in this issue San Eugenio Vela et al., 2020; Van Assche et al. 2012). If planning represents the more rigid aspect of governance, part of checks and balances, it can at the same time help in implementing (and inspiring) some of the visions coming out of the branding-as-reinvention arena. This relation is thus one of keeping in check, and of enabling (Gunder & Hillier, 2016; see in this issue Deffner et al., 2020).
6. Multilevel governance. Planning and branding can be located on different scales or levels of governance. The relation between planning and branding at one level is likely to be influenced by the relation between the two on another level. This influence can be both, positive or negative. What happens regularly, is that some form of place branding strategy exists at regional level, with minimal planning presence there, while locally, spatial planning affects decision-making more intensively than branding. Such differential emphasis is not necessarily bad and to some extent part of each context. It does however pose specific requirements for coordination. At each scale, planning and branding can still complement each other, if mechanisms exist for collaboration or at least mutual awareness (cf. Yea & Bjorner, 2018). Coordination between levels might be necessary to maintain the unity of narrative and action, to perform the balancing act recounted above.

7. Long term and short term. One can imagine a scenario where one has a long-term emphasis, thus a more strategic nature, than the other. If, for example, planning is community-development led, already sensitive to narrative and value (Parker & Street, 2018), then branding could be an activity towards more short-term goals. One can also argue that in such case, planning takes care of most of the strategic branding activity, yet a separate actor remains responsible for campaigns, events, projects of limited duration (Jensen, 2007; Cleave et al. 2017). Alternatively, branding can be more oriented towards implementation (a combination of short-term actions and long-term goals) of strategic visions coming out of the planning arena. It has been assumed that some of the attempts to respond to the complex issues places are facing depend on the ability to combine the creation of strategic long-term visions with short-term actions (Albrechts, 2015) or a series of short-term projects (Hillier, 2010).
8. Preservation versus innovation. Different relations between planning and branding can occur when they are both linked to the dichotomy preservation versus innovation. While planning could represent the more conservative side, focusing on preservation of assets, places, heritage, place branding could do more on changing place narratives. Yet, it could also be the other way around, with branding more focusing on preservation of assets seen as valuable, and planning more oriented on development. Branding then would shift the focus of planning towards context-sensitive development and ongoing redevelopment, fitting new into old. The discussion between planning and branding, recognizable as separate actors and perspectives, can be an internalized and institutionalized site of reflection in governance on this eternal dilemma. Both innovation and preservation have seemingly objective arguments, in general and per case, and by structuring an internal and transparent discussion between these viewpoints in governance, the quality of decision-making and adaptation is likely to be enhanced.
9. Variable relation. If both are firmly embedded in governance, and their relation can be refashioned with relative ease, the changing of the relation can be part of an overarching strategy of adaptive governance. This requires a clear overview of both planning and branding in overarching governance arena's, an ongoing assessment of their functioning and value, an insight into the added value of alternative relationships. We acknowledge, however, that in the longer-term everything could changes, every relation could be reshaped (Van Assche et al.

2014a); the characteristic of this form of relation lies in the strategic and repeated change in the relationship.

Certainly, other ways of typifying the relations between planning and branding can be imagined. The presented typology starts from the premise that embedding of both planning and branding in governance is a good thing, and from the idea that both planning and branding revolve around assets created and maintained through narratives, which in turn can inspire policy and coordinated action.

Searching synergies of planning and branding with spatial governance

The emphasis on embedding of both planning and branding in governance stems from the idea that this not only enhances local legitimacy and the potential effect of resulting strategies, but also makes it possible to coordinate the two towards synergetic effects. The balancing act required to start the virtuous circle of asset creation described above, can be assisted by a combination of planning and branding. When branding expands to ideas on changing or preserving a place and bringing new activities, it enters the planning domain. Place branding gains in effectiveness when integrated within a wider intervention for the place and when synergistically combined with planning and spatial design interventions (see in this issue Lucarelli & Heldt Cassel, 2020).

A more careful observation of governance will show that combining planning and place branding strategies might not always be possible, nor desirable. The evolution of governance means that, where combined strategies are possible, this option might not last forever, and while it lasts, it might not be the most privileged site of policy integration. Likewise, the place in governance where possibilities for planning and place branding exists, might not be the dominant site for strategy formation, significantly reducing the effects of particular strategies. Local groups might for example find a place for organic farming, some related business, create a brand for a particular neighbourhood and therewith work on the future of that neighbourhood, but chances are slim that their efforts will sort effect beyond that place. In other words, the fact that integrated planning and branding strategies seem possible, does not determine how important they should and can be.

Spatial planning and place branding can find each other in the acceptance of a meta- or framing asset, that is the physical landscape, a product of nature and history, of contingency and of

strategy. Planning leans on, and transforms landscapes (Van Assche & Lo, 2011), while place branding relies on and produces synthetic images of place which go beyond objects, details or events (Donner et al. 2017; Anholt, 2008). The landscape itself can often function as an asset that can frame and enhance other assets (Kavaratzis, 2008). Overall, related spatial planning and place branding strategies could provide a more realistic view over spatial realities, where identities, assets, qualities and landscape are paramount for spatial development (Oliveira, 2016). Lack of planning and branding, obsession with single resources and short-term perspectives, lack of strategy and of diversity in perspectives, often leads to a degradation of the landscape. Governance then is the place to maintain long-term perspectives and diverse perspectives on community development, to remind the community that alternatives are always possible, that some things can be interpreted as future assets that the landscape itself is worth valuing, as a spatial structure, which could accommodate diverse activities fitting alternative futures (Van Assche & Hornidge, 2015). In Provence, a region in south-eastern France bordering Italy and the Mediterranean Sea, lavender is more attractive as a visitor charmer than as an agricultural product, and this is possible because of preservation of cultural landscapes (Donner, Horlings, Fort & Vellema, 2017).

Such functioning of landscape as meta-asset will not always work, as some landscapes are less interesting, more damaged, or less appreciated. The choice for landscape has to emerge out of localized analysis, yet the story of the potential of landscape should caution decision-makers about easy ignorance, about easily missing assets and routinely allowing degradation of heritage, of nature, of landscapes as the sum of all. Similarly, and linking to our points on discursive construction, alternative representations and appreciations of landscape and lifestyle might exist, which might endow new values on a place. Places are being rediscovered all the time, based on products, stories, movies, songs, on writings old and new. Yet at some point rediscovery becomes tough, when not much is recognizable, when few pleasant activities remain possible. Again, physical and narrative structures can reinforce or undermine each other, towards value creation in place, or towards value destruction and destruction of alternative future.

Conclusion

The conscious relating of spatial planning and place branding strategies can in many places offer a useful tool to coordinate the use, conservation and development of natural and urban landscapes. In this paper, we emphasize the value in both spatial planning and place branding and demonstrate the potential synergies. Finding those synergies is a matter of discovering a locally and regionally appropriate form of relating planning and branding. The benefits can be a stabilization of places and the identification of new economic opportunities through a perspective on place- based- value creation. The possible problems are in the realm of increasing complexity of governance, costly overlaps, and most importantly, a possible democratic deficit, often commented upon by critics of place branding and critics of expert- driven planning.

We, therefore, argued strongly for the embedding of both planning and branding in place-based governance structures and showed that governance has to be understood as an evolving system. This is important because, firstly, if governance is understood as co-evolving actors, institutions, power and knowledge, then the analysis of community-specific governance paths can tell us what is possible in terms of re-locating and re-relating planning and branding, and which transformations of governance in that direction are most likely to work. Secondly, this clear embedding of both planning and branding in governance helps to understand the narrative dynamics in and about the place: what are the existing images of place, assets, values, value creation? Successful planning and branding have to be rooted in this set of images and discourses, yet also aware of their position in governance, in order to work with them, build on them. Path mapping, and within this, the mapping of narratives and assets, can help to identify existing and possible relations between planning and branding. Maximizing integration is not always possible, nor desirable. Fixing a particular relation might be problematic as well.

Our understanding of narrative construction of assets, of identities and of governance structures entails a limitation in terms of policy integration and degree of control, but it also comes with the promise of flexibility, of new opportunities to be grasped by developing new forms of sensitivity and reflexivity for place, narrative, product, and their potential relation. Even where landscapes are not the most appealing ‘asset’, space is ultimately the integrating concept, as we are dealing with attempts to root economies in place, and preserve and create qualities in a place, by linking them systematically yet flexibly to value creation. We have debated here that this requires attention to the many ways in which spatial planning and place branding can cross-fertilize each other and to the embedding of both in evolving spatial governance structures.

References

- Albrechts, L. (2015) Ingredients for a more radical strategic spatial planning. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 42(3): 510-525.
- Albrechts, L., Healey, P., & Kunzmann, K. (2003) Strategic Spatial Planning and Regional Governance in Europe. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 69(2): 113-129.
- Allmendinger, P. & Haughton, G. (2013) 'The Evolution and Trajectories of English Spatial Governance: 'Neoliberal' Episodes in Planning', *Planning Practice and Research*, 28(1): 6-26.
- Anholt, S. (2008) Place branding: Is it marketing, or isn't it? *Place Brand Public Diplomacy*, 4(1): 1-6.
- Ashworth G.J., & Kavaratzis M. (2018) The Roles of Branding in Public Administration and Place Management: Possibilities and Pitfalls. In: Ongaro E., Van Thiel S. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Public Administration and Management in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Ashworth, G. J. & Kavaratzis, M. (Eds.) (2010) *Towards Effective Place Brand Management Branding European Cities and Regions*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Ashworth, G. J. & Voogd, H. (1990) *Selling the City: Marketing Approaches in Public Sector Urban Planning*. London: Belhaven Press.
- Bal, M. (2002). *Travelling concepts in the humanities: A rough guide*. University of Toronto Press.
- Belabas, W., Eshuis J., & Scholten, P. (2020) Re-imagining the City: Branding Migration-Related Diversity. *European Planning Studies*, **this issue**.
- Boland, P. (2013). Sexing up the city in the international beauty contest: The performative nature of spatial planning and the fictive spectacle of place branding. *Town Planning Review*, 84(2), 251-274.
- Candel, J. J., & Biesbroek, R. (2016). Toward a processual understanding of policy integration. *Policy Sciences*, 49(3), 211-231.
- Cleave, E., Arku, G., Chatwin, m. (2017) Are they Surgeons? or are they Plumbers? Assessing the Role of Private Sector Consultants in Place Branding and Other Place-Based Economic Development Strategies. *Public Organization Review*, 1-22.
- Cleave, E., Arku, G., Sadler, R. & Gilliland, J. (2017) Is it sound policy or fast policy? Practitioners' perspectives on the role of place branding in local economic development, *Urban Geography*, 38:8, 1133-1157.
- Collie, N. (2011). Cities of the imagination: Science fiction, urban space, and community engagement in urban planning. *Futures*, 43(4), 424-431.
- Dawson, E. & Higgins, M. (2009) How planning authorities can improve quality through the design review process: Lessons from Edinburgh. *Journal of Urban Design*, 14(1): 101-114.

- Deffner, A., Karachalis, E., Psatha, E., Metaxas, T., & Sirakoulis, K. (2020) City Marketing and Planning in Two Greek Cities: Plurality or Constraints? *European Planning Studies*, [this issue](#).
- Denning, S. (2006) Effective storytelling: strategic business narrative techniques. *Strategy & Leadership*, 34(1), 42-48.
- Donner, M. Horlings, L., Fort, F. & Vellema, S. (2017) Place branding, embeddedness and endogenous rural development: Four European cases. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 13(4): 273-292.
- Easterly, W. (2006) *The white man's burden*. London: penguin.
- Feagan, R. (2007). The place of food: mapping out the 'local' in local food systems. *Progress in Human Geography*, 31(1), 23-42.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (1998) *Rationality and power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Go, F. M., & Trunfio, M. (2012). A Paradigm Shift from Tourism Destination Management To Democratic Governance of Place Branding. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Research*.
- Gotham, K. F. (2007). (Re) branding the big easy: tourism rebuilding in post-Katrina New Orleans. *Urban Affairs Review*, 42(6), 823-850.
- Grenni, S., Horlings, L., & Soini, K. (2020) Linking spatial planning and place branding strategies through cultural narratives in places. *European Planning Studies*, [this issue](#).
- Gunder, M., & Hillier, J. (2016). *Planning in ten words or less: A Lacanian entanglement with spatial planning*. London: Routledge.
- Gunder, M., Madanipour, A., & Watson, V. (Eds.). (2017). *The Routledge handbook of planning theory*. Routledge.
- Gunn, S. & Hillier, J. (2014) 'When Uncertainty is Interpreted as Risk: An Analysis of Tensions Relation to Spatial Planning Reform in England', *Planning, Practice & Research*, 29(1): 56-74.
- Hae, L. (2017) Traveling Policy: Place Marketing and the Neoliberal Turn of Urban Studies in South Korea. *Critical Sociology*, 44 (3), 533 – 546.
- Harries, B., Byrne, B., Rhodes, J. & Wallace, S.J. (2018) Diversity in place: narrations of diversity in an ethnically mixed, urban area. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration*.
- Harris, E. (2009). Neoliberal subjectivities or a politics of the possible? Reading for difference in alternative food networks. *Area*, 41(1), 55-63.
- Healey, P. (2006). Transforming governance: Challenges of institutional adaptation and a new politics of space. *European planning studies*, 14(3), 299-320.
- Healey, P., Khakee, A., Motte, A., & Needham, B. (Eds.) (2006). *Making Strategic Spatial Plans: Innovation in Europe*. Edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library.

- Hersperger, A.M., Oliveira, E., Pagliarin, S., Palka, G., Verburg, P., Bolliger, J., & Grădinaru, S. (2018). Urban land-use change: the role of strategic spatial planning. *Global Environmental Change*, 51, 32-42.
- Hillier, J. (2010) Post-structural complexity: strategic navigation in an ocean of theory and practice, in: M. Cerreta, G. Concilio and V. Monno (Eds) *Making Strategies in Spatial Planning: Knowledge and Values*, Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer Science + Business Media B.V, pp. 87-97.
- Hospers, G.-J. (2017) People, place and partnership: exploring Strategies to revitalise town centres. *European Spatial Research & Policy*, 24(1), 65-79.
- Insch, A. & Walters, T. (2018) Challenging assumptions about residents' engagement with place branding. *Place Brand and Public Diplomacy*, 14(3), 152-162.
- Jensen, O. B. (2007). Culture stories: Understanding cultural urban branding. *Planning Theory*, 6(3), 211-236.
- Jordan, A., & Lenschow, A. (2010). Environmental policy integration: a state of the art review. *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 20(3), 147-158.
- Kavaratzis, M. & Kalandides, A. (2015) Rethinking the place brand: the interactive formation of place brands and the role of participatory place branding, *Environment and Planning A*, 47(6): 1368–82.
- Kavaratzis, M. (2008) From city marketing to city branding: An interdisciplinary analysis with reference to Amsterdam, Budapest and Athens. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. Groningen, the Netherlands, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen.
- Kavaratzis, M. (2012) From “necessary evil” to necessity: stakeholders' involvement in place branding. *Journal of Place Management and development*, 5(1), 7-19.
- Kavaratzis, M. (2018) Place branding: Are we any wiser? *Cities*, 80, 61-63.
- Kavaratzis, M., Warnaby, G. & Ashworth, G. J. (2015) *Rethinking Place Branding Comprehensive Brand Development for Cities and Regions*, Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Lucarelli, A. (2018) Place branding as urban policy: The (im)political place branding. *Cities*, 80, 12-21.
- Lucarelli, A., & Brorström, S. (2013). Problematising place branding research: A meta-theoretical analysis of the literature. *The Marketing Review*, 13(1), 65-81.
- Lucarelli, A., & Heldt Cassel, S. (2020) The dialogical relationship between spatial planning and place branding: Conceptualizing regionalization discourses in Sweden. *European Planning Studies*, **this issue**.

- Lund, N. F., Cohen, S. A., & Scarles, C. (2018). The power of social media storytelling in destination branding. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 8, 271-280.
- Mathie, A., & Cunningham, G. (2003). From clients to citizens: Asset-based community development as a strategy for community-driven development. *Development in Practice*, 13(5), 474-486.
- Mayes, R. (2008). A place in the sun: The politics of place, identity and branding. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 4(2), 124-135.
- Niedzialkowski, K., & Beunen, R. (2019). The risky business of planning reform—The evolution of local spatial planning in Poland. *Land Use Policy*, 85, 11-20.
- Niels Frederik Lund, Scott A. Cohen, Caroline Scarles (2018) The power of social media storytelling in destination branding. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 8, 271-280.
- Ntounis, N. & Kavaratzis, M. (2017) "Re-branding the High Street: the place branding process and reflections from three UK towns", *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 10(4): 392-403.
- Olesen, K., (2014). The neoliberalization of strategic spatial planning. *Planning Theory*, 13 (3): 288–303.
- Oliveira, E. (2015). Place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 11(1): 18-33.
- Oliveira, E. (2016). Place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument: A theoretical framework to branding regions with references to northern Portugal. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 9(1), 47-72.
- Oliveira, E., & Hersperger, A.M. (2018). Governance arrangements, funding mechanisms and power configurations in current practices of strategic spatial plan implementation. *Land Use Policy*, 76, 623-633.
- Parker, G. & Street, E (2018) Enabling participatory planning: Planning aid and advocacy in neoliberal times. Policy Press: Bristol.
- Pasquinelli, C. (2010). The limits of place branding for local development: The case of Tuscany and the Arnovalley brand. *Local Economy*, 25(7): 558-572.
- Pasquinelli, C., & Vuignier, R. (2020) Place Marketing, Policy Integration and Governance Complexity: An Analytical Framework for FDI Promotion. *European Planning Studies*, **this issue**.
- Pike, A. (2013) Economic geographies of Brands and Branding. *Economic Geography*, 89(4): 317-39.

- Pike, S. (2009). Destination brand positions of a competitive set of near-home destinations. *Tourism management*, 30(6), 857-866.
- Porter, N. (2020) Strategic planning and place branding in a World Heritage cultural landscape: a case study of the English Lake District, UK. *European Planning Studies*, [this issue](#).
- Radosavljević, U., Dorđević, A., Lalović, K., Živković, J., & Đukanović, Z. (2020) Educational Projects for Linking Place Branding and Urban Planning in Serbia. *European Planning Studies*, [this issue](#).
- Rantisi, N. & Leslie, D. (2006) Branding the design metropole: The case of Montreal, Canada. *Area*, 38(4): 364-76.
- Sadler, D. (1993). Place-marketing, competitive places and the construction of hegemony in Britain in the 1980s. in G. Kearns and C. Philo (eds.) *Selling Places: The City as Cultural Capital Past and Present*, pp. 175–92. Pergamon Press, Oxford.
- Sager, T. (2011). Neo-liberal urban planning policies: A literature survey 1990–2010. *Progress in Planning*, 76(4), 147-199.
- San Eugenio Vela, J., Ginesta, X., & Kavaratzis, M. (2020) The critical role of stakeholder engagement in a place branding strategy: a case study of the Empordà brand. *European Planning Studies*, [this issue](#).
- Sandercock, L. (2003). Out of the closet: The importance of stories and storytelling in planning practice. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 4(1), 11-28.
- Shields, R. (2013) *Spatial questions: Cultural topologies and social spatialisation*. London: Sage
- Throgmorton, J. A. (1996). *Planning as persuasive storytelling: The rhetorical construction of Chicago's electric future*. University of Chicago Press.
- Tregear, A. (2011). Progressing knowledge in alternative and local food networks: Critical reflections and a research agenda. *Journal of rural studies*, 27(4), 419-430.
- Van Assche, K. & Chien Lo, M. (2011). Planning, preservation and place branding: A tale of sharing assets and narratives. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 7(2), 116-126.
- Van Assche, K. (2004) *Signs in time. An interpretive account of urban planning and design, the people and their histories*. Wageningen: Wageningen University.
- Van Assche, K., & Djanibekov, N. (2012). Spatial planning as policy integration: The need for an evolutionary perspective. Lessons from Uzbekistan. *Land use policy*, 29(1), 179-186.
- Van Assche, K., & Hornidge, A. K. (2015). *Rural development. Knowledge and expertise in governance*. Wageningen Academic, Wageningen.
- Van Assche, K., Beunen, R., & Duineveld, M. (2014). *Evolutionary governance theory: an introduction*. Springer Science & Business Media.

- Van Assche, K., Beunen, R., & Lo, M. C. (2016). Place as layered and segmentary commodity: place branding, smart growth and the creation of product and value. *International Planning Studies*, 21(2), 164-175.
- Van Assche, K., Beunen, R., Duineveld, M. & De Jong, H. (2012) Co-evolutions of planning and design: Risks and benefits of design perspectives in planning systems. *Planning Theory*, 12(2): 177- 198.
- Van Assche, K., Duineveld, M., & Beunen, R., (2014). Power and contingency in planning. *Environment and Planning A*, 46(10), 2385–2400.
- Vanolo, A. (2017) City branding. The ghostly politics of representation in globalising cities, Routledge, London.
- Vuignier, R. (2017). Place branding & place marketing 1976–2016: A multidisciplinary literature review. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, 14(4), 447-473.
- Warnaby, G. & Medway D. (2015). Rethinking the Place Product from the Perspective of the Service-Dominant Logic of Marketing. In Kavaratzis, M. Warnaby, G. and Ashworth, G. (Eds.) *Rethinking Place Branding: Comprehensive Brand Development for Cities and Regions*. Heidelberg: Springer Verlag, pp. 33-50.
- Warnaby, G. (2009) 'Towards a Service-Dominant Place Marketing Logic'. *Marketing Theory*, 9 (4): 403-423
- Warnaby, G. (2018) Taking a territorological perspective on place branding? *Cities*, 80, 64-66.
- Warren, G. and Dinnie, K. (2018) Cultural intermediaries in place branding: Who are they and how do they construct legitimacy for their work and for themselves? *Tourism Management*, 66, 302-314.
- Yea, L. & Björner, E. (2018) Linking city branding to multi-level urban governance in Chinese megacities: A case study of Guangzhou, *Cities*, 80, 29-37.
- Zenker, S., & Erfgen, C. (2014). Let them do the work: a participatory place branding approach. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 7(3), 225-234.