

Tourism Marketing

Subjects: Others

Contributor: Heather Skinner

This piece will focus on how tourism marketing could better place focus on local food and drink, to attract visitors interested in authenticity, and engender in them a deeper sense of place with their vacation destination.

Keywords: food and drink ; authenticity ; destination branding ; destination identity ; destination image

1. Introduction

There have been many calls for destinations to move away from mass tourism towards other more sustainable tourism models. We have seen much in the extant literature and popular media about what was termed the 2017 “summer of overtourism”, bringing demonstrations from local community members in many destinations, but particularly in European cities, as “tourismphobia” was rife, and tourists in many destinations told in no uncertain terms to simply “go home” ... or worse! The start of 2020 has seen a complete change, away from overtourism, to many places seeing little or even no tourism at all as lockdowns and travel bans were put in place due to the COVID-10 pandemic, highlighting the unsustainability of current tourism models.

Whatever reasons a destination may have to take this time to reconsider how it focuses its post-pandemic tourism models, and whether the destination will choose, in future to focus more on domestic or international tourism, there is much to be said for places all over the world to consider what they can offer that really is unique, local, authentic, and, most importantly, sustainable. The offer may include assets from the natural or built environment, and also from a place's cultural heritage.

2. National Cultural Identity

The tourism literature is replete with examples of places promoting their cultural heritage. However, one issue that keeps recurring in these discussions is notion of whether such representations are authentic or staged for the benefit of consumers.

“when marketing cultural heritage there is a concern that what is being promoted is ‘fakelore’ ... and not a true representation of the past; yet promoting the past, at least in terms of heritage tourism, is the business of the present” (Skinner & Croft, 2004, p. 7). ^[1]

Focusing on a place's unique assets, be they from the natural or physical environment, or a place's sociocultural assets, is at the heart of creating a unique place brand that can compete with others on a global stage, as places around the world compete to attract residents, investors, tourists, or to better sell their goods and services in export markets (Skinner & Kubacki, 2007) ^[2]. However, whereas:

“The concept of branding is now commonly applied to place marketing ... this concept does not have universal acceptance. The issues are further complicated as studies into a place 's brand identity are closely linked to studies of national identity, which is itself closely linked to the concept of a nation 's cultural and political identity” (Skinner & Kubacki, 2007, p. 306) ^[2].

Some places re politically motivated to undertake this branding process (Skinner, 2012) ^[3], some need to create new identities, or to re-connect with former identities especially, for example with the break-up of the USSR and “recent eastward enlargement of the EU” (Kubacki & Skinner, 2006, p. 285) ^[4]. A place may also wish to update its identity to better reflect what it is now, and how it wishes to present itself to the world, rather than what it was in the past. For example:

"At the turn of the 1990s Wales was still struggling to maintain a unique sense of identity that was not solely based in the past. There was a perceived need to establish a greater awareness of Wales as a separate nation with its own unique identity to both those outside and within the principality ... Wales had indeed undergone a transformation in the perceptions of many people both within and outside the country, from a nation that was perceived as backward looking to a new, proud, positive nation that has the image of Cool Cymru, and which is able to honour its rich heritage and its past while being perceived as an forward thinking, outward looking international" (Skinner & Croft, 2004, pp. 12-16) ^[4].

A nation brand can be communicated through its: Geography; History; Proclamations; Entertainment industry; Culture; Language; Images of popular culture; Media; Creative arts; Art; Music; Famous citizens; Tourism and travel writing; Commercial branded products; and Other features (Kubacki & Skinner, 2006, p. 288) ^[4]. Kubacki and Skinner's (2006, p. 298) study into Poland, the Polish national brand, and Polish culture began "to identify the specific links between national brand and national culture, and found that certain elements of national culture appear to play a more important role than others". Yet under the nation's brand are other towns, cities, and resorts that can also be branded and promoted to the world (Skinner, 2009) ^[5], with this entry focusing on places as tourism destinations, not least because:

"Place marketing has been claimed to be most developed within the tourism marketing literature (Hankinson 2004), where it was realised that a destination's image had an effect on the tourist's decision process (Mayo 1973), and the tourists' perceptions of the place" (Skinner, 2008, p. 917) ^[6].

3. Place/Destination Identity and Place/Destination Image

When referring to a place that is undertaking marketing and branding efforts for tourism purposes, it is more usual to refer to it as a "destination" (Skinner, 2008) ^[6]. Any of this place/destination's *marketing* efforts are part of its wider place management activities, with its branding efforts:

"better clarified as linking to a place's promotional activities, contextualised in the domain of marketing communications, marking the place with a distinct identity in the minds of the various target groups targeted by the incorporated place, from an inside-out approach, assuring the place's multiple stakeholders, in partnership, manage and communicate the place's brand identity to the wider world as they wish it to be presented" (Skinner, 2008, pp. 923-924) ^[6].

Henceforth this entry will refer to places as tourism *destinations*, to *branding* efforts as being undertaken by those formally charged with such activities, usually a government agency or Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO), creating and communicating the destination's *identity*, with the term *destination image* referring to the sum of knowledge, beliefs, feelings an individual may form about the destination from their engagement with information emanating from: Official formal *induced* sources (usually the DMO); unofficial, informal, *organic* sources (including travel writing and other images from popular media and the entertainment industry, as explained by Kubacki & Skinner, 2006, and also by Williams-Burnett, Skinner & Fallon, 2016); as well as any more *complex image* they may have if they have ever visited a specific destination in person (Greaves & Skinner, 2010) ^[7].

4. Local Food and Drink as Destination Attractors

One aspect of a nation, region, or more local place's cultural heritage that can certainly play a part in potentially moving a destination away from mass tourism model, towards one that is more sustainable (Skinner, 2017) , while also building on its unique assets, is the speciality food and drink that can be found in a certain place (Skinner, Chatzopoulou & Gorton, 2020) ^[8].

It has been found that even tourists who are not motivated to travel to a destination specifically for its gastronomy are seeking authenticity of food and drink when on vacation in a destination (Melewar & Skinner, 2020; Skinner, Chatzopoulou & Gorton, 2020) ^[9], yet many local restaurants in that destination do not make the most of promoting localness in terms of their cuisine, ingredients, local speciality foods, beers and wines Indeed:

"localness contributes to positive perceptions of authenticity. A restaurant is judged to be more authentic if local people dine there, it offers local ... and regional speciality dishes and local wines, and it prepares all meals fresh rather than in advance and then heated up in a microwave oven" (Skinner, Chatzopoulou & Gorton, 2020, p. 166) ^[9].

As Melewar and Skinner (2020) ask, on a small Greek island full of cultural heritage, even with its own microbrewery making *Corfu Beer*, "why would anyone come to Corfu to have a Heineken?".

5. Conclusion

As many places around the world are experiencing difficulties coping with success of their branding efforts, especially those destinations experiencing overtourism and tourismphobia, or the destinations now facing undertourism in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, seek to find a more sustainable form of tourism, it must be recognised that:

“Sustainable development and placemaking can be seen encompassing a range of aspects of place management; marketing and branding, including increasing tourist numbers to improve the economy of a destination; attracting appropriate inward investment, while also attempting to preserve a destination’s traditional industries; and enhancing the quality of life of all the place’s stakeholders” (Skinner, 2017b, P. 102) ^[10].

Whatever reasons a destination may have to reconsider how it focuses its post-pandemic tourism models, and whether the destination will choose, in future to focus more on domestic or international tourism, there is much to be said for places all over the world to consider what they can offer that really is unique, local, authentic, and, most importantly, sustainable. One answer may be found in highlighting the local authentic food and drink to be found in a place, that can contribute to a visitor’s sense of place, and which may not only be found on a first-hand visitation to a destination but which cannot be replicated elsewhere.

References

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