

City's Perceived Image and Urban Waterfront Morphologies

A City Branding Strategy Approach

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Abstract: The management of spatial planning processes by composing a spatial narrative concerns the act of symbolic economy that aims to create a competitive place identity with benefits and opportunities for sustainable economic investments. The process may be linked to mechanisms of symbolic economy having cultural and political intentions. Thus, the cultural assets may be treated as active elements in the formation of the perceived image of a place and spatial elements of the desired imaginary content that this image defines. The proposed paper analyzes the paradigms of Mediterranean cities' waterfront as highly performative in the perceived image of the cities' urban cores, related to capital investment and the production of cultural concepts. Specifically, it examines brand equity as this has been defined by a set of regulatory fields in existing city branding research. The proposed methodology contributes to the creation of a spatial narrative and places the urban morphologies at the core of urban branding strategies. Thus, the structured space is treated as an activator of spatial developments, of capital investments and of cultural symbols. The process of investigation concerns the capital investments where urban morphologies seem to control perceptions and to form a competitive cultural identity as a strong economic core and a catalyst for consumer behavior.

1. Introduction: Urban waterfront morphologies and the city's perceived image

The planning process of composing a spatial narrative concerns the act of symbolic economy that aims to create a competitive place identity with benefits and opportunities for sustainable economic investments. The reading method adopted for examining the place brand equity of selected Mediterranean cities' waterfront is based on the notions of symbolic economy, competitive place identity and the argument that the city's imaginary is readable within its spatial narrative.

Within this general frame of reference (both symbolic and morphological) the paper analyses the cities' waterfronts as highly performative cores of the city's perceived image. The analysis has been carried out as a cultural and spatial investigation of the morpho-imaginary process that determines the consumer's behavior.

The methodology of analysis of place brand equity estimation is based on the hypothesis that the composition of a waterfront's spatial narrative concerns an act of symbolic economy "writ-

ten” within its building fabric. In this interpretation, “the reading” corresponds to the structure itself and it is perceived as a cultural asset with political intentions. Moreover, a comparative framework between cities’ waterfronts, based on the regulatory fields of place brand equity (Michael, 2018) and their building fabric may have several advantages over places’ competitive identity. First, the place brand equity may influence positive perceptions that indicate the basic structural rule of a narrative that is *the imaginary*. Second, may influence the consumer behavior.

In this study we introduce a new approach for examining the competitive identity of a place through urban morphologies and a set of regulatory fields of place brand equity. In particular, the places’ brand equity estimation will be compared between the selected Mediterranean cities’ waterfront and their potential for further cultural and economic development will be discussed.

2. Competitive identity and the importance of symbolic economy in urban waterfront morphologies

Urban waterfront development is a well-established phenomenon in urban design discourse, internationally. This phenomenon is gradually rising as a central topic in the most Mediterranean cities during the last decade both on academic level and design projects (see Gospodini, 2001; Breen and Rigby, 1996; Bruttomesso, 1993; Craig-Smith and Fagence, 1995, etc.). The intense interest in communicating the positive perceptions that indicate the basic structural rule of a narrative, corresponds to the traces of a place’ morpho-imaginary. Such traces have a direct impact on almost all aspects of a city’s cooperation with other places and an important role in its economic upgrading. The “reading” approach of the building fabric combines the structure itself and the acts of symbolic economy. In this competitive framework, the term of symbolic economy includes two parallel systems of production: (a) the production of space with the synergy of capital investment and cultural concepts; and (b) the production of symbols (as elements of concept depiction which both construct a means of commercial exchange and a language of social identity) (Zukin, 1995 in Σουλιώτης N., 2013). This process of composing a competitive identity of a place through its image and cultural assets, that is the city branding process, is attracting the keen interest not only of research and academic community (Anholt, 2004, 2007, 2010; Dinnie, 2011; Klingmann, 2007; Kavatzis & Ashworth, 2005; Middleton, 2011) but of the tourism industry also (Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000; Vaughan & Edwards, 1999; Walmsley & Jenkins, 1993). At the same time has the objective to attract visitors, investment, and new talented residents for relocation (Ashworth G., 2009; Ashworth & Voogd, 1990; Lash & Urry, 1994).

From this conceptual interpretation of the built environment, two fundamental approaches are identified (Critchley, 2014; Kavatzis & Ashworth, 2005), the political economic approach which focuses on the material nature of society and the symbolic economy. These approaches concern the rejection or acceptance of the building fabric to spatial representations and spatial narratives.

The demand of places to develop comparative advantages against other places lead to the composition of spatial systems, where the size, color and the overall unique and different form of planning manage an enriched imaginary content (Michael, 2008). This constructed message is created with the intention to produce the desired associations by projecting the vision of a place. At the same time, the landmark-symbol seeks the communicative process (the form and the spatial planning) which will lead to certain target groups. Furthermore, innovative designs attempt through

dominant to the cityscape building constructions to create a homogeneous set of impressions. The experience of “unique” situations is interpreted to the composition of “unique” constructions where architecture and urban design seems to play, in the planning process, the game of shapes and dominant images (Michael, 2008). The pompous spatial traces are easily then transformed into a symbolic building image, a cultural asset that leads to the city that belongs.

3. The methodology of analysis of place brand equity through a set of regulatory fields

In City Branding strategies, the enrichment of the conceptual content of an architectural object with cultural, different, innovative, distinct references is interpreted as a process of creating a visual trace a spatial symbol with a conceptual content. At the same time, the architectural object aims to easily be transformed into an image and a landmark responding to the central issue of the self-identification of populations while the architectural object produces political and economic meanings which are attached to its symbolic content. Thus, by controlling the perception processes, strong economic cores and catalysts of consumer behavior are created. This process could be interpreted as place brand equity enhancement and it is supported by the following two dimensions: A) The ability to influence perceptions and B) The challenge of consumer behavior (Florek, 2015)

The paper follows a methodology of analysis through a set of regulatory fields that concerns the evaluation of place brand equity of notes and urban cores by the existing research (see Table 1; Michael, 2018). According to this it investigates the performance in the perceived image of urban waterfronts of the selected Mediterranean cities.

4. The estimation of place brand equity of urban waterfront morphologies to Mediterranean cities

The waterfront of Limassol, is a highly performance urban core in the perceived image of the city. While its spatial projection dominates in an aerial view its visual exposure is also wide at the eye level along the entire length of the costal line. The aerial outline exploration identifies that its linear composition attempts to unify a limited number of landmarks with “show off” spatial characteristics. It is noteworthy that, while the unique design of the tall buildings is projected to the urban outline causing at the same time emotions of “astonishment”, it has no return on new developmental actions or on the social recognition. Additionally, the presence of tall buildings as visual traces on the urban waterfront is not supported by the spatial narrative of Cypriot coastal cities where “sea and sun” are the key benefits, the comparative advantages and the dominant reason for visitation. Moreover, the coastal front expresses intentions of visual integration but its existing linear spatial elements are tourism infrastructures with insignificant, underdeveloped, low quality urban morphologies.

Limassol Marina seems to be “The Activator” of the coastal development which attracts new investments, supportive or in continuity to its function. Its conceptual context (*the imaginary*), the urban symbols and the positive associations refer to an economically and technologically advanced urban fabric, enriched with unique experiences for the visitors.

According to the above, the place brand equity of Limassol waterfront is estimated through conceptual meanings that challenge positive associations of a modern and technologically ad-

Table 1. *Set of Regulatory Fields of Place Brand Equity of Notes or Urban Cores to Spatial Narrative (Michael, 2018).*

A/A		
A1	Social/ Political	Social acceptance and the effect on the urban cultural landscape
A2	Cultural/ Symbolic	Cultural acts on the urban landscape (i.e. upgrading of cultural environment, promotion of values and symbols, etc.).
A3	Conceptual	Challenging positive associations in the urban cultural landscape (i.e. technologically developed landscape, energy-advanced cultural landscape, etc.).
A4	Qualitative	Qualitative effect on the urban cultural landscape (i.e. creativity, uniqueness, liveliness etc.).
A5	Environmental	Effect on the environment (i.e. the impact on sustainable development, the impact on existing environmental values, etc.).
A6	Developmentally	Ability to challenge new investments and actions in continuation or in a supportive way of Activators' function with lasting effect.
A7	Response to the city's vision and to specific target groups.	Challenge visitation, investment activity and habitation with conceptual and functional content compatible with the imaginary and target groups.
A8	Competitive according to architectural and urban design	Competitive dynamics (i.e. unique designs, non-replicable, recognizable, symbolic, correlated with the desired imaginary content).
A9	Design which is Spatial Projected	Distinct designs from dominant perspective views, with a visual trace that can be easily transformed into an image, a sign and a landmark.
A10	Emotional Responses to Unique Experiences	Challenge emotional responses which identify a place through unique experiences.
A11	Spatial Correlation	Spatial correlation with the cultural, local symbols and spatial pathways.

vanced urban environment. At the same time Limassol's urban waterfront morphologies promise unique experiences to visitors and new residents. Nevertheless and despite its ability to attract developmental actions, a set of tall buildings to the cityscape has negative impact on environmental assets and limited social acceptance. Moreover, the Limassol's perceived image raises the following questions: Which is the imaginary that the city wants to project? What are the spatial symbols which support the city's imaginary? And which cities Limassol attempts to compete with? In other words, which are the symbolic spatial elements that compose its competitive identity and at the same time display a competitive imaginary content?

We argue that city's urban scale doesn't permit to compete other destinations where their spatial narrative refers to the production of tall buildings such as Dubai or Singapore. More

important to that, Limassol's imaginary is able to be correlated with its existing cultural and natural assets, creating at the same time perceptive spatial symbols to the city's narrative.

In Cyprus so far, the phenomenon of urban waterfront morpho-imaginary design as a means of economic development in the framework of between cities' competition, identifies Marina of Ayia Napa as a new developmental "Activator", a new urban core westward oriented from the existing port and tourist center of Ayia Napa. The development aspires to attract new residents, investors and new visitors while its spatial projection and its unique and distinctive character reveals the need to compete with other destinations. In the context of spatial dominance both in aerial view and in eye level, two towers are raised to the city's outline. Moreover, the building fabric is extended towards the sea, while an Event Center and Residential Villas promise multi-sensory experiences. The design seems to challenge further economic activities and at the same time to increase the place brand equity of the city. However, and despite the emphasis of the urban morphology on important place assets such as the "sea and the sun", the spatial correlations of Marina with other urban cores seems to be limited.

It seems that, the place brand equity estimation of Marina of Ayia Napa reveals conceptual meanings of a modern place that challenges unique experiences to visitors and new residents through recognizable spatial symbols. The "reading" process of its urban morpho-imaginary identifies through dominant perspective views, a distinct design and a visual trace that can be easily be transformed into an image and a sign. However, the question that could be raised concerns the lasting effect of its perceived image to attract capital investments and visitation when the «astonishment effect» will no longer exist.

According to the above paradigms of cities' waterfront we can develop a two-fold argument: First, one of the key factors affecting new urban waterfront developments concerns «show off» morpho-imaginary actions. Second, cities' waterfront have become attractors of a highly competitive economic environment in which traditional factors (i.e geography, physical infrastructure) that once affected the location of a new business to a specific place, matter less than ever (see Sassen, 2001 in Gospodini, 2001).

In this framework of cities' competition it is rather significant to describe the waterfront morpho-imaginary development of other than Cypriot Mediterranean cities, such as Rhodes, Chania, and Valetta. The «reading» of their projected images corresponds to a spatial narrative with traces of different historic phases. Such traces are not necessarily represented by archaeological remains, but by property boundaries, routes and rows of trees in the urban context. The estimation of their place brand equity (according to the regulatory fields mentioned above), is a reference to a building cluster that consists spatial symbols enriched with cultural content, socially accepted, non-replicable, recognizable and distinct from dominant perspective views. Their visual trace has been transformed into an image and a sign with a lasting effect in visitation and capital investments. Moreover, their spatial narrative concerns correlations of cultural and local symbols that promise experiences of "unique situations" timeless and associated with the waterfront's perceived image.

Following the cases of successful destinations such as of Barcelona, the composition of the city's waterfront morphology concerns a holistic city branding strategy. Barcelona's spatial narrative reflects a solid message with conceptual correlations of an advanced cultural-modern place and a strong tourist destination with a lasting effect. Although its development involve "show off" actions, such as the involvement to the design of "star-architects", or the introduction of morphologically notable architectural elements, urban notes and cores to the city's *imaginary*, the strategy implemented established networks of relationships through pathways of development of traditional and new centers. This approach describes the wider transformation

of Barcelona in a multi-center field with strong associations and symbolic meanings integrated to urban nodes and cores (see Rowe, 2006, p. 164). This city branding strategy was highly performative in the perceived image of the city's urban core and attracted new residents, architects, technology specialists and visitors in general. This reflects the communication dynamics of architecture and urban morphologies in projecting the imaginary of the city.

All the above discussion allows us to suggest a strategy that will implement the set of the regulatory fields of place brand equity to urban waterfronts of Mediterranean cities with the potential for further cultural and economic development.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the place brand equity of selected Mediterranean cities' waterfront emerges that the best approach to city branding strategies is the emphasis to their strong historical background and new cultural developmental processes that is the cultural orientation. The apparent repetition of morpho-imaginary design processes that promotes "show off" buildings does not support their competitive identity. On the contrary, their projected image could be easily replicated by other places eliminating at the same time its comparative advantage.

The implementation of the set of regulatory fields of place brand equity to Mediterranean cities' waterfronts could be a chance to change the established "show off" urban design practice. The new approach could treat their cultural assets as an active elements of their desired imaginary composition. Furthermore, could be a challenge to improve the cities' perceptions and at the same time form a relationship between the sea and the building fabric. Finally, the urban waterfront of Mediterranean cities could be placed on the urban map of Europe as competitive destinations with distinct perceived image.

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