Guest editorial

Introduction to the special issue

Beyond country and brand “Origin”: product/brand place associations and the role of place image in behaviour and strategy

The objective of this Special Issue (SI) was to “go beyond” country and/or brand “origin”. As we noted in the Call for Papers, the traditional “Country of origin” (COO) construct is old, tired, much debated and much maligned, while both it and its more recent cousin, “brand origin”, along with the growing interest in “place” studies in tourism and other cogent fields, show that geography may be even more relevant today than ever before – globalisation notwithstanding. In terms of going beyond “Country” origin, country is but one of several possible geographic loci, and in terms of going beyond “Brand” origin, brands can be administered from one place, owned by a parent company headquartered in a different place, designed in another, assembled in still another, from components designed and sourced in numerous locales, promoted by a spokesperson associated with a particular place, sold by retailers located in one or several places and purchased by consumers living in many places, some of whom may have multiple ethnic origins or nationalities – and named in relation to an origin different from their own (e.g. the Japanese-origin Subaru “Outback” or California’s “Gabbiano Chianti Classico” wines). In a nutshell, what matters today is the place with which a product or a brand is associated by its marketer and in the eyes of its buyers.

The authors who submitted manuscripts and the reviewers who helped to select papers for inclusion understood the need to “go beyond” well and made it possible to meet the SI’s objective in spades. The magnitude of the task of developing the place-to-brand direction of association by looking at the effects of global brands on their countries of origin. The next three papers move from the global to the subnational level: Sloan, Aiken and Mikkelson look at the congruency between brands and regions within the USA, Donner and Fort study place-brand building from the stakeholder perspective in France, and Martin and Capelli elaborate on terminal versus instrumental values in the context of place brand communities, also in France. Next, three papers study “places” in contexts where traditional research does not go often: Aruan, Crouch and Quester take us to the realm of services, Meshreki, Ennew and Murad to industrial buyers, and Schade, Piehler, Müller and Burmann to the role of city-level place images in attracting skilled workers. Last but not least, in the subject-specific studies, two papers deal with an issue of current and growing importance, namely, cross-border mergers and acquisitions, and their effects on place associations: Matarazzo, Lanzilli and Resciniti focus on country image and corporate reputation in cross-border acquisitions, and Johansson, Koch, Varga and Zhao on change-of-ownership effects on the image of premium brands.

Taken individually and together, the papers deal with a wide scope of issues, were written by scholars representing a variety of cultural and academic perspectives, and use a broad range of methodological approaches, from conceptual to empirical and from structural equation modelling and econometrics to qualitative netnography. We cannot thank our authors and reviewers enough and we owe them a debt of gratitude. We trust that their combined efforts will help to spawn new place-related research that, along the lines of the papers in this issue, goes “beyond” the ordinary.

We thank our reviewers most profoundly:

- Zafar Ahmed, American University of Ras Al Khaimah, UAE.
- Thomas Aichner, Alfaisal University, Saudi Arabia.
- Noel Albert, Kedge Business School, France.
- Mikael Andén, Royal Holloway University of London, UK.
- Anahit Armenakyan, Nipissing University, Canada.
- Søren Askegaard, Syddansk Universitet, Denmark.
- Daniel Baack, University of Denver, USA.
- Sally Baalbaki, Metropolitan State University of Denver, USA.
- Naval Bajpai, Indian Inst. of Information Technology & Management, India.
- Georgios Baltas, Athens University of Economics and Business, Greece.
- The ten papers in-between focus on a variety of specific place-related subjects that take us “beyond” traditional foci in place research.

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Guest editorial

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