









***City's vision, mission and values***

What is the city mission and what is the vision behind it? What values does the city presume to be most fundamental and why? How do these values show themselves in real city life? How are they shared internally and externally?

***Key milestones in city's history***

How can residents factually define the city's historical process? Which have been the city's most significant events? What anecdotes about famous and influential people and facts are yet being narrated within city?

***Residents' stories***

What do residents say about the city? Which stories do they narrate about the city? Which events and experiences do residents use to represent the city? What is it that makes the city a distinguished place to live and visit? Where do residents sense that the city makes a special?

**Figure 2. Scanning the Internal Information**

***External Basic Information***

The aim for scanning external basic information is to map the city's position and prestige at the international level and to clarify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the city. However, its principal aim is to explore what kind of image the city has in the hearts and minds of visitors. Here the following areas are relevant:

***Global Tourism And Travel Trends***

How do current global tourism and travel trends show themselves? What do they mean in terms of where the city is positioned now?

***Visitors***

What stories are repetitive visitors telling about the city? What do residents in other cities say about the city? How is the city positioned compared to other cities at the international level? Who are the target visitors and what are decisive motives for their decisions to visit the city?

***Travel opinion leaders***

Which individuals or organizations are opinion leaders in travel decision making and trip planning process? What do travel agencies and social media (travel blogs and websites) say about the city? What do they think about the attractions, atmosphere, infrastructure and value of city?

***Partners***

What are the city's marketing partners that have an active role in supporting and advising on strategies and practical issues? What projects have been solved together with those partners? What do these projects mean about the city's values?

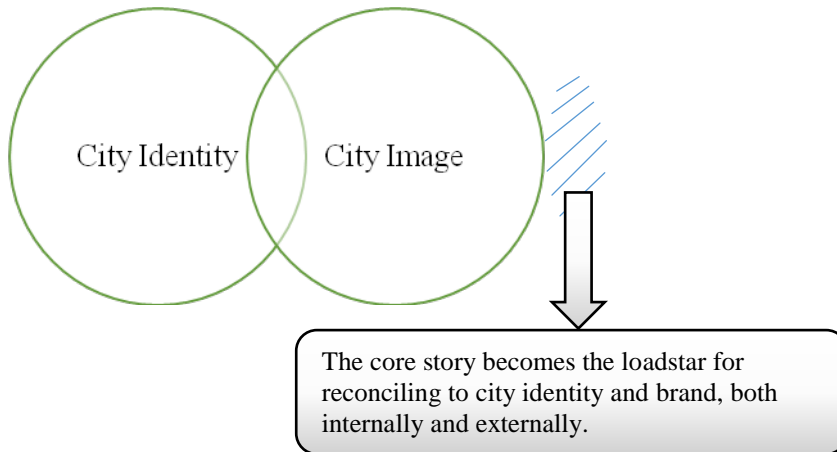
**Figure 3. Scanning External Information**

**Distilling the Basic Information**

When the internal and external information sources have been scanned, city and destination marketers are faced with a pile of information that has to be handled. Herein, they need to cut to the quick and focus on the gist of what makes the city special (Fog, et. al. 2005).

The aim of the core story is to reconcile the city's identity with the external sense of the city. This is the building block of a positive and powerful brand. Here, it is needed to recognize the nature of a probable

gap between the city's identity and its community image. In other words, it is critical to describe the contrasts and harmonies between internal and external information. For example, while the city of London aims to position itself as a smart city in which people want to live, work and play, foreign visitors perceive it as unfriendly, expensive and dirty (TripAdvisor' report, 2012). In this case, by distilling internal and external basic information, marketers can determine fields that should be emphasized in future communication in order to act the city's identity and image together.

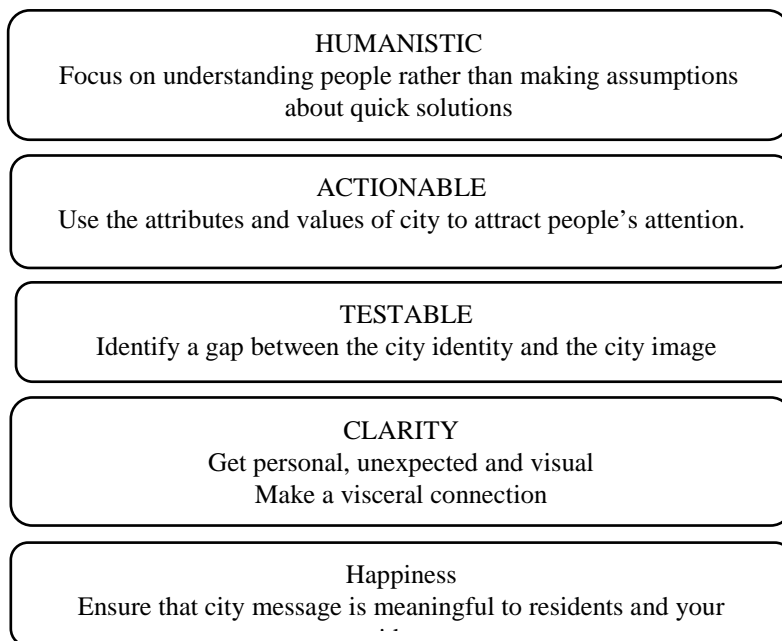


**Figure 4. Closing the Gap**

## Formulating the Core Story

### *Message*

The message should not be confused with a slogan. A slogan is a short and attractive statement that contains the message generally launched in city advertising. For instance, “The City That Never Sleeps” is New York’s slogan, however its message is that the city have the potential to realize people’s dream regardless of sex, age or creed. A single focused message should provide direction, motivation and operational guidance. In this regard, the message comprises five design principles (Figure 5) (Aaker and Smith, 2011).



**Figure 5. Components of a Good Message**

## *Conflict*

When city planners have verified on a possible preceding message for city's core story, the next stage is to appraise the level of conflict within this message. Because conflict produces the dynamics of a good story. Through conflict, the city can make its stand while expressing its core values at the same time (Fog, et. al. 2011). Branding literature suggests that a conflict is not essentially a negative, rather the catalyst for generating a special brand since it is simple to express what companies do not reflect, instead of attempting to express what they do (Kavaratzis, 2004). Without conflict, therefore, it is considerably hard to establish and sustain a powerful core story. To reinforce its brand, for instance, "Zaragoza city concluded to employ a sole slogan for all its target groups: "a challenge, a city". This aggressive slogan emphasizes that "if you have a challenge, Zaragoza is the city for you, and that the city is united by the way it welcomes a challenge". The essence behind this slogan is that it improves the image and values of the Zaragoza city brand. This original tagline satisfies two requirements: it brings residents together in a broad aim and it allures enterprises and investment to Zaragoza" (Daclin, 2010).

## *Cognitive and Affective Components*

Looking across various definitions and perspectives, a common theme emerged from the tourism marketing literature, which is that the relative position of a destination determine through a comparison of cognitive attributes and affective impressions (Baloglu & MaCleary, 1999). Specifically mega-events, which has features of indelibility, permanent interest, memorable experience, and professionalism of organization, may have an influential effect in both converting and branding a city (e.g Milan fashion week, Cannes Film Festival, Johannesburg safari tour...). Utilizing the chance to host such events is viewed as a great chance to announce focused messages about the city and its attractions to numerous people in the city's target audience (Zhang and Zhao, 2009). "When Oslo hosted the 2010 Eurovision Song Contest, NRK (the host broadcaster) combined the local tourist office VisitOSLO into the organization. Thus, by generating the best working environment for artists, the press and Eurovision members, the event produced a tremendous amount of positive and wide media coverage all over the world, promoting Oslo's image as a city of paradoxes in culture and nature" (Daclin, 2010).

## *The Plot*

Because a city's core story is a strategic platform for communication, it should be launched in a way that is widely acceptable, easily marketable, presentable and open to experience in a daily manner (Fog, et. al. 2005; Zhang and Zhao, 2009). In other words, city branding has to be related to how culture and history, economic development and socio-cultural advance, infrastructure and architecture, atmosphere, landscape and natural environment, can be synthesized into a vendible identity that is admissible to all people (Zhang and Zhao, 2009). For instance, Verona conveys a really special charm especially to lovers so that they can feel and imagine the real story behind the literary work, almost as if Romeo and Juliet had really existed. The city of Florence is also known as the cradle of the Renaissance for its monuments, churches, and buildings.

## **ACID Test**

The Acid Test investigates whether the city's core story is original regarding other cities. The branding can be viewed as a success if it is able to present core city values that are deemed coherent, distinguishing, attractive, enduring, and expressible (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). Because a lot of cities have similar features to deliver, a strategy of city branding is to produce original values, so differentiating one city from another. By catching the atmosphere of the city and its features, branding permits a city to indicate its unique strengths, to share an explicit message, and to charm enterprisers, organizations, visitors and pop-culture activities at both a national and international level. For example, "Karlstad has generated a brand and logo from its classic image (quality of life) in Sweden: The lodestars of this message are a charming, progressive city; a focus on people to assure a city for everybody and a green and sustainable city. Since 1989, its logo has been a smiling sun, underlining its sunny position and disposition. In this way, Karlstad's branding strategy distinguishes it from other cities" (Daclin, 2010).

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study contributes to a theoretical understanding of the success factors about using storytelling to brand a city and how city marketer and planner ascertain and generate the city's core story. By

highlighting the role of the core story in branding efforts of a city, this research ensures a framework for marketing researchers and practitioners to envisage and comprehend how cities can consider storytelling as a strategic branding concept and marketer can establish a powerful, sustained brand through holistic (both as a branding and communication tool) storytelling, thus enhancing the movement of the storytelling-based approach in the city branding literature.

This study demonstrated the theoretical relationship of storytelling marketing with branding concept. Especially based on Fog et. al.'s (2005) Laboratory model which explains the process of generating the company's branding story we showed four crucial principles of storytelling (scanning basic information, distilling basic information, formulating core story and The ACID test) in the city branding process. This proposed model enhances previous studies (Hsiao, et. al. 2013, Merrilees et. al. 2013) in the literature by specifically exploring the influence of storytelling on city branding. In this respect, for a successful city branding, this model suggests that core story must 1) reflect both city identity and city image, 2) recognize and reconcile the contrasts and harmonies between the city's identity and its community image, 3) include four elements (message, conflict, cognitive and affective components and plot) that compose the core value of storytelling, and 4) confirm whether the city's core story is original.

The proposed model also contribute to the research of city marketing by providing in-depth understanding of the important elements for generating the core story of a city. In addition, the importance of storytelling as a branding and communication tool was verified. Storytelling was found to build emotional link between a city or corporate and their target groups and can be viewed as a building block of branding process in the research of marketing or branding. The results are consistent with previous findings (e.g. Aaker and Smith, 2011) which indicate that storytelling is a quick, effective, and powerful way to direct people's interest.

## **CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study explores the key components of a city's core story and investigates how these components influence the city's branding process. The proposed model raises understanding of the influence of a city's core story on their target groups (residents, foreign visitors, investors). Our study suggest that scanning basic internal and external information, distilling basic information, formulating core story and The ACID test are the key principles of a core story and these elements influence the heart and mind of the city's target group to build a clear and original city brand. From a practical viewpoint, insights provided by the study can help city marketer and planner and tourism organizations and institutions manage their projects to attract more visitor and investor.

Moreover, the concept of storytelling triggers the opportunity for future research. First, since storytelling literature misses the empirical examination of the relationship between the core story's components and city branding in particular, the proposed model warrants an empirical and experimental investigation. Second, this research only showed the role of storytelling in tourism marketing context. The role of a core story can be explored in the future in different context.



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