



Report partnermeeting WP2 Regional Branding - Sluis (NL)

Wednesday 9th February - Thursday 10th February 2011

Participants

Wim Beernaert	Nelson
Vanessa Caudenbergh	Nelson
Bianca Hamers	Nelson
Ann Van Laere	Streekplatform+ Meetjesland
Geert Van de Woestyne	Streekplatform+ Meetjesland
Mark Arnaut	Streekplatform+ Meetjesland
Peter Verheecke	Province of West-Flanders
Ann Tavernier	Province of West-Flanders
Els Oyaert	Leiedal
Jeannette Groeneveld	Municipality of Sluis
Tiny Maenhout	Municipality of Sluis
Heidi Skifjell	Municipality of Finnoy
Åge Vårdal	Member of municipality board in Finnoy
Regine von der Haar	City of Langenhagen
Emma Finn	County Norfolk
Sigrid Tersteeg	NOFA
Eise Van Der Sluis	NOFA (Achtkaarspelen)
Gerard Van Keken	Remarkable Identity
Carola Simon	University Sout-East Denmark (member of scientific team)

Wednesday 9th February 2011

Presentation of partners.

Wim Beernaert introduces the manual & gives an overview of the activities executed by the partners. Some partners already achieved all WP2-targets, others still have to work on certain topics. *(see attachments: overview of activities & presentation 'Status activities partners & manual')*

Gerard Van Keken explains that 'Place marketing' may not be confused with 'Place branding'. Branding is not just marketing, but a holistic development that influences the whole place (see *attachment: overview of definitions*).

Presentation 'Social Media' (Bianca Hamers – Nelson Inspires)

Tips for place branders:

- Create your network. To direct people to your platform(s), besides current content about your region
 - integrate incentives e.g. games, group deals, coupons
 - Anticipate on e.g. Valentine's day <http://bit.ly/valentinesdaytourismflanders>
- Let your audience taste what your region is about, let them explore unique experiences on your regional offerings ("What can we offer our target groups?").
- Connect your online activities; foresee links between your website, Facebookpage, Twitteraccount, YouTubechannel,... Good new example from our Frysian partners = <http://www.dwaande.nl>.
- Stay active on these channels by posting messages, being part of conversations, sharing content also from other parties. Integrate related initiatives published by people outside your organization. Good example = <http://www.mechelenblogt.be>.
- Don't get caught up in negative feedback. Listen & learn. Provide feedback/response when necessary. Don't refuse or delete reactions.
- Segment your target groups on common needs, interests, motivations. Try to determine the benefits they reap from their social media usage.
- Make social media scalable, repeatable, measurable to collect insights & act upon if needed. Are there topics you don't cover today?
- Integrate existing assets that can be repurposed to provide your consumers needs.
- Be careful: don't overload your fans/followers with info, or sound like a press release, you're in a social space!
- Don't forget to use employees and colleagues to promote your region and activate them to make part of the social media developed for the branding of your region.
- Develop a social media strategy in line with the corporate strategy of your organization.

Experiences of partners

- Manpower is necessary to develop social media. West-Flanders has an employee who works for 20% on the social media promoting the Province of West-Flanders.
- Linking the platforms of your region is very important. West-Flanders e.g. has a link on their website to the platform made by the inhabitants. This is important because the platforms developed by the inhabitants are more successful than those developed by the province itself.
- NOFA reports about the huge success of Twitter they used to launch their campaign 'Dwaande'. They also use successfully Twitter for job applications.
- How to deal with negative comments? (cf. tips of Bianca). Honesty is important and trying to form a dialogue with the respondents.

- Most regions agree that a mediamix of different channels (print and digital) is the most effective way to realize effective communication. Social media can even boom if classical media pick the news up.
- Social media is cheap. With low costs (personnel) you can achieve huge effects.
- Jeannette Groeneveld has a good tip for the next partnermeeting/policy forum: 'Youngsters have to tell us how they are using social media'.
- With social media regions can easily build networks between public & private partners.

Thursday 10th February 2011

Presentation of prof. Robert Govers (supplementations & debates).

Prezi-presentation was sent to all WP2-partners by mail.

- Should branding be about distribution of regional products?
Food can be an important factor in the search for identity, but only food will not improve the image of your region. However, a focus on food can be part of a 'regional branding plan'.
- Should the brand be a quality label?
According to prof. Robert Govers everybody in the region needs to feel part of the brand and using high level criteria does not stimulate cooperation in your region. Avoiding conflict is very important in the process of Regional Branding. You have to get as many people involved as possible.
Wim Beernaert nuances this remark. In the region of West-Flanders they use well defined criteria to select the companies involved in the branding process in order to protect the brand values inhere in the brand.
In academic literature and among practitioners there are many differences of opinion about developing criteria for the use of the regional brand among stakeholders (companies, associations, ...) Many depends on the targets you want to achieve with your brand.
- Why not to confuse place branding and marketing?
Marketing is demand driven. You look at the market and make something therefore.
Place branding shouldn't, because of:
 - the essential role of image
 - internal branding (very important, inhabitants have to be proud on their region)
 - cooperation in the region
 Branding is about: who are we really? How do we want the world perceives us? Managing reputation as a whole. This is f.e. the reason why cheaper houses don't work. It's only about functional arguments. Questions like 'What is our sense of place?' and 'Why are we unique?' are much more important. Branding is about the 'Unique Proposition', not about the 'USP' (unique selling proposition).

- What's the value of a brand and a slogan/baseline?

Prof. Govers doesn't believe much in brands and slogans. It will be the cooperation, policy and organised activities in your region that will develop the branding of your region and improve the positive image.

- How to choose your values and attributes?

The actions & promises of your region have to be true. For example the government of Flanders decided to work about 'Flanders Fits' (Flanders is dynamic). This value doesn't say a lot, it's quite meaningless. Tourism Flanders worked about the values 'charming, indulgent, ...' which were translated in attributes like 'rich past', 'chocolate', ... Those attributes are true and improve your social system because you deliver what you promise.

Question of Els Oyaert (Leiedal): The city of Kortrijk works around 'Design'. Can a group of people decide to work on this theme?

According to prof. Robert Govers you have to ask: is this true, is there a history about this theme? Who are we? What is our identity? If the chosen attributes don't fit with reality, your branding won't work.

- 3-gap model: how to build strong place brands that bridge gaps?

- Branding starts with **self analysis**: with understanding and defining the product personality (research on history, culture, ...). Important question here is: what is your region about? You have to understand your identity. It cannot be fabricated to please a market because it will soon be found out as false when it fails to deliver. Important too is to know the perceived image of your region. How do people talk about you? (offline & online).
- **Brand essence** includes the brand identity, which incorporates the brand roots, values, vision, scope, name, visual identity, behaviour and the narratives of place. Consulting and involving stakeholders is hereby very essential. It is important that everyone is heard, and that all stakeholders, interest groups and layers of society are involved. Co-operative brands are stronger brands.
Realize you have to make choices in values: who are we and what are we not?
Don't forget that associations 'stick' in the mind of people. Prof. Govers recommends to use them, eventually add something to it, or reverse them.
The link to the actual offering is also essential in place branding (festivals, events, museum exhibitions, creating a virtual community,) Place branding cannot be based on communication alone, it requires actual product development.
Important in this process is to create the right expectations. Do not overpromise.
- **Brand implementation**. Place brands need to be constructed with physical elements, behaviour and communication, as actions speak louder than words. Communication will become increasingly important. Getting one's message across to the right consumer at the right time will be essential.

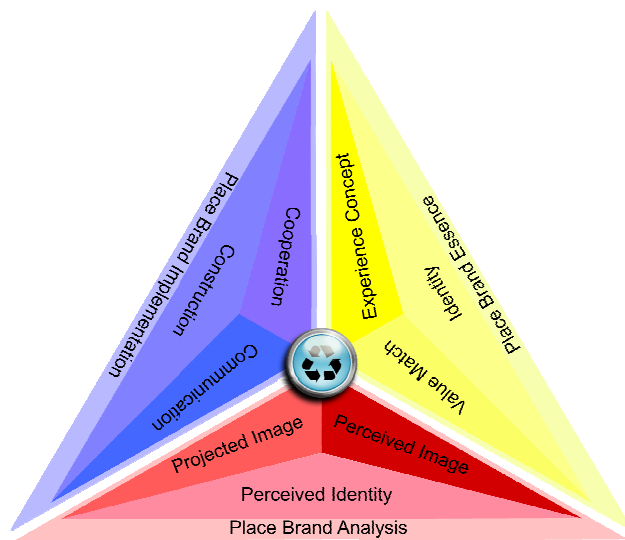


Figure 1: 3² Gap-bridging Place Branding Guide, from: Govers, R. & Go, F.M. (2009) *Place Branding*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Role of scientific team (Carola Simon) in the project 'Vital Rural Area'

Carola explains her role in the project. She will follow the activities of WP2, organize interviews with the WP2-partners and work together with the scientific team on the 'Rural Power Pack', the final draft document of Vital Rural Area.

Subjects for the next partnermeeting in Friesland (Wednesday 25th may 2011)

- Cooperation in the region
- How to set up partnerships?
- Benchmarking
- How to involve youth in your branding?
- How to deal with the gap young-old and traditional-new?
- Organisation and communication in projects
- Keys to success
- Looking for finances

Newsletter for WP2

Regine Von der Haar (Langenhagen) proposed to make a newsletter especially designed for WP2. The group agrees with her idea. Ann Van Laere will organize the follow up of this question.

'Branding is a process of soul searching'

Prof. Robert Govers & Prof. Frank Go