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Defining Place Image

Candi Clouse
*Cleveland State University*, c.clouse@csuohio.edu

Ashutosh Dixit
*Cleveland State University*, a.dixit1@csuohio.edu

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Strategic Place Branding Methodologies and Theory for Tourist Attraction

Ahmet Bayraktar  
Bozok University, Turkey

Can Uslay  
Rutgers University, USA

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Chapter 1
Defining Place Image

Candi Clouse
Cleveland State University, USA

Ashutosh Dixit
Cleveland State University, USA

ABSTRACT

The image of a place is important as it has implications for investments made in cities, workforce locations, and tourism. Place image incorporates concepts including brand, visual image, reputation, the sense of place, and the identity of the place - all of which create an overall image of a place and can lead to investment or abandonment. Place image has ramifications for decisions made about the place, including where businesses locate, where workers live, and where tourists visit (Smith, 2006). Place image has serious ramifications for decisions made about the place as people choose to stay, work, visit, and invest. This research outlines the inconsistencies in the literature, clarifies the terminology, and begins to set research standards for how place image is described through a conceptual model.

INTRODUCTION

The image of a place is important as it has implications for investments made in cities, workforce locations, and tourism which can include upwards of 600 significant new expansions or relocations in a state in a given year with each creating jobs and value to the economy (Conway, 2015). Place image incorporates concepts including brand, visual image, reputation, the sense of place, and the identity of the people - all of which create an overall image of a place and can lead to either investment or abandonment. Place image has ramifications for decisions made about the place, including where businesses locate, where workers live, and where tourists visit (Smith, 2006; Zenker, Eggers, & Farsky, 2013). Place image has serious ramifications for decisions made about the place as people choose to stay, work, visit, and invest. This research outlines the inconsistencies in the literature, clarifies the terminology, and begins to set research standards for how place image is described through a conceptual model.

Promoting places requires the “sale” of the image of particular place “so as to make it attractive to economic enterprises, to tourists, and even to inhabitants of that place” (Philo & Kearns, 1993). The goal of promoting cities is to encourage interest and investment to a specific place. Promoting places is...
one way to boost regional growth through self-promotion and to “manufacture an environment that will secure the acceptance and even the affection of peoples who might otherwise rebel against it” (Philo & Kearns, 1993). Selling places makes one location stand out from the competition (Trejo, 2008; Avraham & Ketter, 2008). The marketing of places is crucial because practitioners argue that 71% of location decisions are based on image and these decisions are made based on emotions and rationalized with data (personal communication).

Place brands are now disseminated through a variety of tools including advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, public relations and personal selling (Kotler, et al, 1993). Close attention should be paid to how valuable marketing dollars are spent and where the best impact for the money will be seen. Experts have said that an audience is perhaps five times more likely to be influenced by editorial copy than by advertising (Kotler, et al, 1993). As Andy Levine, President of Development Counsellors International noted, “If Money magazine says you’re a great place to live that means more than if you say it. If a corporation says you’re a great place to do business, that’s more credible than your ad” (as quoted in Baker, 2007). Oftentimes, the media has a great influence on prospective place buyers by highlighting current events, sports highlights and publicized rankings ranging from most walkable to most miserable places.

There has been a major global shift toward increasing activity at the urban level to attract attention, capital, residents, and tourists, and one of those activities is place branding (Jensen, 2007). Anholt (2010) argues that given the effects of globalization, every country and every region must compete with every other for its share of the commercial, political, social, and cultural transactions. The brand is the shortcut for the “informed buying decision” about a region (Anholt, 2010). The brand, however, may not be known in-depth by the people who are potential residents or tourists. For example, a person may make a decision to visit Orlando because of Disney World, not knowing anything else about the region or its image.

CONCEPTS OF PLACE IMAGE

“The Image of the City” written by Kevin Lynch (1960), is a well-cited resource on city image. He calls for future research on how images develop and how this process can be influenced. The concepts and terminology surrounding place image are inconsistent in both the academic literature and among practitioners to this day. What one source calls image, another calls identity, and a third will term brand (Stock, 2009). This confusion is one of the major challenges for those researching this topic. The literature offers few empirical studies of this topic and instead relies mostly on case studies and anecdotal practitioner information (Dinnie, 2004; Uhlir, 2005; Herstein & Jaffee, 2008; Fan, 2010; & personal communications). Due to the inconsistencies in the literature, there is a great need to clarify the terminology and begin to set research standards for how place image is examined.

This lack of cohesiveness on definitions for all concepts of image includes concepts such as brand, image, reputation, stereotypes, sense of place, quality of place, identity, and quality of life. Gertner (2011) brings out this subject in a meta-analysis of the place marketing and place branding literature between 1990 and 2009. He found that most articles were not concerning business, management, marketing, or branding, but instead in the fields of public diplomacy, urban planning, geography, and political science, perhaps due to the lack of collaboration between disciplines. He also notes that most articles were essays or editorials with “doubtful scientific value” and 200 of 212 were subjective and anecdotal. He reported that several articles talked about brand and image as interchangeable concepts; he stated that out of the
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212-article sample, 144 were based on personal opinions and secondary sources and 187 did not refer to any theoretical framework. In fact, only 16 articles reported statistics leading to his argument that little progress had been made in building theoretical knowledge in the field (Gertner, 2011). This thorough analysis demonstrates the need for research that explains the terminology surrounding place image. Based upon a review of the literature and interviews with place marketing and attraction practitioners, a framework of five concepts of place image is presented: brand, visual image, reputation, sense of place, and identity. These concepts together herein will be referred to as place image. It is important to examine all five of these concepts as they all interact in the system of how a place is seen by various actors working on place promotion as well as those that may live in, visit, or invest in a place. After each component of place image is presented, a model outlining the concepts of place image will be offered.

The body of this chapter will further delve into the literature on place image and it will outline the definitions of the five aspects of place image. This includes the brand: the intended message of the place, the visual image: the symbolic knowledge of a place, the reputation: specific knowledge about a place, the sense of place: subjective experience in a place, and identity: the extents to which people are willing to associate themselves with a place. These five aspects are proposed here as a framework for understanding the complexity of place image.

BRAND

Promoting a city is usually means adopting a new tagline and a logo, for example The Best location in the Nation or Cleveland’s a Plum or even Believe in Cleveland. Taglines offer no information about a place and have a very short shelf-life. A real brand is more than these taglines.

Branding is the intended message of the place. Branding is often presented as half science, and half art (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). It is a complex bundle of images, meanings, associations, and experiences in the minds of people (Fan, 2010). A brand is the personality of a product and that personality is how people associate with it (Aaker, 1997). The brand enables the place to differentiate itself from the competition, plan its future economic, human, social and cultural developments, retain and create new human capital, develop and capitalize on its cultural heritage, sports teams and attributes, attract major investment, and define or redefine what it does well and upon which it is capable of building (Allan, 2004). The brand is a complex bundle of what the place offers.

Branding is story-telling about a place which compels people to see it in a certain way by articulating it as such (Jensen, 2007). Branding can be defined as a combination of imaginative marketing, supported by investment in key services and facilities which is required to deliver the experience (Hankinson, 2004). It is argued that branding is truly not a sales pitch or slogan; it is about creating a place (Hankinson, 2004; On Three Communication Design Inc., 2008). Branding can be demonstrated through various means including both functional, symbolic, legal, strategic, differentiating, and ownership devices (Medway & Warnaby, 2008). Branding generates a set of expectations and images and positioning those shows off what a community has to offer (Runyan & Huddleston, 2006). Also, branding should bridge the gap between what a place is, how people perceive it, and how it wishes to be seen (Alonso & Bea, 2013). The brand must be factual and offer insight on the realities of the place.

A brand is the promise of the value that the place offers (Van Gelder, 2008). Branding, according to Allan (2006), is about creating value for all that have a stake in the brand, its reputation, products and services, as well as for the customers who purchase those items. A brand is also an organizing tool and
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can be seen as the way in which products and services are created and brought to market (Allan, 2006). The brand can be reinforced by positive associations with companies located within a place’s boundary as is the case with Cleveland being on the healthcare radar due in large part to the presence of the world-renowned Cleveland Clinic. The brand of a place organizes the stakeholders around a common value.

Branding requires resident recognition and adoption. Branding a place is different from branding a product because you cannot control or change the product easily when dealing with an entire city (Hankinson, 2004). It is important to see how the public sees a place in order to improve it (Nasar, 1990). As Jensen (2005) points out, “You don’t have to ask the beans in the can how they feel about the label.” Taking stock of the people is of the utmost importance as residents are necessary for the success of the campaign.

Branding is the aspect of place image in which the heaviest investment is often made. The brand of a place is often what is found leading the brochures, advertisement, and communications to the world about a place. To conclude, a brand is the intended message of the place.

VISUAL IMAGE

Visual image represents what people know and visualize about a place. For example, when Toledo, Ohio began working through a branding campaign, they found that it was not that they had a bad image to outsiders, it was that they did not have one at all (Baker, 2007). People may picture the Empire State Building, the Sydney Opera House, or the Eiffel Tower. People distinguish that Orlando is a family tourist destination and that Las Vegas is a city of vice. As Downs and Stea (1973) note, “We rely on these images for understanding and explaining the event because ‘you would expect that sort of thing to happen there.’” Images of the social system, attitudes of the people, culture, and food are envisioned about places (Downs & Stea, 1973). The visual image is what people see when they think of a place and represent a simplification of all of the information one has of each place. They are the product of each person trying to essentialize huge amounts of information about a place (Kotler et al., 1993). Lynch (1960) argues that image is a “purposive simplification…made by reducing, eliminating, or even adding elements to reality.” He further argues that people are always trying to organize their surroundings to understand them and that people create their own meanings and connections (Lynch, 1960). These connections become their visual image of a place.

A prevalent definition of place image is that it represents the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people have of a place (Kotler et al., 1993). Image also includes evaluations of these items (Burgess, 1982 as cited in Ashworth & Voogd, 1990). Images are the “mental conceptions” that pull together everything that an individual knows, evaluates, and prefers about places (Walmsley, 1988 as cited in Ashworth & Voogd, 1990). Thus, images are preferences which have been filtered through each individual’s own personality construct (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990). Visual images are individually held.

Image is formed through different mechanisms. Luque-Martinez et al. (2007) modeled how city image is formed in Granada, Spain through a detailed survey of residents. The authors identified twelve dimensions of city image, which lead to a level of satisfaction living in the city (Luque-Martinez et al., 2007). Authors argue that all of the factor dimensions (physical, social, cultural, and economic) which they included have an impact on how the residents see the city. The nine factors in their model suggested that image had a high positive influence on how satisfied people felt living the city (Luque-Martinez et al., 2007). Image can affect how people feel about places.
Some authors argue that positive image is crucial to places. Visual image has become an active part of the economic success or failure of a region (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990). A place with a positive visual image has an easier time exporting goods and attracting talent (Anholt, 2010b). Ergo, visual image is important in the way a place is represented. A visual image of a place involves more than a tagline or brand; it is the personal embodiment of how an individual symbolically thinks about a place. To summarize this section, a visual image is the symbolic knowledge of a place.

REPUTATION

A reputation is how a city is colloquially known. Reputation represents feedback from the outsiders about claims made from those endogenous to the city (Fan, 2010). Reputation is based on certain firm clichés and prejudices (Anholt, 2007). It represents a widely held belief that is simplistic and carries a certain attitude about a place that is either positive or negative (Kotler et al., 1993). Reputations include that Paris is romantic and Baghdad is dangerous. Public opinion is usually in agreement on the reputation of places (Nasar, 1990). Reputations exist outside of the physical place and can be held by people that have never even visited it (Anholt, 2010a). The reputation is specific knowledge about a place that is a pre-conceived notion about the place.

Often the reputation of a city is a reflection of a real-life problem or condition (Avraham, 2004); the reputation can be both positive and negative, however, cities must work to solve the real problems to curb some of the negative attention placed on them (Avraham, 2004). The real-life situation is more important than any media strategy invoked to counter a negative reputation (Avraham, 2004). Barber (2008) states that the relationship between a place and its reputation is a “chicken-and-egg scenario.” A place could have reflected their reputation first or it could be that a place grew to accept and become a likeness of said reputation.

Place representation is built through various mechanisms. The media plays a role in the creation and dissemination of reputation (Pocock & Hudson, 1978). Part of this is the popularity of negative stories (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). According to Allan (2006) the role of the media is even more important now as they assist in making the place recognizable. With their reach in print, television, and the internet, the representation that the media creates and distributes play a role in defining places by shaping opinions of them (Allan, 2006). The media can, because of the proliferation of negative stories, reinforce adverse stereotypes of places (Baker, 2007). In addition, the media can send outdated messages further impacting a city (Baker, 2007). Avraham and Ketter, (2008) note that the media is the very mechanism through which the way we see places is constructed. They argue the idea that if crime is the main topic of news stories that are told about a place, any positive stories will be lost (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Anholt and Hildreth (2004) argued that good stories just do not have the same power as bad ones and they further argue that the public is not likely to “trade down” from a juicy story to a boring one. The media works not just as an adversary, but it can also act as an ally as many cities promote themselves through this medium. Reputations are convenient and fit within what Anholt and Hildreth (2004) called the “spirit of the times.” This zeitgeist is largely influenced by the media.

As with visual image, reputation is defined by public perceptions (Barber, 2008). Reputation is distributed through a wide network for the public to accept or reject (Barber, 2008). However, by the very nature of the media distribution network, the portrayed reputations of places are the work an elite group that possesses the power to command these forums (Barber, 2008). Often the reputation of a city is ce-
mented into place, even if positive change occurs in the area. Places or regions with poor reputations like the rust belt may have a harder time attracting people and investment due to the way the region is seen. Many cities believe that a poor reputation is an obstacle for economic growth (Avraham, 2004). Residents often lack pride in their city when it has a bad reputation. This can lead to a lack of investment in the city and even to its abandonment (Avraham, 2004). Thomas Waltermire, {now former} Chief Executive Officer of TeamNEO, the business attraction organization for Greater Cleveland, states “It’s not often easy to be a realistic optimist in Northeast Ohio because the culture is so much more attune to badmouthing, that if you aren’t doing that, you are an outcast” (personal communication). When a city is suffering from major economic issues, it is often hard to change how the residents see the city which can lead to decline. To conclude, a reputation is defined as specific knowledge about a place.

**SENSE OF PLACE**

Unlike branding, visual image, and reputation, the sense of place must be experienced on the ground. Every neighborhood or city has a distinct sense of place stemming from its physical infrastructure and sociological make-up (Billig, 2005). Sense of place is the experience of being involved in the human aspect of place (Birch, 2001). Jorgensen and Stedman (2006) argue that it is a multidimensional construct made up of beliefs, emotions, and behavioral commitments about a specific geography. The sense of place is an attachment held by people to specific places which is deeply personal. It represents the idea of “topophilia” – from the Latin word meaning “to love” (Barber, 2008; Holcomb, 1993). This may be an experience held by a vacationer, a person doing business, or residents. People remember the unique atmosphere of places as it relates to them and their interests (Billig, 2005). Shamai (1991) states that places are not just objects, but instead the experiences in places. A sense of place is the feelings, attitudes, and the behavior toward a place: an essence that exists in the beholder’s senses and mind (Shamai, 1991). The character of a place is defined by the people in it imposing upon it their views, attitudes, beliefs, symbols, and myths (Shamai, 1991). The former marketing director of Positively Cleveland notes, 

*We need to address an attitude…thinking about Cleveland as a tourist destination. I’m imagining that if you talk to most people walking down the street and asked if they think Cleveland is a tourist destination, the answer would be no. We need to change that thinking. We need to be welcoming. We need to stop asking visitors why they are here and really roll out the red carpet because if you have a great experience, you’re going to post it on Facebook, you’re going to tweet about it, all of your friends are going to hear about it and they are going to want to come visit. We need to make sure that people are running into very happy, very positive ambassadors for this region. (personal communication).*

Sense of place is a feeling within a place that can be held by anyone there.

The sense of place is often inspired by the natural environment or skyline (Barber, 2008). The sense of place is made up of the scenic nature of a place which is often used to make inferences about the local people (Nasar, 1990). The sense of place includes the density of the area, variety of offerings, urban qualities, and positive “street culture” (Jensen, 2007). It is how one feels when inside a place and what one remembers about it. Here again, Lynch (1960) notes that the “vividness and coherence” of a place was crucial for enjoyment and use. He further notes “By appearing as a remarkable and well-knit place, the city could provide a ground for the clustering and organization of these meanings and associations.
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Such a sense of place in itself enhances every human activity that occurs there, and encourages the deposit of a memory trace.” Hay (1998) argues that a sense of place can “provide feelings of security, belonging and stability, similar to the feelings that arise from a fully developed pair bond.” Sense of place is the memory and the associations made about a place.

Chamlee-Wright and Storr (2009) found in their research on the former residents of New Orleans’s ninth ward after Hurricane Katrina that residents that returned to The Big Easy desired the unique characteristics that cannot be found elsewhere. The sense of place was found to be a strong determinant for those that returned quickly (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009). The sense of place for these displaced people was raised up to a level of consciousness with which most people are not in touch. This sense of happiness, well-being, and even their sense of self was tied to the city. The sense of place for those that returned was so high that they even expected other people to hold it as well (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009). The sense of place itself was brought back to New Orleans.

German sociologist Gerhard Schulze argued that we are living in “erlebnisgeschellschaft” or “experience society” (Jensen, 2005, 2007). The primary concern has shifted away from mere sustenance toward seeking ever more stimulating experiences (Jensen, 2007). The way a place is represented has profound implications on the level of erlebnisgeschellschaft offered. Orleans (1973) argues that any knowledge of a place comes from how it is experienced. Evans (2003) argues that city location alone is not enough to generate interest but the package of entertainment can capture those looking for an urban consumption experience. Boddy (1992) states that people may even prefer stimulation to reality. Take the case of Disneyland as presented by Sorkin (1992): often a popular vacation spot – it is by its very nature created space. Sorkin (1992) argues, “Disneyland is just like the world, only better.” Travelers to Disney are putting a preference on stimulation over reality – urbanism without the city. The promotion of places should focus not as much on the place, but on what can be done and experienced in the place.

The sense of place, or way a place is experienced, has an impact on decisions that are made whether or not to stay or invest. The sense of place concept requires that one experience the place first-hand. If this experience is positive, it may encourage further exploration or investment. The importance of this is shown by regional marketing and attraction agencies that invite site selection experts to visit their cities to see what it is really like. Dave Shute, the Senior Strategic Adviser at the Global Center for Health Innovation in Cleveland, noted that getting people to the city and the site was key in his ability to attract businesses and because of the low expectations held by some visitors, they are overwhelmed by the city (personal communication). To summarize, the sense of place is the subjective experience in a place.

IDENTITY

The concept of places and people in them having a unique identity is not new. Back to agrarian societies, people have felt connected to the land and identified themselves by where they are from. This is easily demonstrated through the many surnames that were used which identified location, such as the “Tweedie” clan of Scotland and their roots on the River Tweed. Clans, tribes, and city-dwellers throughout history have identified themselves by location. Finding out where people are from is often one of the first questions asked when meeting a new person. Based on his analysis of mining towns in Mexico, Harner (2001) argues that identity is “a cultural value shared by the community, a collective understanding about social identity intertwined with place meaning. Place is a process, and it is human experience and struggle that give meaning to place” (Harner, 2001). The identity is an attitude held by the residents.
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The identity of a place is the personal connection that residents have to it. It is how one is a “Clevelander” or a “New Yorker”; a self-image (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). The identity exists within the people within a place (Anholt, 2010a). Proshansky (1978) defines a “place-identity” in terms of the self as all pieces of the person as they relate to their environment. People organize their place identity as it suits them. It should also be noted that places do not have single identities but like all characterizations of place representation instead have different meanings to different people (Goodwin, 1993). Those that live in an affluent section of town will identify with a city very differently than those that reside in low-income housing. Former employees identify with an abandoned factory town in a very different way than a politician or a developer (Goodwin, 1993). Identity is tied to how one interacts with their environment.

People want to be proud of their city and where they come from. Lalli (1992) contends that self-esteem has been positively correlated with living in a prestigious place. This is found through the attributes of a place and through positive feedback given to people in a place (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Positive place identity, simply pride in where they live and work, is notably not a characteristic held by people in the industrial Midwest given deindustrialization and the weak economy. Anholt (2010a) argues that “loyalty builds success, and success builds loyalty, and no place on earth – city, town, country, village or region – can hope to make others respect and admire it unless it first respects and admires itself.” The identity, formed through unique culture, history, land, traditions, genius, and imagination, are a strong force in creating identity (Anholt, 2010a). Anholt (2010b) argues that “… people want their nation to count. They want to feel proud of where they come from” (Anholt, 2010b). Identifying with a place is essential to residents and the stronger the identification is, the more likely they will remain.

Changing the way people feel about their home is not easy but it can be enriched through improvements. Lowe (1993) argues that any physical improvement, although important to the place image, may be even more important to the confidence of the residents which arguably will lead to further regional regeneration in the long run. Improving a place not only has implications for how it is seen outside, but it also has a large impact on how people within the place interact and identify with it. If people have a strong identity due to being from a certain place, they are likely more apt to stay in that place. As the company Monolith was looking for a new location, they wanted to be in a place “where people share their values, who are very hardworking, and who they can trust” (Bartles, 2015). To conclude, identity is the extent to which people are willing to associate themselves with a place.

MODEL OF PLACE IMAGE

Many case studies regarding how the way places are represented can be found in extant academic and practitioner literature (Barber, 2008; Birch 2001; Boyer, 1992; Herstein, & Jaffe, 2008; Laurier, 1993; Ong & Horbunluekit, 1997). Figure 1 proposes how the five concepts of place image may fit together, using the definitions outlined previously.

The model ties the five concepts of place image together. There are two groups: the attraction focus (brand, visual image, reputation) and the retention focus (sense of place, identity). The brand, visual image, and reputation of the place are all place characteristics utilized by marketing professionals to attract businesses to a specific place. These characteristics can develop away from the place and live outside of it. These three concepts are propagated by organizations and governments as well as by the media and individuals, both inside and outside the place. These concepts are conveyed through pictures and text and do not require people to physically experience a place; they are the broad characteristics of
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Figure 1. Conceptual model of place image

a place. However, the concepts of sense of place and identity are concrete place characteristics that can be used by marketing and site selection professionals to primarily retain businesses. To experience sense of place, one needs to be present in the place, one needs to identify with the place, and one must live there. These concepts play a role in the retention of businesses – instead of the solely attraction focus above. An interesting sense of place and a positive place identity will retain residents and businesses in addition to aiding in attraction efforts.

Additionally, the model shows a hierarchy from brand to identity, showing an increasing experiential relationship to the physical space (leftmost arrow). The brand can live completely outside the space and be completely unrelated to it. For example, the brand for the city of Pittsburgh is “Mighty. Beautiful” and shows a logo of a bridge over water (Visit Pittsburgh, 2014). The visual image that a person has of a place can also live outside the place but requires some knowledge of the place, like visualizing Niagara Falls outside of Buffalo. The reputation of a place requires more specific knowledge, like the burning Cuyahoga River for which Cleveland is often remembered. All three can persist in the absence of any direct experience with a place. However, the sense of place can be experienced by any visitor as in Detroit’s North End neighborhood filled with art and agriculture creating an interesting sense of place (Huffington Post, 2013). Identity is the concept that is most closely tied with an individual. One must be a current or a former resident of a place to identify with it, as those from the Canton, Ohio region
identify strongly with their football-centric home town. The concepts of sense of place and identity require experience with the place.

The five concepts of place image presented here are intended to guide the further research into how place image factors into the location decision process and economic health of places. As Hill, et al, (1995) argued, “If the region has a poor image, risk perceptions will increase, business start-ups with locational choices will take place elsewhere, and plants and other operations will have strong incentives to do their expanding in other places.” This model will help guide further research surrounding place image as it clarifies the common terms and presents a framework for future research. Figures 2-6 show how each of the aspects of place image currently fits in the context of Cleveland.

The Five Aspects of Place Image: Cleveland

Brand: The Intended Message of the Place

“Grit meets sophistication in a town where you can browse modern art inside a turn-of-the-century transformer station, hear the orchestra perform live inside the local hot dog joint and chow down on pierogi stuffed with beef cheek. We’ve got world-class experiences without the world-class ego. And for that, you’re welcome.”

Over time, the city has also been “The Best Location in the Nation,” and even “Cleveland is the Plum.”

Visual Image: The Symbolic Knowledge of a Place

The most recognizable image of the city – the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. Other notable images include the skyline of the city sitting on Lake Erie including the historic Terminal Tower, Severance Hall (home to the world-renowned Cleveland Orchestra), the West Side Market (the oldest market in the city), and the East 4th Street entertainment district.

Reputation: The Specific Knowledge about a Place

The reputation of Cleveland has formed through many events, most notably:

1964: The last time a professional Cleveland sports team won a championship.
1966: Race riots occurred in the Hough neighborhood.
1969: The industrial Cuyahoga River caught fire.
1978: The city became the first major American city to default on debts since the Great Depression.
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Figure 3. Visual image
www.rockhall.com

Figure 4. Reputation
http://clevelandhistorical.org/items/show/63#.VmdfJLgrK70

Additional items that cross time include the Cleveland Orchestra, the Cleveland Clinic, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, the sports teams, and specifically, LeBron James and the 2016 NBA Champion Cleveland Cavaliers. The reputation of Cleveland has been mainly negative due to some of the aforementioned events, which led to the adoption of the “Mistake on the Lake” moniker which was propagated largely by late night television host Johnny Carson as he continually poked fun at the city.

Sense of Place: The Subjective Experience in a Place

The sense of place in Cleveland varies greatly depending on what parts of the city are visited. There is the bustling downtown which houses shopping, restaurants, and a casino, with three sports stadiums within walking distance. The theater district, the largest in the country outside of New York City’s Lincoln Center, is home to five major theaters as well as smaller performance spaces. Additionally, the city sits on the banks of where the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie meet and recreation and entertainment options are located along the shores.
Identity: The Extent to Which People Are Willing to Associate Themselves with a Place

While traditionally, Clevelanders themselves have tended to badmouth the city, most residents are die-hard fans that were born and stayed in the city. Also, a new generation of people is being welcomed that was not party to the issues that created any bad visual image or reputation of the city. These new arrivals are quickly making the city their own which in turn has helped improve the identity of many long-time residents.

INVESTING IN CITIES

Cities continue to invest in themselves and their image. Kotler et al. (1993) argue, for example, that economic weakness throughout the Midwest is often measured by population loss, decreasing incomes, and investment. Places need to find ways to sustain themselves and grow, but also prevent unmanaged
growth or further decay from destroying them. Not everything that happens to a place is within its control: there are natural disasters, business location changes, or what Joseph Schumpeter called “creative destruction” (Kotler et al., 1993). Business, industry, and population once had a large concentration in the Midwest, and specifically in the central cities in this region. In the current market, however, businesses have many more options for their location decisions. As Hill, et al (2012) notes, “Central cities that at one time dominated their regional markets for business locations are now just one potential location among many in much less dense and much larger metropolitan areas.” Job losses and the decline in the manufacturing industry has been a huge factor in their economies.

At a summit of 2,000 citizens in the Ohio capital city of Columbus, 19% of them stated that self-image was a factor standing in the way of the greatness of the city (Smyth, 2008). The common name of the city and the lack of professional sports teams were cited as a major impetus in their image creation (Smyth, 2008). These same citizens recommended capitalizing on the downtown riverfront, adding a downtown trolley and becoming a center for green construction to improve the city (Smyth, 2008). These residents note their city lacks an image (and arguably also a brand).

A successful place must be able to look honestly at its situation. By examining the attributes of a place from a regional standpoint, it is easier to see how the place functions in the national and international marketplace (Kotler, et al, 1993). Any effort to improve the image of a place must begin with a strategic market planning process (Kotler, et al, 1993). This process must be a collaborative effort of all of the relevant players within the place including city leaders, government, institutional, nonprofit, business representatives (both large and small), and representatives from the citizenry and daytime employment population. When the city of Dallas, Texas worked on its plan, the city council sent questionnaires to citizens asking what they would like their city to look like in ten years and this information helped guide the direction of their process (Kotler, et al, 1993). Working in a partnership, the interests of the entire community can be represented. Sometimes, the image of a place change just by a change in the way the leadership and government treats the citizenry through education, housing, training, social security, culture, and the environment (Allan, 2006). Strong, engaged leadership is key to a positive place image.

All cities have challenges from their history and infrastructure which leads to issues with planning and development (Morrison & Dewar, 2012). This is where public investment can make a difference. Changing the way a city is perceived may require public investment and government intervention both in infrastructure as well as in the way these cities are seen. Public investments may contribute to forging positive images that eventually affect location decisions. Government outlays signal willingness to invest in the future. Lynch (1960) noted that merely investing in a place can improve its image regardless of how the investment turns out in the end. The idea that merely showing investment can improve the way a place is seen is one reason places invest in themselves. It is imperative that those investing in cities and their marketing focus on each of the aspects of place image to improve the overall conditions.

During the 1990s, in the midst of a boom in development in the urban core including new skyscrapers and sports stadiums valued at approximately $1.2 billion (in 2015 dollars), Cleveland billed itself as a “Renaissance City.” This level of major investment and development may lead people to perceive it as progress and to assume that the city is improving. Currently, projects valued at an estimated $8.7 billion in construction are set to be completed in Cleveland, including the Global Center for Health Innovation (formerly called the Medical Mart), the Horseshoe Casino, and skyline-altering new office and residential buildings (personal communication). Since investment is perceived as progress, Cleveland may be positioning itself to change the perception of being known as the “mistake on the lake.”
Growth of a city is important to its success. Pocock and Hudson (1978) examined reasons areas grow and decline with regard to public investment. They note one frequent strategy for solving regional problems is to encourage growth by changing the area and its industrial structure through business retention and attraction. To accomplish this, many changes have to take place in both the people and the place. They argue that “Places regarded as having growth potential have had public sector investment channeled to them; places perceived as lacking growth potential have been denied these resources” (Pocock & Hudson, 1978). Whichever came first, the investment or the success of the city, the two items are intertwined.

In his seminal work on city image, Lynch (1960) begins by noting that “the city is a construction in space,” meaning that what people know of a city is constructed by a variety of actors. The way places are represented can be influenced by marketing and a place can be sold just like any other product (Allen, 2007). Stakeholders in each place need to meticulously define, design, and market to the outside world the assets of their place (Kotler et al., 1993). In the absence of attention to marketing, places run the risk of (further) decline and failure (Kotler et al., 1993). Places and their images are constructed for the purpose of encouraging growth.

The act of selling a place is popular to economic development professionals because it offers a chance to improve prospects for “trade, aid, economic development, political influence and general respect” (Anholt, 2010a). The increasing importance of place image may be due several factors including the media and declining cost of travel. Any way that professionals within a place can work to improve the five aspects of place image will advance the overall environment and will therefore lead to increased interest and investment.

Roles certain cities and regions played historically have adjusted, adapted, or disappeared (Sadler, 1993). At the height of the industrial Midwest, Pittsburgh was known as the location for steel production and Akron, Ohio dominated rubber manufacturing. Competition has increased with globalization and the relevance of place is becoming less important for business (Sadler, 1993). Each place must compete with every other for its share of commercial, political, social, and cultural transactions (Anholt, 2010a; Short et al., 1993). This competition forces places to work on their image in order to improve their attraction efforts.

Spreading the word that Cleveland has a strong bioscience industry or that Pittsburgh is a city with a concentration of technology companies can contribute to the economic success of these cities. Regions throughout the Midwest are trying to turn around negative images. The word “industrial” itself may be associated with negative images of a deteriorating economic base, pollution, and obsolescence (Short et al., 1993). Even the recent renaming of the region to “Legacy Cities” invokes a sense of obsolescence. Regions going through deindustrialization or having become post-industrial face “a deep sense of insecurity that grows out of the collapse all around them of the traditional economic base of their community” (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982). Cities in the Midwest have not only their individual place image issues to contend with, but additionally those from a broader, regional scale.

Major improvements and investments may lead people to take a closer look at a place, whether at the city or national level. An executive with Visit Buffalo Niagara, stated that their work to improve the waterfront, art, and architecture are leading people to take a closer look at Buffalo. He noted “The story that I would have to tell would just be empty spin if all of this very concrete investment weren’t taking place...there is real substance behind the story we are trying to tell” (personal communication). A former executive of the Allegheny Conference in Pittsburgh notes “A lot of Pittsburgh’s transformation was very place-based and focused – improving the appearance and the land use” (personal communication). New positive promotion, which showcases new assets, may lead people to look at a place differently and piques
Defining Place Image

their interest about places to which they may have been indifferent previously or about which they had a negative opinion. Changes in the way a place is seen do not happen suddenly; however, as shown when Pittsburgh’s previously dominant steel industry all but died by 1983 and its official transformation did not begin until 2005 (personal communication). Improvements to a place are important to place image, but they alone cannot change it completely.

Public and private investment can shift beliefs about a city. According to an article in the Chicago Sun Times (as quoted by Uhlir, 2005), “You can’t put a monetary value on public works that enhance the image and quality of life of a city.” Chicago created the Millennium Park, one of the largest public works projects the city has ever undertaken. The park is built on land that previously housed outdated rail yards which is now an immense outdoor recreation and arts area. The city now boasts an iconic park which is not only enjoyable and useful, but also beautiful and its likeness is used in many regional promotion pieces. The park has even been showcased in national advertising focused on archetypal places throughout the country and shows that a major investment can affect the image of the place.

Whether or not there is a problem with the image of certain cities or if this has any impact on the location decisions, actors in these cities feel that there are problems and therefore invest in image. In Greater Cleveland for example, the promotion of individual cities is handled internally by each locality with their own budgets. However, two organizations represent a regional collaboration that works to target business and people. TeamNEO is a collaboration of the largest metro chambers of commerce in Northeast Ohio. The organization is tasked with attracting businesses from around the world to the 18-county region. In 2011, they had $3.3 million in revenue generated from local communities and spent $2.9 million on business attraction and marketing (Guidestar: Team NEO, 2013). Positively Cleveland, the Convention and Visitors Bureau of greater Cleveland, is tasked with marketing, sales, and promotion of the region for tourism, conventions, and trade shows. They raised a 2011 budget of $8.9 million from membership fees of businesses and the hotel bed tax and they spent $8.8 million on their mission that year (Guidestar: Positively Cleveland, 2013). So in Greater Cleveland alone, with just the work of these two organizations, $11.7 million was spent on place promotion, without verification that these efforts yield results.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES IMPACTING THE CONCEPT OF PLACE

While the image of a place may not be on the first list of considerations when a business selects a new site, it is however important when final considerations are being made. The research shows that factors important to the business location decision include demographics, education, environment, financing, government, industry, infrastructure, transportation, workforce, necessities of life, and quality of life. The concepts of image are not a common topic in the literature. After the initial set of criteria is met, the importance of image comes into play. Anecdotal evidence shows that when companies are left with the final two to three options, the image of the place becomes the deciding factor (personal communication). Image was an important factor when Facebook established a presence in Austin (personal communication). Also, for headquarter locations, image is very important as the company looks to match their specific brand and culture. Office Max moved to Chicago because it offered something their previous location could not (Miller, 2005).

Image is also shaped by the workforce. The people, or the identity of the residents, are a huge factor when a business is looking to make a location decision. Businesses want to be in a place where their
employees and executives want to live which can offer them a certain set of amenities. When a site is being considered, if the feel of the location does not meet the expectations and desires of the company, the city will be snubbed. For example, Sierra Nevada was looking for a certain image so as to recruit a talented workforce and they chose Asheville – notably a city for the outdoors, food, and craft brewing. The company wanted employees who identified with that culture (personal communication). A site selection consultant that owns his own consulting firm notes, “25 years ago, it was all about cost: utility, labor, transportation, taxes. Today, these aren’t the drivers as it’s more about maintaining competitive edge in their businesses: labor, skilled workforce, and local communities’ ability to generate quality workers (pipeline of future workers is awesome – that’s the image part)” (personal communication).

Additionally, when faced with the decision of potentially relocating or taking a vacation, individuals examine different aspects of place image. Each individual, like businesses, are looking for a certain set of criteria. When a job offer is made for with options in Seoul or Cairo, the image of Egyptian politics alone will likely steer the job-seeker to Korea. Again, investments made in the different aspects of place image can improve the prospects for attracting people to places.

The International Image

When competing in the international market, the place image of cities is second to that of the nation itself. In fact, countries spend immense amounts of money developing brands that convey certain images in the hopes of increasing tourism, investments, and exports (Pipoli de Azambuja, 2010).

The country brand is important when decisions are made based on the good name of the country of origin (Anholt & Hildreth, 2004; Samiec, 2009). Often, buyers develop stereotypical images of countries (macro) and products (micro) which include the total of all descriptive, inferential, and informational beliefs about a particular country (Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2004; Martin & Eroglu, 1993). These images are based on politics, economics, technology, and social desirability. Arguably, there are three aspects of country-related image: cognitive (the beliefs about the country), affective (emotional reaction to the country), and conative (the behavioral intentions about the country) (Brijs, Bloemer, & Kasper, 2011); which all factor into decisions made about the country.

CONCLUSION

It can be argued that image is everything and that this above all can predict destiny or that it has no bearing on the market whatsoever. Merely discounting this concept can be challenged on the basis that images change over time and flow with the economy of cities (Pocock & Hudson, 1978). While Detroit was once known as a world center for the automotive industry as well as research and development, the city center is now seen as a place abandoned and struggling to hold what employment base remains from its legacy. On the flip side, ask anyone 25 years ago how they felt about Silicon Valley and their answer would have been nil. Birch (2001) argues that image develops in an incremental fashion - when one image dominates, it is already it in the state of change as was the case in his study on the Bronx moving from the “shame of the nation” to the “all-American city.” Because of the transient nature of images, they cannot predict success or failure, but remain an important concept regarding city life and investment. Image can be a very strong determinant when the business site selection decision is considering their top options and therefore cities should strive to improve and maintain strong images in the market.
REFERENCES


**KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

- **Brand**: The intended message of the place.
- **Identity**: The extent to which people are willing to associate themselves with a place.
- **Place Image**: Represents the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people have of a place (Kotler, et al, 1993).
- **Reputation**: The specific knowledge about a place.
- **Sense of Place**: The subjective experience in a place.
- **Visual Image**: The symbolic knowledge of a place.