

Neacșu, Marius-Cristian; Neaguț, Silviu; Vlăsceanu, Gheorghe

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PLACE BRANDING – GEOGRAPHICAL APPROACH.
CASE STUDY: WATERLOO

Marius-Cristian Neacșu^{1*}, Silviu Neguț² and Gheorghe Vlăsceanu³
^{1) 2) 3)} Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

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Abstract

This study represents an exploratory analysis of the evolution of the *place branding* concept, with an important focus on the geographical perspective. How has this notion, a newcomer into the geographers' analysis, changed over time and what role does it have in the decision making process of intervening into the way a certain place is organised or as an instrument of economic revival and territorial development? At least from the perspective of Romanian geographical literature, the originality and novelty of this study is obvious. An element of the originality of this research is the attempt of redefining the concept of place branding so that it is more meaningful from the perspective of spatial analyses. The reason for which Waterloo was chosen as a case study is multi-dimensional: the case studies so far have mainly focused on large cities (*urban branding* instead of place branding) and this site has all the theoretical elements to create a stand-alone brand.

Keywords: tourism geography, cultural tourism, place branding, Waterloo.

JEL classification: M31, R11, O21, Z32.

Introduction

A recent visit to Waterloo, in the autumn of 2015 - several months after the bicentennial anniversary of the 1815 battle -, gave birth to the *context* for certain questions which materialised into a small research which further on had this study as a result. The question that triggered this whole exploratory endeavour was: *why and how can a place attract people and investments despite others?* The question gains more meaning from a geographical perspective: the place is not a product which you can simply brand and sell, factoring in the latest marketing innovations towards influencing a consumer's behaviour or emotionally involving him into the respective product's story.

* Corresponding author, **Marius-Cristian Neacșu** – marius.neacsu@ase.ro

Unlike any other product which can move around a territory, the place is fixed - you must go to it. Furthermore, if for a product you can sketch on a piece of paper the entire organisational chart from the production lines to the consumer and you can clearly identify clients and interests, the place/geographical space is simply "much too complex, multifunctional, multifaceted, too vaguely defined, with a much too confuse image in the residents' minds [or tourists], with an extremely high number of actors which are no longer passive but rather active into shaping it" (Neacșu, 2010a, p.45).

It becomes clear that the place is not mobile, but what about its image? Moreover, what about the story behind its image? We are living in a global world, a world in which images and image symbols have gained more power than the product or the place they refer to and they have an amazing mobility, pushed forward by globalisation and virtualisation: they become "viral" in the virtual environment and generate global opinion trends.

The goal of this study, starting with the above mentioned question which triggered this research, is *a return to the concept of place branding* (an emerging concept 10 years ago), *as an instrument used in the process of economic, functional and semantic revival of a geographically "captive" territory*. How this notion changed over the past few years and the geographical perspective over this concept with clear inter-disciplinary valences are especially of interest.

The originality of the study also derives from the goal: it is not about an economical marketing analysis of a concept that was born precisely in this area, but by the way it managed to boost the geographic landscape. Besides this manifesting reality the theory was obviously left behind. Thus, (i) which is geography's role in understanding a place's branding process in a double dimension - how does this process reverberate into the geographical space (the dynamic of how space is organised) and (ii) conversely, what are the intrinsic qualities of the place which give value to this both economic and social practice through which the place gains distinctiveness and competitive advantages?

The novelty of the research is also obvious: the specialised geographical literature has plenty of gaps in this regard, geographers not being especially attracted so far by this concept, by how strongly it can stimulate the decision making process with regards to organising a place/territory/geographical space, or how it determines the shaping or reconfiguration of territorial flows or spatial morphologies.

With regards to the *methodology* used, it mainly consisted of direct observation in the field (an occasion which also gave rise to qualitative interviews with Romanian officials working in Brussels, within the EU Parliament), doubled and completed by critical analysis of the specialised literature, both geographical and economical or in connection with urban policies and public administration.

The results summarily presented in this study also attest, at least for now that *place branding* is a concept that works. At least in this complicated context in which places all over the world are in a global competition now, amplified by the speed with which information and image travel in the virtual environment, the concept of *place branding* better faces the present challenges of reality than *place marketing*, in a world urbanising at an amazing speed and the non-urban space - like Waterloo - is seeking to uncover identity anchors, ideas and meanings that would maintain such spaces competitive in this global race.

The *applicative value* of this study is represented on the one hand by the theoretical dimension in enriching the Romanian specialised literature, geographical studies not allocating a specific space for analysing this concept other than in a collateral or accidental manner and on the other hand Waterloo can represent a good practice example for a Romanian country that tries crystallising a direction for development in an engaging world in which you cannot remain a spectator: you are either at the global competition table or as menu on that table.

The current study's *structure* is classical, without being complete based on all the current scientific rigor, starting with an explicative and justifying *Introduction* regarding the context of the research performed, followed by the actual content of the study in which the *results* will be presented, not before performing a substantial *review of specialised literature*, a short presentation of *the research methodology*, followed by the *conclusions* and *bibliography*.

1. Literature Review

The concept of *brand/branding* has its roots as an academic pursuit in the "academic revolution" that took place at the half of the last century (the 50s-60s), when a revival of the reporting perspective of the relationship between product-man/geographical place-man occurred. More precisely, the focus changes from the economy and geography as such towards the man, the economy and geography inside the "human mind".

After the *darwinisation* process of social sciences represented by the *positivist* current with all its nuances, among which *logical positivism* or *critical rationalism* (also see Neacșu, 2010b), of searching for absolute objectivity, of bringing the rigor of the physical and natural sciences into the social sciences, followed an opposite current of thinking individualised by *behaviouralism*: how does the human perception work, how does the product's or the geographical place's image form in his mind, how does this image influence the behaviour and attitude towards a product's consumption, towards a specific territory respectively? Thus, the focus is switched towards the human psychology and phrases such as "social" and "mental" begin to dominate economical and geographical studies.

Therefore, the *branding* process, as an effect of the "humanisation" currents of pure scientific rationalism from the middle of last century's 50s, enters the academic scene in the economic field, especially business and marketing. Only a few decades later (in the 90s) it becomes a preoccupation for geographers as a reality in spatial manifestation which they start taking into account more and more (table no. 1).

The pioneer into transferring the concept of branding from marketing towards geography and fundamenting the concepts of *marketing* and *place branding* is the Dutch school of spatial sciences (a title preferred over that of human/economic/social/or cultural geography) which extensively and intensively used these concepts as a necessary import to geography (see the book in the beginning *Selling the city: Marketing approaches in public sector urban planning* of Ashworth and Voogd, 1990). Moreover, the same Dutch school provided logic to these concepts, enrolling them in the logic of management of places/geographical spaces, where it would have had more meaning as a geographical approach.

In the Romanian geographical literature a series of PhD theses sequentially revitalise *mental geography* with case studies from the Romanian urban space (Ploiești, Bucharest, Craiova, Suceava, Brăila etc.), some of these specifically tackling *place image* (see *city image* and other associated concepts such as *urban design*, *urban marketing*, *urban*

branding at Neacșu (2008a; 2008b; 2009; 2010a; 2010b); Neacșu and Neguț (2008; 2012); Gavriș (2011); Ciobanu (2011); Bădiță and Popescu (2012); Ghioca (2014) and so on).

Table no. 1: The evolution of the concepts of "product branding" and "place branding" in specialised literature (1950-present)

Fields/Concept origins (1950-1980)	Studying the concept (1981-2000)	Secondary fields (after 2000)
Product branding		
Marketing/Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>brand image</i> (Gardner and Levy, 1955; Boulding, 1956) ● <i>positioning</i> (Ries and Trout, 1972) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>brand equity</i> (Keller, 1993) ● <i>brand extensions</i> (Park, et al., 1991) ● <i>brand endorsement</i> (Aaker and Keller, 1990) ● <i>brand architecture</i> (Aaker and Joakimstaller, 2000) ● <i>brand identity</i> (Kapferer, 1997) ● <i>brand orientation</i> (Urde, 1994) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>corporate branding</i> (Balmer, 1995; Ind, 1997) ● <i>services branding</i> (Chernatony and Siegelhorn, 2001) ● <i>non-profit branding</i> (Hankinson, 2000) ● <i>internal branding</i> (Ind, 2001)
Place branding		
Urbanism/Urban sociology /Urban geography /Urban policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>city image</i> (Tolman, 1948; Lynch, 1960) Tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>destination image</i> (Hunt, 1975; Pearce, 1977) Marketing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>marketingul urban marketing</i> (Kotler and Levy, 1969) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>urban design</i> (Lang, 1994) ● <i>place promotion</i> (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990, 1994) ● <i>place marketing</i> (Kotler, et al., 1993) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>city branding</i> (Kawaratzis, 2005) ● <i>destination branding</i> (Morgan and colab., 2002) ● <i>regional/national branding</i> (Caldwel and Freire, 2004/Dinnie, 2008) ● <i>city image as an instrument in space organization</i> (Neacșu, 2008, 2010a; Neacșu and Neguț, 2012) ● <i>urban branding</i> (Neacșu, 2008, 2010b)

Source: adapted after Hankinson, 2015, p.16 and 20, with modifications and additions

2. Methodology

This research was based on a series of primary sources such as direct observation in the field, respectively the analysis of the Waterloo site (2015) and the way elements of place branding have functioned in this case, and it was completed by a series of qualitative interviews and indirect observations focused on the perception of those who had been there before or of international public servants (Romanians) who work in the EU Parliament.

The study is also based on a consistent cabinet meeting, reviewed in specialised literature in a first phase (2003-2005) when I got into contact with the Dutch school of "spatial sciences" in more than one occasions (study visit in the Netherlands, 2003, Groningen University and then the organising the first *Romanian-Dutch Geography Seminar* in Bucharest, followed by a second edition at Groningen and Rotterdam, two years later, in 2007), then a second phase (starting with 2008), more elaborate, oriented towards studying different urban concepts migrating around the notion of *urban branding*, more precisely *urban planning*, *urban design*, *city image*, *urban marketing*, *urban branding* and in a third phase (2015, focused on *place branding*).

3. Results and discussions

3.1. Short history of the concept of *place branding*. A geographical perspective

As with other concepts, reality has been a forerunner of the scientific theory, an example for place and/or destination marketing and/or branding being the one from Antiquity when the Greeks changed the name of the Black Sea - from *Axeinos* (the inhospitable, evil sea) in *Euxinos* (the mild, hospitable sea), the latter being also taken over by the Romans – or that of Portuguese navigators and explorers at the end of the Dark Ages which have similarly changed the name of the southern end of the African continent from "Cape of Storms" to the "Cape of Good Hope". In both situations the effect was the same: from the perspective of the analysed concept the story of the respective places suffered a mutation of meaning and sense, gaining another (added) value, geographically and geopolitically the Greeks colonised almost the entirety of the Black Sea shoreline and the Portuguese found that maritime route that circumvented the "Ottoman spur", which stopped Levantine trade with products from the "Indies".

Obviously these practices have multiplied in the modern and contemporary period, official authorities resorting to the process of branding anytime they needed to popularise a territory, attract investments and human resources, from the "sale" of the lands in the American "Wild West" up to the Dutch example of attracting inhabitants - with a population structure corresponding to the national one - on the polders (the land gained from the grasp of the sea) just introduced in the economic circuit.

In all of the above examples the geographical *place* represented the object and subject of the branding process.

The idea of a visual brand originates in the 18th century, when an English potter, Josiah Wedgwood imprinted his name on the pottery he was producing, each set of tea cups or cutlery being also associated with the names of important clients that purchased them. Thus, he associated his product with that age's nobility (including the Royal Family), observing that this way his products were more sought after. Without knowing or wanting he had actually patented the idea of *brand!* His name imprinted on the pottery products became the logo, the brand with which he associated his products in the mind of his clients, the guaranteed signature of special quality (since the Royal Family had purchased his tea sets) have all brought added value.

Ethimologically, the very idea of "brand" and the associated process of "branding" has the same linguistic origin as the one of the person who patented the branded technique, Josiah Wedgwood, respectively the English word "burn", a practice found in the American farms where cattle were branded with hot iron, in order to easily identify the owner. There was a natural evolution from this simple practice to the marketing technique in the sense that "<<branding>> was associated with <<burning>> an image, a label, a brand in the consumer's mind" (Neacșu, 2010a, p.139).

With regards to the *theory* of the *place branding* concept this occurs at the end of the 90s, when the concept of *place marketing* (see also Neacșu, 2008a) no longer managed to capture the manifesting reality, thus emerging into a new concept of branding which starting with the years 2000 began to be mainly addressed by the specialised geographical literature, especially in the analyses of urban spaces (urban branding).

Ashworth (2005a) identifies the meeting place of researchers in the two areas - geography and marketing - in the semantically translation from the place and the physical product respectively towards their image (figure no. 1), meaning the place, the product in our minds and the way all these generated meanings trigger emotions and meanings which influence our spatial or consumer behaviours. Actually, this is the way the above mentioned author defines, in a first phase, the concept of *place branding* as being "simply applying the branding process of a product to the place" (Ashworth, 2005a, p.49), later on even using the phrase "place-product" (Ashworth, 2009, p.20), but which maintains its geographical place characteristics (defined by a scale: local, regional, global etc., with a certain position in a territorial hierarchy generating, through its characteristics, certain spatial configurations and models of territorial flows, subject and object of multiple actors).

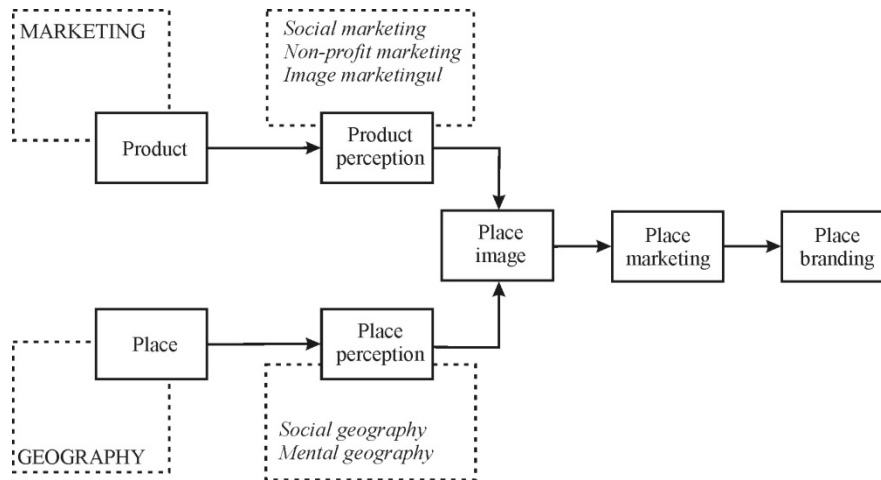


Figure no. 1: The evolution of the *place branding* concept – theoretical schema

Nevertheless, the place is much more complex and sophisticated than a product. There was not a simple translation from marketing towards geography in which the place simply became a "product", the resident or tourist a "consumer" and the town hall a "company". Seisdedos (2006, p.1-3) concluded, referring to the urban space, that "[place] branding does not work" because: the place is much too complex, local authorities are frequently replacing the "forest (n.n. marketing) with the tree (n.n. publicity, promotion)" substituting the entire marketing process (as a client centred competitive philosophy, depending on its needs) to a component (selling the "product" by all means); place image (endogenously and exogenously) is much too confuse and all the promotional materials seem "variations of the same theme", inspiring a feeling of "déjà-vu" to inhabitants. As a result the concept that emerged from place marketing, more precisely *place branding* has a meaning from a geographical perspective only if it is used as an instrument to trigger the decision to intervene into reconfiguring the planning of geographical space, the place image being a special barometer for dysfunctionality in the current way of planning (Neacșu, 2010b), so more of a territory management instrument (Ashworth, 2009).

3.2. Definition

From the idea of applying the branding process to a "place" instead of a "product", in an attempt to define the concept of *place branding* (Ashworth, 2005a) this author together with other contributors (Kavaratzis, Warnaby and Ashworth, 2015), were faced ten years later with the necessity to rethink the concept. There were multiple reasons, but especially the need of a conceptual transfer from the application of corporate marketing strategies regarding the branding of a product towards the activity of place branding, seen as an "effect of inter-dependent and inter-correlated territorial processes that embraced the shape of corporate rhetoric concerning branding" (Andersson, 2015, p.57).

By analysing multiple attempts to define the subject of our research, a theory forced by the manifesting practices, we can observe several main approaches depending on the goal of the branding process or the effect generated: a) *economical* – a set of techniques and activities that lead to a better marketing of a place's image with the end goal of either developing or the economic revival of that territory; b) *sociological* – a set of techniques and activities focused on communicating a place's image or story (interviews, web pages built specifically for this purpose, promotional materials - leaflets, mugs, spoons, magnets, caps, shirts and so on in order to align the public opinion and carefully guide it towards the official brand); c) *psychological* – the controlled overload of that place with a series of meanings (sensations, emotions etc.) in order to help retain "consumers" (residents, tourists, investors etc.); d) *geographical* – as a useful tool or chosen strategy for triggering the decision for urban planning.

We should remember a definition from the beginning of the 90s (Hankinson and Cowking, 1993) which truly goes from the place to the process and not vice versa, respectively the idea that a place can become a brand through "its personality resulted from a unique combination of functional attributes and symbolic values" (*apud.* Kavaratzis, 2005, p.508). Ten years later, in the same spirit, Knox and Bickerton (2003), associated to the idea of *place branding* "the deliberate selection process of various associations which should add value to the base product" (*apud.* Ashworth, 2005a, p.47).

As for us, we must make a distinction from the beginning, respectively that of *image* vs. *brand*. We know that the place generates a certain image in our minds - mental place -, an image resulted from our interaction with the respective place and which carries a certain emotional load, certain meanings and direction (Neacșu, 2008b; 2009; 2010b; Neacșu and Neaguț, 2008; 2012). Thus, in every person's mind a mental map of the respective place is formed. It is about the place's *natural image*. In the same way a collective (natural) image is formed, larger, shared by a group of people and which is not necessarily the sum of individual images. In comparison, *the brand refers to the deliberate creation of a constructed image* in a certain way by the "producer", who is also a beneficiary, which for places it can be multiple (a multi-levelled constellation, inter-connected, formed by local authorities, private area and civil society etc.).

The problem: how to connect the two images - the natural and the constructed one? Thus, if the brand does not have an identity anchor and is not in the "consumer's" mind it cannot resist and becomes a "pack of lies (...), a promise, the promise of something that is not true" (Akwue, 2003, p.5).

In conclusion, we define *place branding as a deliberate, premeditated process for correcting/optimising the natural image towards an official image to be communicated, to*

insure distinctiveness (uniqueness) towards other places, with the purpose of producing mutations in the attitude and behaviour of the "consumers" of places (residents, tourists, investors etc.).

3.3. Concept

Product branding vs. place branding. Taking into consideration the above definition, place branding invites to overcoming a dilemma: isn't it possible that the idea of a place's uniqueness is a redundancy? For a geographer the place is unique in an intrinsic way. For example, a mountain has the same natural characteristics anywhere on the planet, in the same climate area and it mostly generated the same spatial, social, economical behaviours and attitudes. Nevertheless, although the geographical factors are the same *their combination is unique*, uniqueness transferred to the places, from the (visual) landscape and to the human meanings. That is why each place generated certain patterns of spatial behaviour, a certain way of thinking and interpreting the respective geographical space and lastly, a specific and different way of life, what we call a *culture*. The place, with time, gains the expression of this culture. There is an inter-conditioning relationship between the place and the culture it generated. The place made its mark on man (mental place) and in turn man made its mark on the place (cultural landscape).

Globalisation however stimulated an incredible mobility of population that travels all across the planet, a mobility accompanied by an ever faster transfer of images (their virtualisation). Thus, places begin to look more and more like each other and it is enough to look at large cities that generate a relatively similar way of life all across the world. Nevertheless, precisely this global competition for capturing the attention of potential investors, visitors, tourists, new residents has generated an unprecedented proliferation of constructed images - place brands -, which should be unique, insure distinctiveness and be simply different. To generate the idea of a "place different" to others.

Obviously, in the case of product branding the idea of differentiation had a meaning: all ball bearings were the same or served the same functions. "In a cynical language - Ashworth stipulated (2005a, p.48) -, our products are different because we are different and we have added value, because we have this value itself". So uniqueness and differentiation originated from the uniqueness and differentiation proposed and imposed by the producer, by its vision. Can this capacity of differentiation be transferred to place brands? Is Ashworth's statement above applicable to a place? Apparently it is... let us attempt an exercise in imagination: if we move the Eiffel Tower in Bucharest, Paris would be left without tourists and everyone should change their destination towards "little and new Paris"? No. That is because this symbolic structure has added value only in relation with that respective place. The Eiffel Tower attracts tourists especially because it is in Paris (as proof, the "replicas" in Las Vegas or ... near Slobozia, do not have the same success or not at all)!

Place branding tools. Ashworth (2005a; 2005b) also identifies several confuse situations in specialised literature with regards to the theoretical perspective of place branding, situations that can be defined as follows:

- *champaigning*: a certain product borrows the name of the place where it was created (the traditional example being "Champagne"): in this situation neither the product nor the place borrow from one another any quality that confers one of them added value, both being true "marketing accidents". The place did not play a special part in experimenting

with the respective method of obtaining sparkling wine, just as neither the product obtained probably by chance did not borrow any special meaning from the respective geographical space. In this case *we cannot talk about place branding!*

- *Germanisation* or we can even say *Helvetisation* or *Japanisation* etc. What does it mean? It is the situation in which a certain product is associated with a place's meanings and/or even the place's name, as a guarantee of value and good quality. There are numerous examples in this area: "German car", "Swiss watch", "Japanese television", "French perfume", "Belgian chocolate" and so on. As we can observe, although the geographical association is present and brings added value to the associated product, *we cannot talk about a place branding!* In both of the above situations the product is the one undertaking the branding process not the place/territory/geographical space.

Then what exactly generates added value for a place? At least three situations can be summarised: *a) personality association* (Gaudi's Barcelona, Romeo and Juliet's Verona etc.), *b) signature building and design* (the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Colosseum in Rome etc.) and *c) event hallmarking* – sportive, historical etc. (*the Waterloo battle bicentennial celebration 1815-2015, the 2016 Rio Olympic Games* etc.) or a fourth situation *d) when we are talking about a combination* of the first three (Ashworth, 2005a; 2005b; 2009).

Place branding elements. A place brand should be made up of several base elements, each of them building distinctive stages in the evolution of the branding process: *an idea* - and this is based on the management perspective over the place, the creative and innovative potential to create it and the need that generates it, but most importantly, it must have an identity "cover" (otherwise, either the built image does not resist the test of time, or does not produce its effects); *an image* – transforming the above idea into a coherent, identifying image (with anchors into the natural image), that has a direction and meanings and that insures distinctiveness, uniqueness, or better said competitive advantages in relation to other place brands and moreover, to be captured in a simple visual fingerprint, a trademark, a logo, a label; *an infrastructure* – from the "brand suppliers" (local authorities, private companies, tourism, marketing, consulting agencies, civil associations etc.), to the respective place's image communication and delivery infrastructure and up to the "brand consumers" (residents, tourists, investors, interest groups etc.).

The importance of the place branding concept. Andersen (2015) summarised several reasons for which the place branding concept was intensely theorised in the last 25 years, among which: the object of the branding process is generally represented by public spaces which, on the one hand require public financing and on the other hand it is the stake of multiple interests, generated by multiple and diverse actors; practice emerged over theory, more and more places started using this instrument (this is the newest gimmick in image commerce); globalisation and virtualisation have catalysed all the social processes, stimulating inter-connectedness and global competition; it is a "seductive" concept from a scientific perspective, on the one hand through its inter-disciplinary dimension (externalising it from marketing towards the geographical space, many professors and researchers being attracted from various perspectives - economy, geography, psychology, sociology, urbanism, public administration etc. - to analyse this new manifesting phenomenon) and on the other hand through the non-cohesive and ambiguous theory generated.

From a geographical perspective, the place branding concept can insure competitive advantages in the "inter-places" global competition (for investments, capital, human and cultural resources); it can constitute a strategic territorial development guide towards a new model of urban planning and even for a future image of the respective place; it becomes a communication platform between actors with multiple interests; it generates solutions to current urban planning dysfunctions (see also Ashworth, Kavaratzis and Warnaby, 2015; Neacsu 2010b and others).

3.4. Relations with other concepts that address the place (geographical space)

The geographical perspective over the place branding concept also invites to a positioning of the currently analysed concept in relation to other scientific notions that are complementary to this one, as one may see in table no. 2 below:

Table no. 2: Complementarily relations between *place branding* and other concepts connected with *the place* (geographical space)

Concept	What does it target?	Effects generated	Relations with other concepts	Role in spatial sciences
Place planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the place's functionality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> functional optimisation of the place (ergonomics) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it creates an "object" for the <i>place branding and marketing</i>, it is projected into the <i>place image</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explains the dynamic relation between place and its attributed function
Place design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the place's integrity, based on relations aesthetic forms space architecture; urban landscape image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> place's visual personality the place's quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it creates a place's "packaging" as a "product" that is going to be the object of the <i>place marketing</i> process contributes to the "added value" of the <i>place brand</i> it is projected into the <i>place's perceived image</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explains the relationship between place and the dynamics of its shape
Place marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the place, not as a territorial support, but as a result of human perception promoting the place as a product influencing the "consumer's" behaviour retention of residents and attracting new "clients" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> economical-territorial development stimulating the competitiveness between places 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> instrument used in place management it creates the theoretical framework for <i>place branding</i> it is projected in the <i>place's image</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it can explain the spatial distribution of the relationship between local resources – economical development

Concept	What does it target?	Effects generated	Relations with other concepts	Role in spatial sciences
Place image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the "mental" place the human perception over the physical place the place as a "text", interpretable, with meanings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it is a "barometer" of the place's functionality it shapes the place's mental maps it generates spatial attitudes and behaviours it can stimulate the decision making process regarding the place planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an instrument used for projecting the future model of place planning it is influenced by the aesthetic impact of shapes and landscape (place branding), by its publicity and promotion (place marketing), by its numerous meanings (place branding) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it shapes the relationship between the physical place and the human perception of it it generates mental maps of the place it individualises the areas of attractiveness (topophilia), repulsiveness (topophobia) or neutrality
Place branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "the signature", brand, logo, story, image of place, as an expression of its identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> economical-territorial development stimulating competitiveness between places 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> instrument used in place management a place marketing technique it is projected in the place image (influences a place's perception) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explains the relationship between place and its perception it can explain the relationship between a place's identity and its image

Source: amendment after Neacșu, 2010a, pp.155-159, with changes and additions

3.5. Case study: Waterloo – towards a place brand?

It is indisputable that today we are seeing the "blooming of a global commerce with images [of places]" (Neacșu and Neguț, 2008, p.90), a host of brands and logos (figure no. 2) of various places at various observation scales (national, regional, local) being in a fierce competition for resources, investments, tourists etc.

Why Waterloo? On the one hand, to somehow answer the criticisms signalled by Anderssen (2015) and more precisely that beyond the "gaps" in place branding theory, the "attempts" to define the concept, all unfulfilling, many case studies are centred on the large cities (*urban branding* instead of *place branding*), a fact which can be observed both in foreign literature, as well as in the Romanian specialised literature. It is somehow natural, the city is a "place" that focuses many more interests, resources, people and has a much larger capacity to generate ideas and innovation.

On the other hand, Waterloo is present in all of the three situations identified in theory, being a place (non-urban) associated with the name of a historical personality (the place! where Napoleon Bonaparte was defeated), with a symbolic-structure ("Lion's Mound" - the commemorative monument built by the winners several years after the battle of 1815) and with the name and planning of a cultural event with historical significance (*Bicentennial Battle of Waterloo 1815-2015*). Although all three elements somehow have separate history and meanings - the physical place is associated with Napoleon's defeat, the symbolic

structure "Lion's Mound" was William I's (first Dutch king) intention to mark the place where his son, William II fell off the horse, having a shoulder injury from a musket shot in the same *Battle of Waterloo 1815*, and the *Bicentennial* with the idea of economic revival through cultural events (battle commemorations) of a place actually without any other development potential - they can be currently harmonised under the form of a single "story" of the place, to work for one idea, for one image - the "Waterloo" brand.



Figure no. 2: Examples of place brands, at various observation scales

Source: Wallonia's international portal, 2013

The Battle of Waterloo 1815. After Napoleon's defeat, the place "Waterloo" gained an almost mythical status, not just due to the historical event as such, but especially through its significance: Napoleon's defeat and Europe's entry into another international order. This imprinted deep meanings, both for the mind and for the heart, to whomever saw the respective place, from here until the appearance of "pilgrimages" being only one step. Anyone arriving in the Brussels area asks about Waterloo, "Caillou's farm" and "Bodenghien Inn" – the headquarters of the two general staffs of the armies that faced each other, the first for the French and the second for the allies - which became touristic objectives. Almost 100 years after the historical event (in 1914) a law was adopted to conserve the 500 hectares of land near the municipalities of Waterloo, Braine l'Alleud, Genappes and Lasne, by banning any buildings and tree planting. Only a few years previously (1911) the *Rotonda* was built (French architect Franz Van Ophem, 35 m in diameter and 15 m in height) to house the *Panorama* (realised by French painter Louis

Dumoulin, in 1912), a circular fresco with a circumference of 110 m, proposed in 2008 (the year of its renovation) by the Belgian authorities to be listed on the UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

"The Lion's Mound". It is a visual anchor for the Rotonda (*Panorama*) and the *Memorial* through its size: an artificial conical mound with a circumference of 520 m and a height of 43 m, built between 1820 and 1826. Access to the 4.5 m long and tall "Lion" from the top (on its pedestal being marked the date "XVIII Juni MDCCCXV") is done through 226 steps (figure no. 3).

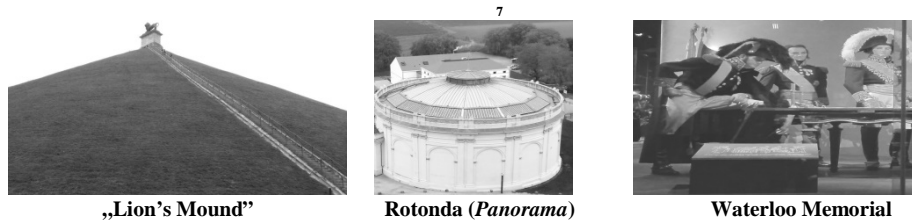


Figure no. 3: Waterloo – visual elements with specific meanings

Bicentennial Waterloo Memorial 1815-2015. Built for the bicentennial celebration (in just three years, May 2012 - May 2015). The Memorial Museum is maybe the most eloquent example of a touristic objective and also of "masked" touristic infrastructure (it is entirely underground in order not to affect the site above), which could support the building of a "Waterloo" brand. It is a happy example of an innovative public-private force (a host of associations, on various hierarchical tiers), which had at its disposal a 40 million euro budget for the improvement of the site where the *Battle of Waterloo* took place, with the occasion of the bicentennial (12 million granted by the General Commissary for Tourism – 6 million for the purchase of land and compensation for total control of the site and 6 million more for the entire scenography for the Bicentennial event, which was the responsibility of the Association "La Belle Alliance" – and 28 million granted by the Regional Centre for Assisting Municipalities, managed by the inter-municipal association "Waterloo 1815", for the actual cost of the construction, out of which only the building of the *Memorial* had a cost of over 9.5 million euro, net of VAT).

What is impressive at the *Memorial* is that it is 10 m underground, buried at the feet of the "Lion", offering an exposition surface of 1 815 m² (not coincidentally), out of the over 5 700 m² arranged (services areas, parking places, hotel etc.) in which there is no museum curator, everything being automated. The museum begins with an open room that recreates the context and atmosphere of the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th (a huge panel with the "Declaration of human and civil rights" from the *French Revolution* of 1789), the personalities of the age, a guillotine, a portrait of Napoleon etc. all accompanied by audio and visual effects - through the power of laser effects the guillotine is "functional" and functioning...). Next there is a hallway flanked by two rows of marching soldiers, one for the allied armies (left) and the other for the French (right) and you can march with them towards Napoleon's "camp", on the eve of the great battle, where you meet the Emperor standing, with one foot supported on a chair, leaning with a frown over the maps and battle plans. Afterwards you accompany Napoleon while he gets on a carriage (also recreated with today's laser technology) and you "fall" in the midst of the battle, in a room armed

with 3D glasses, where on a panoramical screen of 25 m you are hit in the cheek by the hot breath of a horse that extends his nose towards you: you are right in the middle of the battle and for 15 minutes all your senses are tensed to the maximum (visual, audio and olfactory effects are all around you). Stunned by the effects and the semi-darkness you go out the door and find out what happened after the battle with each of the main actors and you go into a room of maps that recorded Europe's political geography in its post-conflict dynamic.

Among the effects of organising the *Bicentennial* we could highlight: a growth in the number of tourists (over 300 000 visitors, in comparison with 150 000 an year before), most of them from the Brussels area, Flanders and France, followed by tourists from the Walloon region, Great Britain, Germany and China, an increase in national and international visibility, clarifying the image and identity of the Waterloo site etc.

Conclusions

Place branding emerged from the need to understand a manifesting reality, which could no longer be captured with other concepts. For example, place marketing appeared as a solution imposed by the necessity to solve problems connected with the planning of geographical space, of the place itself, which no longer offered solutions consistent with the new development visions and philosophies set by the local authorities. Marketing strategies were used to reduce the inhabitants' resistance, which most of the time developed certain emotions and attachments towards the respective place, which became the object of a new territorial development policy. However, it was not all about sales and promotions. The place was not a product, the authorities were not a private company and the inhabitants were not simply clients. The image in the inhabitants' minds had to be reconciled with the official one desired by the authorities. A possible solution was the new concept that emerged in the last decade of the 20th century, respectively place branding.

From a "product" to a "place" or from "marketing" to "geography". The transfer from a product to a place was not a simple translation from product branding to place branding. Unlike a product, the place is fixed, unique, complex and it is the object of multiple interests having the power to generate a confuse image in the minds of the residents or tourists. With a bicephalous root, one oriented towards marketing and the other towards social geography, *place branding* started to individualise itself as an emerging concept when attention was shifted from the product, the physical place, towards the human perceptions of it, a perception which generates a certain emotional and identity charge (meanings, direction) and which, in turn generates attitudes and behaviours associated with the product, respectively the place.

Place branding does not mean a corporate rhetoric applied to the geographical space. Geographical analyses take into account place branding in several ways: the role it plays in decision making processes for intervening and correcting a certain model of geographical space planning, so as a place management instrument or as an instrument used in the economic revival process, functional and semantic reconversion of a territory, "captive" from a geographical point of view.

Brand image is different from the image a place naturally generates in people's minds (mental place). As such, place branding can be defined as the deliberate, premeditated process of correcting/optimising the natural image (mental place).

Waterloo is an example of a place which meets the theoretical conditions to generate an independent brand, as an image of a unique combination of elements - association with an important historical event, with a symbolic-structure ("Lion's Mound") and with the organisation of historically themed cultural events (e.g.: *Waterloo Bicentennial 1815-2015*).

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