

ADDRESSING MULTIPLE TARGET AUDIENCES THROUGH THE PLACE BRAND SLOGAN

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ABSTRACT – The paper provides an affirmative answer to a question frequently asked in place branding circles – whether or not a single place brand slogan can target multiple audiences at once. After reviewing the literature on the topic and some best practices at international level, the paper focuses on a case study – that of the Maramureş County’s slogan. The analysis explains the slogan, points out why it is relevant to all targeted markets and underlines how it can be used both to derive further messages, more adapted to the selected audiences, and to identify project ideas, that would make the place brand more operational. The paper integrates the results of a consultancy project into the mainstream academic research and offers an example of how theoretical dilemmas can be successfully answered on the ground.

Keywords: place brand, slogan, multiple target audiences, Maramureş County

INTRODUCTION

Background of the paper – the challenge

In his ground-breaking book, Pike identifies the area of *brand positioning* as one of the main research gaps in the field of place branding. In his opinion, questions such as:

“Will one brand positioning slogan suit the needs of all markets? Or does market heterogeneity demand consideration of the design of different themes?”

still need more and better answers from scholars and practitioners alike – to quote him, brand positioning remains an area *“in which DMOs face practical opportunities, challenges and constraints and would benefit from more published research”* (Pike, 2008, pp. 4-5).

Objectives of the paper – the answer

The main objective of this paper is to provide an answer to Pike’s questions through the means of a case study.

For this, we chose to discuss the results of a consultancy project that we were involved in, meant to deliver a *Prospective study on promoting and branding the Maramureş County, Romania*. This project, while not unique on a national scale (other counties have a brand of their own, as well), was somewhat unique in terms of ambition because it aimed to create a single brand that would not only reflect the diversity of a *“land of multiple lands”* (or, as the French say it, *“pays des pays”*²), but would also target multiple audiences at the same time, through a single slogan and a single logo.³

This paper reflects the lessons learned through designing such a brand – and, thus, contributes, in a small way, to bridging the gap between consultancy work and the academic literature. In our

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² This concept can be found on the tourism promotion website of the Auvergne Region: <http://www.auvergne-tourisme.info/nos-destinations/pays-d-auvergne-211-1.html>

³ In this article, we decided to focus solely on the slogan, in order to keep the research within the acceptable limits for publication – it is, nevertheless, our intention to follow up on this article with a similar research on the topic of addressing multiple target audiences through the same place brand logo.

experience, many valuable consultancy projects deliver too little to the scientific community, for several reasons:

- they tend to go unnoticed, as they are not published via traditional academic channels; so, even if they are available online, on the websites of local public authorities, they fly under the radar of scholars;
- most of the time, they are not translated into any foreign language – which limits their audience to those understanding the language in which the consultancy report is written;
- a good consultancy report is a concise one, delivering the essentials to the local public authority, with a focus on suggesting a tailored solution to a specific problem; as such, detailed theoretical expos are usually left out, which drastically reduces the appeal of such reports to scientists.

It is somewhat of a novel approach to disseminate the output of a consultancy project by casting it into the mould of a research paper – and, as such, we hope it will set a precedent, encouraging more consultants to share their work with the academia, in a format that is relevant to it.

METHODS

To reach this objective, the paper is structured in two parts:

- a *focused literature review*, scanning mainly for references that address both concepts of *place brand slogan* and *multiple target audiences* – and especially their interplay;
- an analysis of a *case study*, in order to prove that place brand slogans can, indeed, successfully target multiple audiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION - Part 1: Literature review

The concepts: place brand slogan

Much of the place branding literature downplays the importance of slogans (and/or taglines). For instance, Zenker and Braun, while not even using the term *slogan* in their paper, describe *communication*, in general, as merely a component of the *communicated place brand*, which, in turn, is just a component of the *perceived place brand*:

“Place Brand is a network of associations in the consumers’ mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place’s stakeholders and the overall place design. Essential for this definition is that a brand is not in reality the communicated expression or the ‘place physics’, but the perception of those expressions in the mind of the target group(s)” (Zenker, Braun, 2010, p. 3).

This minimalizing approach often comes into conflict with demands from places in need of a brand, as Allan admits it in an interview, discussing his perspective on place branding:

“Now, in 2016, that situation has changed significantly, although on a regular basis I am sent requests for proposals for a new brand for places that are focussed on the design of a new logo and a more-catchy tagline. There will always be places that are playing catch-up in this respect” (Allan, 2016).

It is, therefore, common to see scholars and practitioners warn against overrating the importance of slogans:

“This misunderstanding has misled most contemporary city branding practices into the exclusive use of promotional tools such as slogans and logos or, at best, advertising campaigns. However, a strategic and responsible view on city branding includes many more areas of activities” (Ashworth, Kavaratzis, 2010, p. 43).

Still, there are also a few authors who stand out as proponents of place brand slogans. So, for those who think slogans matter - what are they, and what is their role?

A broad definition comes from Keller, Apéria and Georgson, who describe them as *“short phrases that communicate descriptive or persuasive information about a brand. [...] Slogans can function as useful ‘hooks’ or ‘handles’, to help consumers grasp the meaning of a brand in terms of what it is and what makes it special”* (Keller, Apéria, Georgson, 2008, p. 150).

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A more detailed approach can be found on the website of the American Marketing Association, where several experts explain the difference between *taglines* and *slogans*:

- “*taglines tend to be about the company, whereas slogans tend to be more about the products, the marketplace, the consumer and a need met*” (Quick, quoted by Soat, 2015);
- “*slogans are more ubiquitous and appear in campaign commercials, on packaging and in display ads, whereas taglines are used more sparingly in public-facing messaging, generally reserved for corporate communications and brand-building advertising*” (Carr-Rodriguez, quoted by Soat, 2015);
- “*slogans are designed to be that sticky, catchy repeatable copy or phrase that actually then starts to evolve into songs, visual mnemonics and tremendous shortcuts*” (Mills, quoted by Soat, 2015).⁴

Finally, useful insights come from definitions that focus on how slogans are produced, definitions that can be divided into two categories.

1. The place brand slogan is an essential *brand promise*

From this perspective, “*the brand slogan is a concise expression of the brand promise*” (Panasonic Corporation, 2016), which, in turn, is defined as “*an articulation of what target customers can expect from their experience with an organisation. It describes the experience and the value that this represents to the customer*” (Smith+Co, 2013, p. 2). As such, the place brand slogan captures, in a few carefully chosen words, the essential experience a territory promises to its customers.

An example of this approach can be seen in the way Ethiopia distils its brand promise into a slogan:

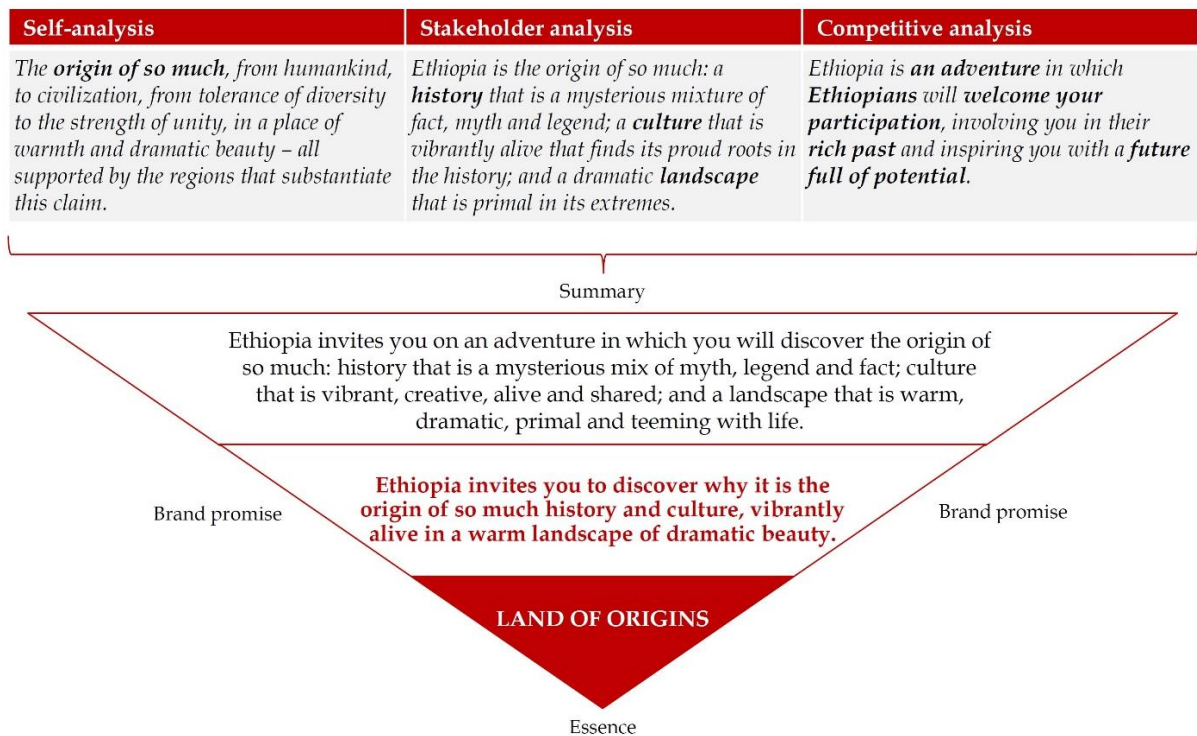


Figure 1. Distilling the brand promise into a slogan – the case of Ethiopia

Source: Ethiopian Tourism Organization, 2016, p. 5

⁴ According to these distinctions, most place brand slogans would actually be place brand taglines; nevertheless, in this paper we will opt for calling both categories *slogans*, as this is the wider used terminology.

2. The place brand slogan is an essential *brand proposition*

According to Keller, Apéria and Georgson: “slogans can help to reinforce the brand positioning and desired point of difference” (Keller, Apéria, Georgson, 2008, p. 152), a remark later developed by Henthorne, George and Miller, who argue that:

“In essence, the marketer is seeking to create a uniquely positive brand image – ideally, a brand image that can be captured in a single memorable slogan, (e.g. “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas”) (...) In any case, USPs and the slogans designed to capture them are central to many destinations’ branding efforts” (Henthorne, George, Miller, 2016, p. 263).

To sum up, a good place brand slogan should incorporate a promise of a unique experience, that differentiates and promotes the territory to its target audience(s). It is our firm belief that, if a slogan manages to do this, it becomes a vital vehicle to carry the brand message.

So yes, choosing the right slogan matters. A lot.⁵

The concepts: multiple target audiences⁶

To quote Kotler, Haider and Rein: “a place can try to attract any of four broad target markets: (1) visitors, (2) residents and workers, (3) business and industry and (4) export markets” (Kotler, Haider, Rein, 1993, p. 24).

However, as Zenker and Braun note, when setting up a place branding strategy, “the groups actually targeted (...) are much more specific and complex” (Zenker, Braun, 2010, p. 2). For instance, *tourists* is a very broad concept, that covers a lot of potential market segments, such as business tourists, religious tourists or medical tourists.

Back to the challenge: answers from scholars

In this context, can a single slogan target multiple audiences? That is - can we identify a single experience that would be relevant and unique for visitors, residents and workers, business and industry and export markets alike? The few scholars who answered these questions gave a negative answer, explicitly or implicitly.

Kotler, Haider and Rein (1993), for example, imply that multiple messages are required to successfully address multiple markets. For instance, they suggest that assessing and designing the place’s image should be done separately for each target market (as each has its own image about the place, structured around different dimensions) and they dedicate separate chapters in their book for specific strategies to communicate with each target market (seen as different in terms of needs and facing different competition).

A more explicit answer comes from Zenker and Braun, who, while introducing their *Brand Centre* concept, make the following comments:

“As already mentioned, the brand perception differs strongly between target groups, because of different knowledge levels of the target audience (Brakus et al., 2009) and the different demands for a place (e.g. Zenker, 2009). In conformity with the social identity theory, for example, the external target audience (out-group) shows a much more common and stereotypical association set with a place, while the internal target audience (in-group) has a more diverse and heterogeneous place brand perception (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Zenker et

⁵ A quick comment is in order now: while most definitions we quoted talk about *slogans* (in plural), a place brand usually has only one single slogan at any given moment in time. This single statement can, nevertheless, be replaced by multiple *themes* – one for each targeted audience. See Kotler, Haider and Rein (1993), for more details on the topic.

⁶ Some papers use the concept of *target audiences*, while other talk about *target markets*. More often than not, they are used in similar contexts and with a similar meaning – still, it would seem place branding papers are more likely to use the term *audiences* (drawn from communication studies), while place marketing papers are more likely to use the term *markets* (drawn from marketing). We opted for *audiences*, but occasionally we will use *markets* as well.

al., forthcoming). An equal brand communication for both target groups would disregard the complexity of a place and probably fail. For an advanced customer-focused place brand management, a diverse brand architecture is needed to match a specific target audience with a specific place sub-brand. Unfortunately, this customer-focused view – an essential part of the general marketing discussion (Webster, 1992) – is not yet common sense in the public sector (Buurma, 2001), nor in place marketing practice” (Zenker and Braun, 2010, p. 3).

Back to the challenge: answers from best practices

Moving on to the answers provided by place branding practice, there is one outstanding example of how a brand *can* simultaneously address multiple target audiences – Mississauga, Canada.

The city’s brand book explains the brand promise, then insists on the idea that it is relevant to all targeted audiences - which include *City employees, newcomers, businesses and employers, residents and youth and students*. To prove this, the brand promise is translated into specific *benefits* for each segment (The Corporation of the City of Mississauga, 2014, pp. 12-20).

Below, we attached together two selected print-screens from the city’s brand book, to show how the brand promise can be translated into specific messages for targeted audiences (we opted for showing the sample messages for two such audiences - *newcomers* and *businesses and employers*):



Figure 2. A brand promise relevant for multiple target audiences – the case of Mississauga
Source: The Corporation of the City of Mississauga, 2014, Shaping Our Brand Story, pp. 12-20

Furthermore, discussing the three *brand ingredients* that make up their brand promise, the Final Report of the Brand Research Project for the City of Mississauga makes the following comments:

“Brand ingredients are the attributes of a place that are most important to the intended audience, be that residents, businesses, investors, students, visitors, or a combination of all of them. It is the foundation of a clear and compelling message that a place wants to communicate as part of its brand story. To be effective, a brand story should have two to three brand ingredients to ensure a focused message.

Communication can, and should, be targeted and positioned to address various audiences, but the core elements of the brand story will remain the same. The ingredients aren’t intended to be used word-for-word in marketing and communication, but rather as a guide” (The Corporation of the City of Mississauga, 2014, Our Future Mississauga. Growing Our Brand - Final Report, p. 34).

This example shows that addressing multiple target audiences through the same brand promise is possible. Still, on a closer look, we see that this brand promise is not distilled into a slogan – a

concept used neither in the brand book, nor in the Final Report. Therefore, in order to answer Pike’s questions thoroughly, we shall analyse another case study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION - Part 2: The Case Study

The *Prospective study on promoting and branding the Maramureş County*, Romania includes a concise snapshot of the county’s main brand ingredients⁷:

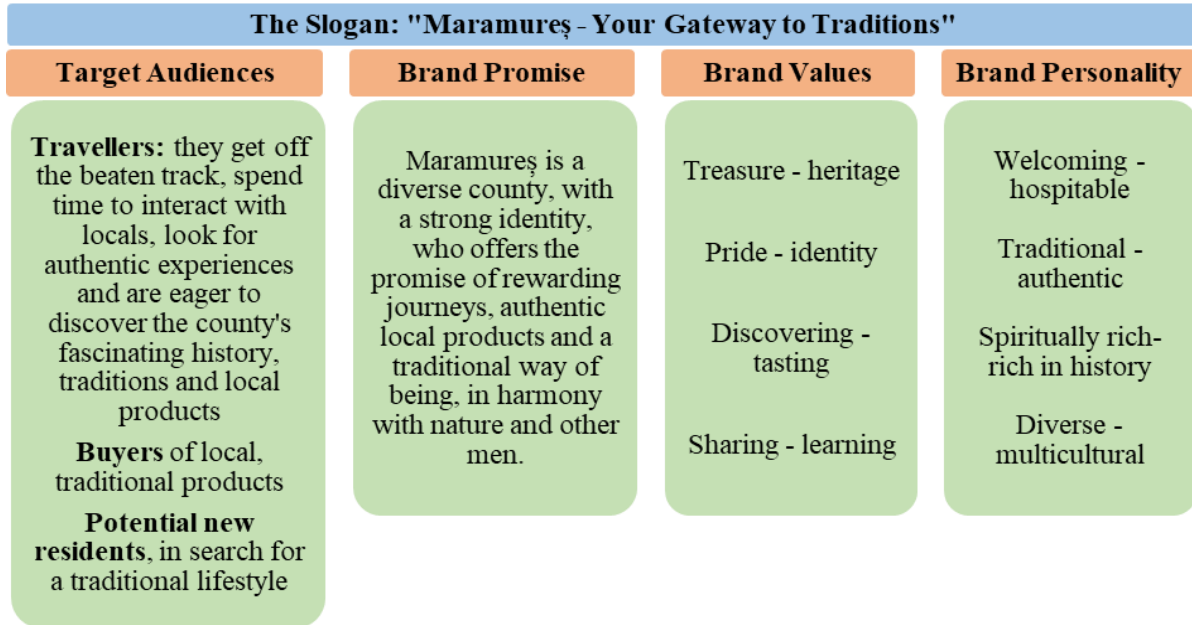


Figure 3. A concise snapshot of the Maramureş County’s main brand ingredients
 Source: Maramureş County Council, 2016, p. 44

Looking at the slogan through the lenses of the reviewed literature, we can make several comments on it:

- this slogan is descriptive, catchy and does function as a hook, making it easier to grasp the *essential* Maramureş - as a traditional land;
- the slogan lends itself easily to visual representations (making the task of finding a suitable logo much easier to accomplish);
- the slogan captures the essence of the brand promise and is in line with the brand values and the brand personality;
- while *traditions* are not something to be found only in Maramureş⁸ (in fact, the other northern counties of Romania have preserved their traditions as well and use them actively for place branding), the explicit reference to the “wooden gates” – which are a symbol of this land, makes the slogan a useful tool for brand positioning.

As far as the target audiences are concerned, we can see that the slogan (and the other brand ingredients as well) target three audiences – *travellers*, *buyers of local products* and *potential new*

⁷ As this paper is in English, we will only make references to the English version of the brand ingredients, which might not be 100% identical with the original, Romanian version (traduttore, traditore...). For instance, we took the liberty to make small adjustments to the (unofficial) English translations included in this paper, so as to keep *the meaning* of the brand ingredients, rather than their *form*. For the official Romanian version, please consult the original study, available on the Maramureş County Council’s webpage: <http://www.cjmaramures.ro/legislativ/hotarari/hotararea-nr-235-din-28-11-2016>.

⁸ Although, one could argue that the traditions kept in Maramureş are not only genuine, but also extremely picturesque and even unique, making them particularly valuable for the intended target markets.

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residents. The study does not include sample messages for these three selected audiences, but does suggest several possible ways to translate the slogan, both into more targeted communications *and* into projects that would make the brand more operational. For instance, the study makes reference to:

- **THE RELEVANCE OF THE SLOGAN FOR TRAVELLERS:**
 - linking the slogan to more targeted messages:
 - *“the slogan makes an explicit reference to two of the most valuable tourist attractions of this county – its wooden gates (which symbolize access to an enchanted, ancient land) and its traditions (including the county’s authentic folk costumes, folk dances, folk music, religious holidays and ceremonies, crafts, foods and local architecture etc.) (...)”*
 - *the gateway also suggests both an interface with a different, traditional world, and the starting point of a rewarding journey of discovery”;*
 - linking the slogan to potential brand-on projects:
 - *“the gateway, as interface, could be made more operational through a mobile app for travelers, “opening the gate” to all the traditions that are to be visited, discovered and enjoyed (...)*
 - *the slogan could easily be turned into a quality label for local tourism organizations – guaranteeing, for instance, that a guest house with this label has traditional architecture and furniture, offers traditional food and traditional entertainment etc., thus offering a guarantee that the traveler staying there overnight will enjoy an authentic experience”* (Maramureş County Council, 2016, p. 43).
- **THE RELEVANCE OF THE SLOGAN FOR BUYERS OF LOCAL PRODUCTS:**
 - linking the slogan to more targeted messages:
 - *“the slogan uses the word “traditions” – which can easily be extended to cover a wide variety of local products”*
 - linking the slogan to potential brand-on projects:
 - *“the gateway, as interface, could be made more operational through a portal for selling traditional products (setting up a short food supply chain, for example). The portal would cover mainly the national market, but, translated in English, it could also offer former travelers a chance to enjoy, from home, the local products they fell in love with during their trips to Maramureş (...)*
 - *the slogan could easily be turned into a quality label, implemented through an agricultural quality scheme – guaranteeing, for instance, that a food product has been prepared according to a traditional recipe, and, thus, offering a guarantee that the buyer will enjoy a true Maramureş dish”* (Maramureş County Council, 2016, p. 43).
- **THE RELEVANCE OF THE SLOGAN FOR POTENTIAL NEW RESIDENTS**
 - linking the slogan to more targeted messages:
 - *“backed up by relevant storytelling and real life examples, “traditions” could suggest a traditional, healthy, peaceful, eco-lifestyle, among communities of welcoming locals*
 - *something that might be appealing to the stressed urban dwellers, who seek an escape from crowded, polluted, stressful cities”* (Maramureş County Council, 2016, p. 44).
 - linking the slogan to potential brand-on projects (this section is newly added, solely in this paper, as a result of feed-back received after publishing the original study):
 - the gateway, as *interface*, could be made more operational through a portal for real estate agents – as a way to promote offers of traditional houses;
 - the slogan could easily be turned into a quality label for rural communities – guaranteeing, for instance, that a village still preserves old houses, people still dress up in folk costumes on a daily basis, and the overall lifestyle of the community has not been breached by aggressive modernization – thus guaranteeing to a potential new resident an immersion into a traditional world.

CONCLUSION

The Maramureş County case study proves that a slogan can be a useful tool to carry the brand message to multiple target audiences and to derive projects that would make the place brand operational.

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