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A ‘bottom-up’ place marketing initiative: Destination Lund Sweden

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Abstract

While New York Times and Vogue described Lund and the southernmost region in Sweden as an undiscovered pearl waiting to be explored, the local tourism office of Lund asked tourists to go to visit places outside Lund. This is not due to a huge and steady flow of tourists visiting the city of Lund. Lund is one of the oldest town in Scandinavia, with a rich and fascinating history. This paper aims at discussing the citizen initiative to place market the city of Lund. Destination Lund can be seen as a ‘bottom-up’ response by residents in 2016 to the politically controlled local tourism office’s attempts to involve residents in ‘top-down’ activities and dismantling of the city brand. A unique material has been collected through participating observation. By using smart tourism technologies and the fact that many of the members are experienced travellers, a set of downloadable material for smart phones and tablets in several languages have been developed: maps, guides, films and useful links. All material is free of charge on the Facebook page and at the blog. The local tourism office run by the municipality oppose – and even combat – these efforts, as they want the tourists to come to their office and buy their printed products; their focus is on the surrounding countryside.

Several lessons can be learned from Lund. The locals are the best ambassadors for a place; Kotler is right indeed. Know-how and enthusiasm can achieve more in place marketing than the official tourism office with a budget. Moreover, the third sector can play an important role in place marketing activities. A key to successful place marketing lays in a good product and to master marketing through social media.

I am grateful for constructive comments on an earlier version of this paper by Daniel Rauhut, Jonny Andersson and the anonymous referees of the conference.

Full paper

Lund is one of the oldest towns in Scandinavia, founded around 990 A.D. (Cinthio 2018), and it played a key role in the Christianisation of the Nordic and Baltic regions (Skansjö 2008). The magnificent 12th century Romanesque cathedral is still a landmark. During the Middle Ages, Lund was an administrative, commercial and religious metropolis in the Nordic countries (Carelli 2012). The first ‘University College’ in the Nordic countries, Studium Generale Lundensis, operated in
Lund 1438-1536 (Blom & Wahlöö 1999); the Cathedral School, founded 1085 A.D., is still running and is the oldest school in Scandinavia (Lunds kommun 2018). The University of Lund was founded 1666, presently a top-100 university in the world. Today Lund is a R&D cluster for biotech (Medicon valley) and the IT-sector, and it hosts the European research centre ESS (Oredsson 2012; Wetterberg 2017b).

After the Battle of Lund in 1676, Denmark lost its eastern province to Sweden forever (Wetterberg 2017a). During 1716-1718, Lund served as Sweden’s unofficial capital (Skansjö 2012). Still, Lund is an arena for high-level politics. In early 2018, Lund hosted a UN Security Council meeting (Svt 2018) and in 2016, on the 500 years' celebration of the Reformation, the Pope visited Lund and the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation finally made peace (Vatican News 2016).

The cultural life is vivid in Lund. Måns Zelmerlöv, the 2015 Eurovision Song Contest winner, is from Lund as is Timbuktu (Wikipedia 2018). Among others, the artists Gösta Adrian-Nilsson (GAN), Oskar Reuterswärd and Carl Fredrik Hill were from Lund as the contemporary Mats Milhamre is (Wikipedia 2018; Art by Milhamre 2018). A number of famous Swedish authors come from Lund or have worked in Lund, e.g. Frans G. Bengtsson, Hjalmar Gullberg, Fritjof Nilsson Piraten, Viktor Rydeberg, August Strindberg, Esaias Tegnér and Per Wahlöö (Kulturportalen Lund 2018).

While e.g. New York Times (2016) and Vogue (2017) describe Lund and the southernmost region in Sweden as an undiscovered pearl waiting to be explored, the local tourism office of Lund advices tourists to go to see the countryside around Lund (Visit Lund 2018). This is not due to a huge and steady flow of tourists visiting the city of Lund. The brave tourists who defy the local tourist office’s advice only receive information to visit the Botanical Garden and exhibitions of obscure artists in the municipal art gallery. Needless to say, the gallery is usually empty of visitors.

In 2016, some citizens in Lund reacted against the dismantling of the place brand by the local tourism office, first in a Facebook group, and later in the association “Destination Lund Sweden” 2017. That residents raise their voice in favour of an increased tourism has been identified in previous studies (Andriotis & Vaughan 2003; Zhang et al. 2006; Kavaratzis 2012; Braun et al. 2013; McComb et al. 2017). In theory, the best ambassadors of a place or destination are the residents. To include the residents views is important for place marketing to succeed (Giles et al. 2013; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Braun et al. 2010; Messley et al., 2010; Zenker & Petersen, 2010). If the residents are satisfied with where they live, it has to be a nice place (Rauhut Kompani & Rauhut 2016). Tourists, business travellers etc. are however also ambassadors of a place or destination, so what they think may affect the attractiveness of a place or destination (Kotler et al 1999; Simpson & Siguaw 2008). These target groups are underexplored in Lund.

The concept smart tourism refers to the use of modern ICT-solutions e.g. to spread information on destinations and places, to facilitate travel planning and to enhance travel satisfaction (Gretzel et al 2015; Huang et al 2017; Yoo et al. 2017). Digital technologies opens up the possibilities for collaboration among the place stakeholders and their active participation in place marketing process which is needed to achieve successful place and destination marketing results (Huang et al. 2017; Jovicic 2016). Destination Lund Sweden developed a set of free downloadable material for smart phones and tablets in several languages: maps, guides, films and useful links (Destination Lund 2018). The local tourism office run by the municipality oppose these efforts, as they want the tourists to come to their office and buy their printed products. Although improvements have been made regarding available digital information, the focus is on the surrounding countryside (Visit Lund 2018).

This paper aims at discussing the citizen initiative to place market Lund. Three questions will be addressed: (1) How has smart tourism technologies changed the possibilities for the third sector¹ to be active in place marketing? (2) Why has Destination Lund Sweden managed to achieve such success in a relatively short time? Finally, (3) Why is it important with a stakeholder’s collaboration during the place marketing process?

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Over the last decades, significant amounts of research and scientific findings on the city residents’ role and perceptions have been made.

¹ The third sector comprise non-governmental and non-profit-making organisations or associations, including charities, voluntary and community groups, cooperatives, etc.
The place marketing theory and practices display the changing role of city residents in place marketing activities and strategies. Residents were considered as city customers before, with the most important attitudes such as customer satisfaction, satisfaction with a place of living, intention to stay, attachment, city attractiveness and loyalty (Insch & Florek 2008; Zenker & Petersen 2010; Zenker & Rütter 2014). Today, residents are considered one of many stakeholders actively involved in place marketing and branding process (Kotler et al 1999; Hankinson 2004; Kavaratzis 2012; Giles et al. 2013; Rauhut Kompaniets & Rauhut 2016; Herežniak 2017). The stakeholders-oriented approach in place marketing and branding process is fundamental for successful results. In theory, it is more likely to achieve success in city marketing if the residents are not considered important from a customer-oriented approach, but with an involvement orientation and participation practices (Hankinson 2004; Baker 2007; Houghton & Stevens 2011; Kavaratzis 2012; Zhang et al. 2006).

It is not only the residents’ “customer era” when they “were only one of the target groups of the place marketing efforts” (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2008, p. 162) which is gone. So is the top-down centred policymaking in place marketing not considering the stakeholders’ involvement and engagement (Houghton & Stevens 2011, p. 48; Kavaratzis 2012; Jamhawi & Hajjahjah 2017). Nowadays residents are the main participants in all stages of place marketing and branding process (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2008; Kavaratzis 2012; Braun et al. 2013; Rauhut Kompaniets & Rauhut, 2016). They are co-partners, co-creators and co-producers of a whole place product, services and policies (Warnaby 2009; Braun et al. 2013), ambassadors for their place brand (Kotler et al. 1999; Simpson & Siguaw 2008; Braun et al. 2010; Rauhut Kompaniets & Rauhut 2013; Taecharungroj 2016), and city citizens, actively participating and contributing to the place marketing process (Braun et al. 2013; Zenker & Rütter 2014; Taecharungroj 2016).

The bottom-up approach, with stakeholders as core drivers, is seen as a key to the successful results of place marketing process (Simpson & Siguaw 2008; Jamhawi & Hajjahjah 2017). Kavaratzis (2012, p.10) argues that “[...] stakeholders should be thought of as active groups of people to be motivated towards defining their own meaning of the place brand instead of passive groups of people to be consulted on this meaning”.

To what extent is place marketing sensitive to who is doing it? Marketing of a place based on political-administrative interests present a ‘desired’ image the political and administrative leaders in a certain place want to spread (Kavaratzis 2012; Holcomb 1999), and e.g. residents and tourists have to accept this image. This kind of place marketing can be considered as a top-down marketing of a place. Moreover, commercial interests, e.g. a travel agent boosting the image of a certain resort place, do top-down marketing. Also residents, business travellers and tourists place market a city or place (Simpson & Siguaw 2008). They have sometimes a different image of a place compared to the image of top-down place marketing. This ‘practical’ experience of a place generates a bottom-up image of a place. As we noted earlier in this theoretical discussion, there is a consensus of the importance of involving residents, business travellers and other tourists in place marketing.

The rapid development of ICT, internet and social media have revolutionised the tourism sector from both a destinations and tourist perspective (Buhalas & Law 2008; Xiang & Gretzel 2010; Chung & Koo 2015; Li et al. 2017; Yoo et al. 2017) and brought “smartness” into tourism destinations (Jovicic 2016). ICT has also changed a tourists’ behavior in searching and purchasing the travel information. Tourists now are less loyal to package tours; they are smart, more knowledgeable and demanding, prefer to manage their vacations and holidays by themselves (Yoo et al. 2017; Jovicic 2016). Hence, places and destinations must master social media and the smart tourism aspect to reach their potential target groups if they plan to become successful in attracting tourists and visitors (Xiang et al. 2008; Li et al. 2017).

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The empirical material is based upon literature, internet sources, documents and participating observation. While the first three sources need no further explanation, the latter does. Participating observation is a methodology commonly used in anthropological and ethnological studies. “The most distinctive opportunity [of participating observation] is related to the investigator’s ability to gain access to events or groups that are otherwise inaccessible to scientific investigation /.../ Another distinct opportunity is the ability to perceive reality from the viewpoint of someone ‘inside’ the case study rather than external to it” (Yin 1990:92-93). The participating observer is a primary data source by
him/herself as s/he interprets what is going on around him/her (Robson 2002). The most significant disadvantage with this methodology is that the participating observer can be biased in his/her views because of being a participant (Yin 1990). On the other hand, no research in social science is truly unbiased and ‘neutral’ in a normative sense (Holme & Solvang 2010).

This study will use a mixed methods methodology, in which both qualitative and quantitative sources are analysed. By combining different kinds of material, a fuller analysis can be made of complex situations and processes (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998). A mixed methods methodology is likely to produce new knowledge as it approaches the empirical material in a broader way (Bryman 2010). In marketing research, this is also a standard research design (Kent 2007). Given that the empirical material consists of literature, internet sources, documents and participating observation, this appears a reasonable methodological choice.

How can the influence of Destination Lund Sweden be measured? Measuring the output in terms of effect, results, impact etc. is not possible at this stage. The organisation has just existed for just more than a year. After ca five years it is however possible to evaluate how Destination Lund has changed tourism in Lund.

A ‘BOTTOM-UP’ REACTION

The municipal tourism office considers the sights worth displaying for tourist to Lund are the beautify countryside outside Lund, but not Lund itself (Meeting notes 2017). At first sight, this appears odd, but the local municipal tourist offices are a part of the local public administration, and hence highly politicised. Rauhut Kompaniets & Rauhut (2013) found that 75 municipalities northern Sweden focused upon promoting their beautiful countryside instead of identifying their unique selling points. Promoting the ‘beautiful countryside’ is a result of benchmarking towards other municipalities’ place marketing activities; they just copy strategies from each other. The rationale for highlighting a relatively unexciting countryside, as the municipal tourism office of Lund does, instead of the unique selling points of a city with many cultural and historic treasures, is related to a simple benchmarking exercise towards the surrounding municipalities of Lund.

During the early autumn 2016, five private residents in Lund expressed their dissatisfaction with how the city is promoted on a Facebook community page. Suddenly, the number had grown to 30 and a separate community was formed – Lund’s tourist association. The common denominator in the dissatisfaction was how the cultural and historic treasures of Lund were ignored in the promotion of the city. A core group of the community started Destination Lund Sweden in January 2017; one communication’s expert, one IT programmer and one marketing expert. Today the community Destination Lund Sweden has more than 1,000 followers and about 10 active

(unpaid) members. Destination Lund / Lund’s tourist association is a third sector organisation and all the members are volunteers working without any salary (Kniivilä 2017; Magnusson 2017; Rumpf 2017; Stierna 2017).

The first activity Destination Lund organised in August 2017 was a guided biking tour around the battlefield of the Battle of Lund. As a completely new organisation, which only communicated through social media, Destination Lund hoped for 10-15 participants – 50 showed up! (Destination Lund 2017). During the summer 2018, the number of persons listing themselves to participate in this guided tour is three times as high as the maximum number of participants for the guided tour! The Swedish nationwide tourist association STF reviewed the quality of the guided Battle of Lund tour as excellent (STF Sydsvåra Skåne 2018). A free downloadable map of the tour is available on internet and so is a short guide (Destination Lund 2018).

Destination Lund has not only tried to identify unique selling points of Lund, but also potential target groups. The municipal tourism office targets Swedish, Danish and German tourists alone (Meeting notes 2017). To increase the number of foreign tourists, Destination Lund did two 15 minutes long promotion films about Lund in Russian. The films were broadcasted in Russian travel program “Tour insider” on

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1 In a recent appraisal and review of how place marketing activities are measured by Rauhut Kompaniets and Rauhut (2018), the findings indicate that a majority of the measurements are non-scientific and not evidence-based. The common quasi-experimental methods and the use of the difference between an ex ante and ex post evaluation in place marketing are targets for severe criticism for being imprecise and inefficient. The normal thing to do would however be to evaluate the impact of Destination Lund with these imprecise and inefficient methods. This attempt is declined in this paper.
Figure 1
Screenshots of the Battle of Lund map and guide

Slaget vid Lund den 4 december 1676
Med cykel – Så nära du kan komma!

Destination Lund

Figure 2
Screenshots from the two films on Lund
Figure 3
Screenshot from the city map

Figure 4
Screenshots from the compilation of guides and Instagram

Destination Lund
Ideell turistinformation om Lund

https://www.facebook.com/SvenskaDestinationLund/
https://www.facebook.com/DestinationLund/
Lunds bästa turistinformation

Destination Lund
Ideell turistinformation om Lund

Lunds bästa turistinformation
Siberian TV (Tour insider 2017a; Tour insider 2017b). Several Russian bus trips operators to Europe had a four hours stopover in Lund; now they have extended the stay in Lund to two full days due to an increased demand of their customer (Forum Tourtrans-Voyage 2018). Very positive reports of these tourists have been posted on internet, which has further increased the demand for exploring the city of Lund and its cultural and historic treasures (Interview 2018). The aim is to translate these two films on Lund into Swedish, English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Korean and Chinese. The Russian voice track will be replaced with voice tracks in these languages, and the films will be available for free on Youtube.

In order to maximise the experience of Lund, Destination Lund has also developed a set of maps and guides for smart phones and tablets (figure 3). The digital map of sights and attractions, practical information (ATMs, toilets, bike stations etc.) aims at visiting professionals and business travellers who have a few hours to spend before or after meetings to explore Lund’s cultural and historic treasures. By clicking on an icon on the map, a pop-up window displays further information of the object together with a photo, history, links, opening hours etc. The number of downloads of the map indicates a demand and that this product most likely has reached its target group.

A series of downloadable guides, on historical buildings and sights in Lund have also been produced. These guides contain a short history of these sights and historical buildings, photos and a map on how to find them.

The local tourism office of Lund called Destination Lund for a meeting in November 2017. During this meeting, the tourism director called Destination Lund to dissolve and stop with all activities. This request was based upon, although only implicitly expressed, a fear for competition (Meeting notes 2017). It took only six months before a handful of unpaid experts, without any budget and resources, outperformed a local tourism office with full-time staff and a regular budget.

A dialogue with other third sector organisations begun during the autumn 2017. Thomandersällskap och Uppåkras vånförening are worth mentioning in this context. The association for local enterprise host frequent meetings to which relevant public and private actors are invited to. Destination Lund participates at these meetings and are active in networking there since autumn 2017. Kulturen (an outdoor historical museum), the Historical Museum and the International Citizen Hub Lund have a pending attitude towards Destination Lund and a cooperation will most likely emerge in the future. Destination Lund tried to establish a cooperation with a Church of Sweden, but the Church of Sweden does not consider the magnificent cathedral of Lund as a tourist attraction (Meeting notes 2018b). Still, thousands of tourists come to Lund just to see the cathedral.

During the spring 2018, several shops and galleries have contacted Destination Lund to inquire if it could be possible to be mentioned in the free downloadable maps and guides by Destination Lund. Furthermore, Destination Lund has entered an interesting cooperation with Lundaspelen. The organisers of Lundaspelen would like accompanying family members to have an interesting experience while in Lund during the handball tournament. The products produced by Destination Lund have made an impression on them (Meeting notes 2018).

DISCUSSION

As the municipal tourist office is a part of the local public administration, it is governed by the politics of the ruling majority in the city hall. Hence, the place marketing activities are politically decided and are therefore not a result of a professional marketing strategy. If the ruling politicians wish to market Lund by benchmarking and by copying the neighbouring municipalities, the administration has to comply with this decision - also if it in practical terms means a dismantling of the city brand.

When the local tourist office wants to include the residents into marketing or brand promoting activities, these are decided by the local administration. These activities can be considered ‘top-down’. Since the place marketing is made by the public administration, they have to be evaluated. The rationale for evaluations varies. The two most common are (1) to legitimise the policy of a ruling majority and (2) improve the activity/programme in different ways (Vedung 2010). If a programme/activity is highly political, it becomes politically difficult to point at failure – may it be lack of cost efficiency, effect, participation etc. The more political a programme/activity is, the more likely it is that it shows success (Premfors 1989). The evaluations of the activities by the municipal tourism office report an outstanding performance and success, especially during the summer months (Magnusson 2018; Lunds kommun 2017). The evaluations made however use a methodology which is every bit scientific or evidence based (Cf. Rauhut Kompaniets and Rauhut 2018). Again, this implies
the political character of these evaluations.

Destination Lund Sweden is a third sector organisation and staffed by unpaid residents of Lund. The (potential) unique selling points of Lund have been analysed from a professional perspective and so have the provided smart tourism products. While the politically controlled local tourism office target native, Danish and German tourists to visit the countryside surrounding Lund, Destination Lund targets also business travellers and students in Lund, and they target tourists from other countries (Russia, the Netherlands, China etc.). Finally, the information provided by Destination Lund is not only in Swedish and English, but also in Russian (and products in more languages are in the pipeline).

It is also worth emphasising that Destination Lund Sweden is the result of a dissatisfaction among residents in Lund on how the marketing of the city is done by the local tourism office. Successful place marketing needs to include the residents and their views (Rauhut Kompaniets & Rauhut 2016; Giles et al, 2013; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Braun et al, 2010; Messley et al, 2010; Zerken & Petersen, 2010). Seen from this perspective, Destination Lund can be regarded as a ‘bottom-up’ response to the politically controlled local tourism office’s attempts to involve residents in ‘top-down’ activities. That residents oppose local politicians on how many tourists, what activities etc. a certain place should attract has been surveyed in previous research (Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003; Zhang et al. 2006; Kavaratzis 2012; Braun et al. 2013; McComb et al. 2017).

Destination Lund concluded that the modern traveller prefers to have all needed information about a destination, sights etc. in their smartphone or tablet. This is the underlying idea of smart tourism. Why carry numerous paper maps (which always break down on the second day of use), leaflets and booklets to carry in a bag when you can have the same information in the smartphone? To enable this, all essential travel information, information on destinations, sights etc. have to be available online. This is what Destination Lund does. The local tourism office does not; the tourist can come to their office and pick up a city map and maps of the surrounding of Lund, leaflets, booklets etc. Some are free of charge, others are not. It is obvious that Destination Lund and the local tourist office have two completely conflicting views on how to use modern ICT and social media in place marketing.

While the local tourism office try to shun the third sector stakeholders from the place marketing of Lund, private and other third sector stakeholders seek cooperation with Destination Lund due to the way Destination Lund uses ICT and social media to produce easy accessible tourism information. The politically controlled ‘top-down’ marketing of Lund appears to lose ground in favour for a stakeholder-based ‘bottom-up’ place marketing process. The new smart tourism technology has started to change the participation of different stakeholders in the place marketing process.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper is to discuss the citizen initiative to place market Lund and three questions are proposed to be answered. (1) Modern ICT and social media has revolutionised place marketing in a way few could predict. The emergence of smart tourism technology have turned residents from being consumers, with needs to be satisfied, into an important stakeholder actively involved in the marketing and branding of a place. Most people today know how to post things on e.g. Facebook and Instagram, and many persons run their own blog. Consequently, modern ICT and social media has challenged the traditional marketing monopoly of the politically controlled local tourism offices. From this follows that the new smart tourism technology has enabled residents, tourists, and business travellers etc. to do a ‘bottom-up’ marketing of a place parallel to the traditional ‘top-down’ marketing by the local tourism offices.

(2) Seen from this perspective it is not surprising at all that potential visitors to Lund appreciate the maps and guides produced by Destination Lund; the information a smart tourist demands is now supplied. Several local associations and organisations related to the tourism industry have noticed the products of Destination Lund and seek collaboration. The remarkable in this context is how the local tourism office opposes both smart tourism and the involvement of other stakeholders in the place marketing of Lund.

(3) Research results point at a stakeholders-oriented approach in place marketing and branding process as fundamental for successful results. Numerous studies argue that residents are e.g. co-partners, co-creators and co-producers of a whole place product, services and policies, ambassadors for their place brand and actively participating and contributing to the place marketing process. If such an important stakeholder suddenly is shunned from the place marketing of a city, the place
marketing of the city will be inefficient and unsuccessful.

A general conclusion is that the local tourism office is not in tune with time. Instead of welcoming different stakeholders and involve them in the marketing process, the local tourism office tries to uphold a monopoly of place marketing activities for the city of Lund. In analogy with the arguments of standard economic theory, monopolies in general are inefficient; public politically controlled monopolies are definitely inefficient. A second indication that the local tourism office is not in tune with time is the awkward and flatfooted attitude towards ICT and social media in general, and smart tourism in particular.

Not being in tune with time will eventually have consequences for the local tourism office. Another political majority in the city hall may conclude that the performance of the local tourism office is too poor, and hence cut the budget or, more drastically, close it down. At that point, active residents, business travellers, tourists etc. are left on their own to place market the city. Since they know how to use smart tourism technologies and accustomed to operate without a budget, the loss of the local tourism office may not be noticed.

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