Participatory design tools in place branding

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Abstract

This paper discusses why participatory design tools are suitable for modern place branding. First we give an overview of the academic area of current place branding theory, followed by an overview of the academic area of participatory design. We then discuss problems in place branding theory and how participatory design tools could be used to overcome them. Finally we turn to empirical examples where we have experimented with participatory design tools in a place branding process, ending with a summary and suggestions for further research.

KEYWORDS: place branding, participation, participatory design, design tools

Introduction

A growing competition between countries, regions and cities for a skilful workforce, businesses, foreign investment and tourists makes place branding an important issue (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2008; Moilanen and Rainisto 2009). A fundamental part of place branding is residents' participation and co-creation. As residents need to be seen as brand owners they should also be involved in the process. Otherwise, the brand will not be accepted and committed to by residents or considered as authentic by for example tourists or investors. (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Braun et al., 2010; Kavaratzis, 2012; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008). Although residents and local communities are seen as important, there is still a lack of involvement in place branding processes (Kavaratzis, 2012). There is a need to identify and test possible methods of participa-

tion.

In design, projects are often set in a social context (e.g., in Swedish Design Research Journal). In such projects we find a democratic reasoning - users are entitled to participate in design processes where the outcome will affect them (Sanders and Dandavate, 1999; Westerlund, 2009). Another reason for participation is better end results since the real users have significant knowledge on how to use a product/service (Krippendorf and Reinhart, 2007; Westerlund, 2009).

This paper applies from place branding and design theory combined with empirical experiences from using participatory design tools in a place branding process in Bollebygd municipality, Sweden. We present aspects that clarify why it is interesting to integrate these tools in future place branding theory and practice.

The academic area of place branding

A brand includes much more than just the logo or symbol: it is about identity, image and communication. Moilanen and Rainisto (2009) describes the brand identity as how the owner of a brand wants to be perceived, the image as all the attributes that come to someone's mind when thinking about or experiencing the brand and communication as choosing attractive factors of the identity and communicating them to target audiences. This can be seen as a seller-centric, one-way focus on communication which is now challenged by a participatory approach where customers, managers and employees are all active in defining and developing the brand (Ind and Bjerke, 2007). The consumer's role is moving from passive to active, interacting and thereby co-creating value with companies (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

As opposed to a company, the brand of a place affects and concerns a large number of stakeholders - government officials, politicians, business, residents and visitors (Fan 2010; Moilanen and Rainisto 2009). The academic fields that place branding covers are also broad, including for example urban planning, geography, urban studies, marketing, public administration and sociology (Warnaby, 2009) as well as domains reflecting "the multipurpose nature of places, focusing on specific areas of economic activity such as tourism, retailing, cultural activities and sporting events" (Hankinson, 2004, p. 109). The multiple stakeholders and the multidisciplinary nature make place branding a complicated phenomenon. Anholt (2007) argued that places cannot be branded and introduced the term competitive identity. Fan (2010) referred to the public skepticism over the use of the term branding when it comes to nations and suggested the definition (nation) image management. In the literature there are also concepts such as nation, city and destination branding (e.g., Anholt 2010; Moilanen and Rainisto 2009; Ooi 2010). In this paper we choose the broad term place branding as the generic and multidimensional concept, meaning the process of building a brand for a nation, city or region.

Residents' roles in place branding

Residents' roles in place branding are discussed by several researchers: as residents need to be seen as brand owners they should also be involved in the process. There is a democratic aspect in this, related to social sustainability, or as stated by Aitken and Campelo (2011, p. 917): "a place brand by nature belongs to the place and its people". Place brand strategies based on co-created experiences with residents empower the community and should be of a more central importance than they are today. Otherwise, the brand does not promote the "authenticity, recognition, acceptance and commitment by the local community" that is needed (Aitken and Campelo 2011, p. 918). According to Braun et al. (2010), residents have four roles: as target group, as integrated parts of the place brand, as ambassadors for the place, and as citizens and voters. Because of their multiple roles their participation in place branding is crucial (Braun et al. 2010). Also Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008) state that local people should not be treated as "marketing vehicles". Their needs and wishes should be "integrated in the goals set and they should be participants in all stages of formulating, designing and implementing a marketing strategy" (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008, p. 162).

The academic area of participatory design

Many people view a product as design. This is a too narrow definition - design in a broader sense concerns the whole process behind this product (Lawson, 1997). In the design process a designer deals with change, proposing a possible and more preferred future (Edeholt, 2004; Lawson 1997). Viewing design as merely being about products is also too narrow since many design projects of today are set in a social context. This becomes evident when reading, for example, Swedish Design Research Journal (2012, No.1), including several articles on design in the healthcare sector and an article on Youth Design Against Crime (YDAC), a project where young people are involved in designing their society.

Focus on user participation

Design in a social context needs to be human-centered (Krippendorf and Reinhart, 2007; Westerlund, 2009). Here we find a democratic reasoning, where users are entitled to participate in the design process of products and services that will somehow have impact on their lives (Sanders and Dandavate, 1999; Westerlund, 2009). User participation is also important since they have significant knowledge on how a product can and should be used (Krippendorf and Reinhart, 2007; Westerlund, 2009). This knowledge is derived from their personal experience and is hard to reach without user participation (Westerlund, 2009). The Dutch architect Habraken (1972) argues that without the user's knowledge, design will not be successful. Westerlund refers to a case where he designed a toothpick holder for people with rheumatism. He describes a meeting with a user, where she tested an early prototype; "I was fascinated by how the woman seemed to have an immediate and intuitive strategy for handling the prototype. She had crucial experience that we designers lacked..." (Westerlund, 2009, p. 11-12, p. 125).

Although participation with a single user gives good insight, Westerlund means that there is stronger ideation, co-creative learning and a greater understanding when a number of people come together at the same time (Westerlund, 2009). Also Krippendorf and Reinhart mean that knowledge from several different stakeholders needs to be taken into account, including producers, engineers, marketers, retailers, government agencies, buyers (who might not be users) and recyclers. The involvement of "THE user" needs to be replaced by a network of stakeholders (Krippendorf and Reinhart, 2007).

Design tools

Before involving the users in the design process, designers need insight into the users' context. The British Design Council gives the example of "being your user", a tool for the beginning of a process. When using this process the designer puts him/herself in the shoes of the users, does what they would do, in a place where they would do it. An example mentioned is that by wearing tinted glasses (that make it harder for you to see) whilst conducting everyday tasks, you will get insight to the life of a person with impaired eyesight (British Design Council, 2012).

Another aspect that needs to happen early in a participatory design process is to make the process accessible. The British Design Council suggests physically devoting, framing and building an available project space, where users are invited to participate in workshops, where several users interact with each other. This also provides an opportunity to make the process tangible by visualising the process (British Design Council, 2012).

There are several tools that can be used in participatory workshops with users, many of which come from design practice, for example drawing and prototyping. Drawing is a core tool for designers and a source for idea generation. Lawson (1997, p. 242) describes drawing as a journey that takes you through a "what if" process, for example when an architect explores the layout of a house by changing positions of fixtures –"what if the kitchen were here... How could I then organise the entrance". Drawing is also a production of knowledge-in-action (Schön, 1992), meaning that a designer gets a deeper understanding of the task (and problem) at hand whilst drawing. Schön calls this "reflective conversation", where a designer draws, sees what is drawn, and reflects over this, getting new ideas for the next pencil move (Schön, 1992). Drawings also enable designers to show ideas to others (Lawson 1997), which is important since knowledge produced in action is primarily tacit, meaning that it is hard to express verbally (Schön, 1992).

Although highly usable, drawing has limitations. To get a deeper understanding on how, for example, an artefact will be used in real life, designers build prototypes. Prototyping is, as with drawing, a journey where knowledge and ideas are created in action. A designer starts with simple small scale prototypes in paper or cardboard, moves to full scale, testing different materials, eventually coming to a "works like" stage where the functionality of the prototype is tested (British Design Council, 2012).

Design tools as a base for user participation

Design tools such as drawing and prototyping are useful, if not vital, in a participatory process. According to Sanders and Dandavate (1999) design has primarily focused on observing what users *do,* and marketing has focused on what they *say* (in interviews and focus groups). Listening to users will get you important information, although they can only tell you what they can express in words (explicit knowledge), meaning that you will not get access to their tacit knowledge. In order to reach their feelings, subconscious needs and hidden dreams Sanders and Dandavate (1999) introduced a model where listening and observing are merged with the "make tools" of doing and acting (e.g., drawing and prototyping), enabling the user to produce knowledge in action.

Westerlund refers to Sanders and Dandavate's model when describing his own research on participatory workshops with users. A workshop should be framed within a certain experience, in order to reduce the risk of staying on an abstract and general level (Westerlund 2009). Within this frame the participants are asked to tell the group a personal, meaningful, and even problematic story. The stories encourage other participants to create ideas for solutions, which are all written on post-its and placed on a table visible for all to see. Since these (problematic) experiences can be hard to verbalise, it is suitable to combine the discussion with make tools. Prototyping makes one person's thoughts visible to the other participants - helping them to communicate and build on each other's ideas. During a workshop possible futures are created by the experimentation and building of prototypes and new ideas are generated in the process - reflective conversation (Westerlund, 2009; Schön, 1992). Westerlund (2009) states that participants often are proud of the outcome, seeing it as meaningful since they solve an existing and sometimes personal problem, but also because a workshop does not stop at a discussion level as prototypes makes the result tangible.

Using participatory design tools in place branding

There are several problems identified within both current place branding practice and the academic field of place branding that limit its role and development opportunities. There is, for example, a lack of managerial guidance (Hankinson, 2009) and a fragmented theoretical foundation (Lucarelli and Berg, 2011). One of the key problems is that although the residents and local communities are seen as important, there is still a lack of their involvement in place branding processes (Braun et al., 2010; Kavaratzis, 2012; Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2008). Stressing that residents need to be of a more central importance than today, Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) state that, "There is a necessity for meaningful consultation with residents as this is the only way to produce a sustainable place brand and to avoid the pitfall of developing 'artificial' brand imposed from the outside."

In design theory we find a human-centered approach where users, and often a broader network of stakeholders, are viewed as important participants in a design process. Without the participation of the user, it is argued that design will not be successful (Habraken, 1972; Krippendorf and Reinhart, 2007; Sanders and Dandavate 1999; Westerlund, 2009).

Place branding researcher Kavaratzis (2012) gives directions for future research, of which one is to identify and test possible methods of stakeholder participation. We argue that participatory design tools and methods are most suitable in place branding from a democratic and quality point of view. The place branding process as well as the outcomes become more authentic, accepted and non-artificial when it is imposed from the inside instead of the outside, as place brand researchers have found important (e.g. Aitken and Campelo 2011; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2012). The use of design tools gives advantages that are hard to reach within marketing/management. The arguments are, as summarized from Westerlund (2009) above, that participatory design tools:

» Give crucial knowledge derived from the users' personal experience.
» Give a deeper understanding of needs and sharing of knowledge.
» Are a source for idea generation and enables participants to build on each other's ideas by, for example, drawing and prototyping.
» Enable participants to move beyond the discussion level, reducing the risk of staying on a general and abstract level. Drawing and prototyping make the result tangible and participants become proud of the relevance of their result.

Empirical examples

So far we have found a need for tools in order to reach participation in place branding and suggested that these tools can be found in design. We will now continue to give examples on how to use design tools in a place branding process. We use empirical data from our university master studies were we had the opportunity to work with the place brand for Bollebygd, a small municipality in Sweden (Jernsand and Kraff, 2009; Jernsand and Kraff, 2010). During this process we were continuously testing existing participatory design tools as well as developing these in order to suit a place branding context.

A first step was to obtain an insight on the stakeholder context. By setting up our workspace in Bollebygd, and spending most of our one-year working time on site, we reached a personal experience of how it is to work there. It gave us access to residents and an understanding of how it is to live in Bollebygd talking to local "personalities", shop owners, politicians and community officials. By putting ourselves in the shoes of tourists we, for example, explored a Bollebygd scenic route, experiencing problematic aspects first hand; it was only accessible by two cars, a lack of signage led us in the wrong direction, and we experienced the need for renovation in wet areas when getting our feet drenched. This personal experience gave us useful information that we

would not have reached otherwise: we got to "know" Bollebygd, its strengths and weaknesses by "being your user", as explained by the British Design Council.

Halfway through the project we turned our workspace into an available project space (also explained by British Design Council) in the form of an exhibition open to public. We visualised ideas from our research and held participatory workshops in the central part of Bollebygd. The exhibition had the purpose of making information easier for residents to take in, rather than handing out a heavy written report. Bollebygd was creatively described both visually and verbally, for example by creating personas. It encouraged the visitor to be active, give feedback and tell us their ideas on how they wanted the project to proceed. They could, for example, vote for Bollebygd's core values and put ideas on an "idea tree". At the end of the process they could vote for Bollebygd's vision. The aim was also to keep the project highly democratic. It broadened the participatory aspect in the sense that the people involved were not limited to workshop participants.

Figure 1. Available project space in a central location

Figure 2. Opportunity for visitors to give feedback into the project

In addition to talking to people one by one we needed several people to come together at the same time, to reach a greater understanding of a possible future (Westerlund, 2009). We needed a network of stakeholders (Krippendorf and Reinhart, 2007), and invited residents, companies, community officials and politicians to workshops, conducted with a minimum of four participants and a maximum of thirty.

In the first workshop we wanted to know what the residents believed was Bollebygd's "personality". To get the participants focused on the situation at hand we asked them to bring an artefact, photo of their favourite place or a fond memory, that to them represented Bollebygd. This is a similar approach to that of Westerlund (2009), who sees users' personal experience as important to reach successful design proposals. We asked the participants to talk about Bollebygd as if talking about a real person, as an attempt to get them to talk in terms of value. To show that the aim was to develop Bollebygd we created a visual backdrop by illustrating "Bollebygd today" with a silhouette of a man standing still. "Bollebygd in the future" was illustrated by the silhouette of a man jumping forward. To help participants we had visual means available: magazines from which to cut images and coloured pencils for drawing. The silhouettes were mounted on large sheets of paper, laid out on a table, and visible for all participants during the discussion.

One group described Bollebygd today as an elderly gentleman with a tendency of being pedantic. He spends most of his money on his beloved garden and a typical Friday evening is spent at home, inviting friends over for dinner. He does not spend time out and about in his municipality. By talking about Bollebygd as an elderly man, a discussion was raised regarding the lack of focus on teenagers and their needs - they might not enjoy pottering around in the garden. Influenced by the previous step, the participants described the future Bollebygd. They wanted Bollebygd to be several people: a teenager and an adult who had moved to Bollebygd from the big city. The person (persons) likes to go out in Bollebygd on a Friday night for a bite to eat, the movies and maybe even visit a spa. This indicates that Bollebygd needs strategies and services to attract this crowd. Thanks to the visual material, where the participants had pasted images representing Bollebygd, we also had a visual base for further development of their ideas.

Figure 3. Visual means to help ideation

In another workshop participants were given the task of building their future city as they liked to see it, using building blocks, coloured fabric, pencils, and so on - a form of "make tool" (Westerlund, Sanders and Dandavate). One participant (a teenager) started to draw a beach that could be easily accessed by bike. She expressed having a hard time getting to the lakes in Bollebygd, which were only reachable by car. Others built an outdoor sports facility on an undeveloped area, explaining that this is what they wanted instead of the golf course that the council had planned. They also focused on a new train station area. A participant said how she had heard bus drivers joking about Bollebygd when passing the gloomy station. One participant built a highrise building (next to the station) with building blocks putting a piece of green fabric on top - a green area with excellent views. Another participant mentioned that it would be good to get parked cars out of the way, saying "You don't want to see them". Why not have underground parking under the highrise building?

This workshop showed a lack of previous involvement of residents since the council had gone forward with plans that the residents didn't need. A golf course was thought of as unnecessary since the small municipality already had one. As Westerlund mentions in his research the participants also continued the development of each other's ideas.

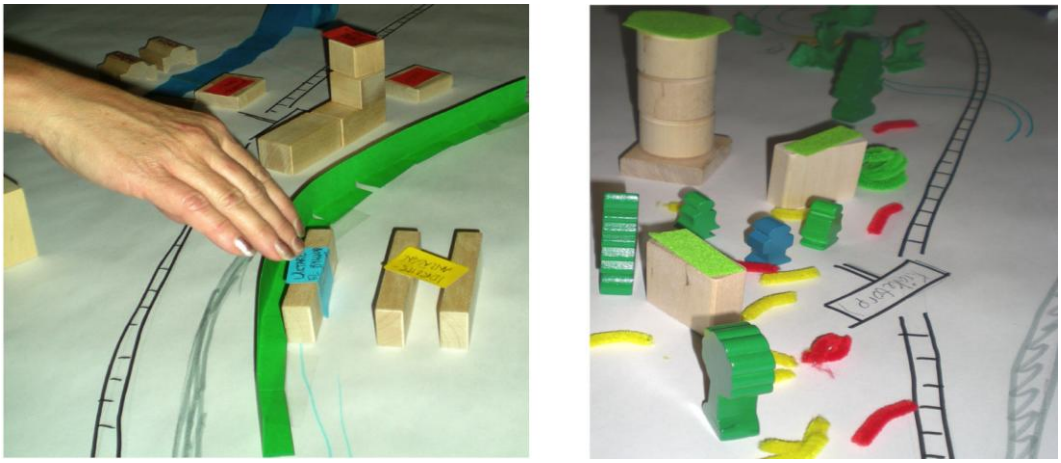

Figure 4. Prototyping the future Bollebygd

The last workshop had the purpose of generating ideas for a vision for Bollebygd. Inspiration was taken from an existing workshop, "Steps to the future", used in a development project for Croydon (Imagine Croydon, 2010) where residents were involved. In the original workshop, groups discussed the future Croydon by pasting visions in writing on the wall. To help with the ideation they had paper cutouts in the shape of steps. They were asked to discuss what steps they thought were necessary to reach the visions. The steps were then placed in chronological order. When participants think about what actual steps needs to be taken, to reach a goal, it makes ideation less abstract.

We developed "Steps to the future" further by adding visual elements and the use of drawing and

prototyping for the participants. In order to show the importance of the workshop we dedicated the exhibition space to it, setting it up like a scene. We illustrated "Bollebygd today" at the bottom left, with an illustration of grass underneath to show that in the future we need to reach higher. From "Bollebygd today" we made room for steps that needed to be taken in order to develop. The steps led to the right and upwards towards a cloud where ideas for the future visions were to be placed. By the illustration of a cloud we wanted the participants to reach for the sky with their ideas. The movement from left to right also indicated a forward movement.
First, the participants formulated possible visions. They then produced possible steps in order to reach these. By visualising the steps, a vision like "Bollebygd is famous for good quality water" became less abstract. For example, the participants built a water feature prototype by the motorway entrance in Lego and drew an image of a "water festival".

The result, four ideas on possible visions including steps on how to reach them, was shown in a new exhibition. Thanks to the visualised steps it also made the visions tangible to visitors, who could vote for the vision they liked.

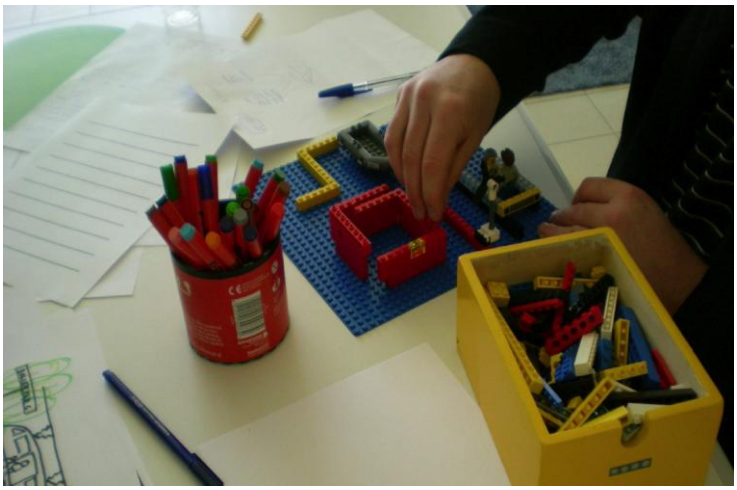

Figure 5. Lego as a prototyping tool

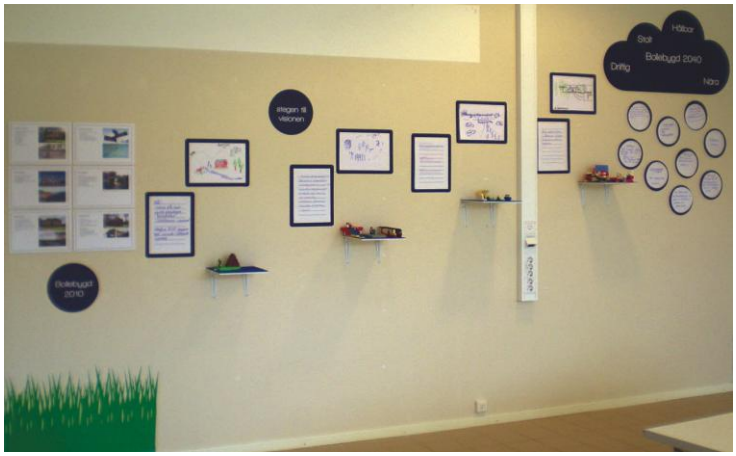

Figure 6. Visual backdrop for vision workshop

Summary

Place branding theory is moving towards questions about residents' participation and involvement. The most effective and accepted place branding initiatives are those where local players are involved (e.g. Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Braun et al., 2010; Kavaratzis 2012). Local communities should be participants in all stages of the process, not only being "marketing vehicles", as Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008) express it.

At the same time design theory and practice is set in a social context dealing with social change, where user-centeredness is fundamental (Krippendorf and Reinhart, 2007; Lawson, 1997; Sanders and Dandavate, 1999; Westerlund 2009). This is in line with the development of today's society, as well as with the complex and dynamic phenomenon of place branding.

There is a good amount of literature dealing with the participatory notion within place branding but there is a lack of tools and methods. It is important to reach transparency and sharing of theories, good examples, methods and tools within place branding. In design practice, actors (e.g. British Design Council) share examples on how to use participatory design tools. In design theory, Westerlund for example, has written extensively on methods for participation. Westerlund's research shows that design tools in user workshops give important information about participants' knowledge, as well as the tools being instruments for ideation. There is an opportunity here for two fields to interact more with each other, meaning that designer and marketers need to work closer to reach participation in place branding.

In this paper we have described examples on participatory design tools from existing design theory and practice. Our hope is that by showing our examples of these tools used in a place branding process, it will shed light on design as a way to reach and conduct participatory place branding.

Further research

Further research should include exploration of design tools in place branding processes in order to see clearer what benefits they bring, as well as explorations of which design tools are suitable in place branding. Is there a need to further develop existing ones or even new tools?

An exploration of the use of a visual backdrop in workshops would also be interesting, that is, to investigate if a visual setting helps the ideation process for the participants. This is especially important in place branding when prototyping is not always suitable or possible to perform as, for example when dealing with abstracts notions such as visions or core values.

Another field for research is the current projects of place development where participatory methods have been used, for example Gothenburg in the project Göteborg 2021. In this project

citizens were invited to share their views on how their city should develop. Are these initiatives based on design tools? In what way are the results used and what will be the consequences for politics, citizens and visitors? Are they continuous processes? And who are the participants?

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