1. The Nordic wave in place branding: moving back and forth in time and space

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This introductory chapter provides a background to the Nordic wave of place branding and its impact on research and practice. The ocean wave is used as a metaphor in the book to emphasize the Nordic as a movement whose boundaries flow back and forth in time and space. The contributors in the book surf the Northern waves in different directions towards increasing the knowledge of the Nordic brand and its implications for place branding. Their contributions emerge from different understandings and ideals of Nordicity, which are used to frame place branding in various ways. The contributions are organized according to three themes – *poetics*, *practices* and *politics* – which are introduced in this chapter.

Nordic place branding is an emerging field of academic research and practice. The evolution, expansion, and geographical spread of place branding in the Nordic region has been studied in several ways and is echoed in recent journal articles and special issues. The strong focus on the Nordic region is evident in the study of Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, and Danish cases, strategies, and processes, as well as in the researchers' country of origin (see for a review Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Chan and Marafa, 2013; Lucarelli and Broström, 2013; Andersson, 2014). Similarly, the strong focus on the Nordic as ideological and socio-cultural construct is evident in the analysis of topics and cases that are not only peculiar to the Nordic as a specific academe (e.g. the interest in food), but also more crucially by the recurrence of similar topics and analysis which are translocal (across countries) and international (outside the Nordic).

The Nordic is here understood in broad terms as an idea (Czarniawska-Joerges and Sevón, 2005), an ideological orientation, and myth, as well as a regional space in relation to which theories, concepts, and practices of place branding emerge and develop. The present book is a further step in the evolution, expansion, and geographical spread of place branding

in the Nordic region, as well as a timely attempt to consider some of the more nebulous related terms and concept (e.g. Nordic cuisine, gender equality, etc.). It does so by building on and synchronizing the existing body of academic research on the Nordic (e.g. Lucarelli and Hallin 2015; Cassinger and Eksell, 2017; Gyimóthy, 2017), as well as by expanding its empirical outreach to topics, cases and fields of inquiry which have not traditionally been tackled by place branding studies (e.g. brand collaborations, phantasmagoria, feminism, appropriation processes, and ideology).

Despite the large number of studies addressing Nordic place brands and branding, little attention is given to the practices of place branding within the Nordic welfare states. The unusual open access to the field of practice granted to researchers (at least compared to Anglo-Saxon and European standard), and the particular political, institutional, cultural environment of the Nordic has not fully been unpacked. The limited scope of previous studies on place branding paired with a widespread international interest in the “Nordic” as a geographical place, moral orientation, and (normative) discourse calls for more research into the global relevance of Nordic place branding. This triggers a number of questions. How is Nordicity defined in place branding? What characterizes the relationship between the Nordic as an idea, dream and myth and the technocracies of place branding? What are the implications for international place branding studies?

Our main concern in editing this book is to open up space from which the Nordic particularism can be conceptualized, analyzed, criticized, and emulated in an international context. The book is one of the very first attempts to unpack the specificity of “Nordicity” in regards to place branding by collecting, examining, and systematizing diverse instances of the Nordic place branding tradition. It gathers different transdisciplinary accounts written by researchers in different research traditions such as business administration, tourism, geography, communication, sociology, and political science. The contributions demonstrate a certain Nordic place branding scholarship characterized by processes of de-politicization, consensus making, collaboration, and transparency. At the same time, Nordic ideals, policies and values push critical, and, hence far, unexplored issues in place branding, such as feminism, bio-ethics, sustainability, and social justice. It is our contention that these peculiarities may be used for building theories and developing methods, which can be extended to the Anglo-Saxon and European field of place branding research and practice.

PLACE BRANDING PERSPECTIVES

As a form of branding philosophy applied to places, place branding has experienced a rapid growth materializing in different branding strategies, practices and public–private investments. Research on place branding at the same time has created new and interwoven methodologies, and different conceptualizations, in order to shape competitive and winning place branding efforts. Although practices and theories have generally understood “place brands” as a particular phenomenon, one can witness in the international-based research two broadly yet sometime interrelated perspectives. On one hand, one can see studies that conceptualize and analyze place brands as having the same features as corporate and product brands and thus implying place brandings as the practices of strategically creating and enhancing brands. In other words, these studies imply that place brands can be seen as a catalyzer of unifying and coherent communications, strategies and activities structured in different forms such as an umbrella, house of brands, etc. (e.g. Hanna and Rowley, 2011; Iversen and Hem, 2008), embracing the corporate and product branding paradigm (e.g. Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009) and emerging as marketing phenomena with some intrinsic characteristics that can be caught and measured (e.g. Insch and Florek, 2008; Zenker, 2011). On the other hand, there are studies where the distinction between place brands and branding is more dynamic and difficult to spot, since brands, rather than being seen as an entity, are instead seen as emerging and becoming process – and therefore branding (or the process of branding) and brands (or the object) does not differ (see e.g. Giovanardi et al., 2013). These studies do not consider pointing out the difference between place brands and branding as a fundamental point of research, and the majority of these studies embrace an interdisciplinary perspective that goes beyond a pure product, service, or corporate branding approach to place branding (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Kavaratzis, 2012; Pike, 2009; Warnaby and Medway, 2013) which takes into consideration its geopolitical dimension (Eshuis and Klijn, 2012; Lucarelli and Giovanardi, 2016; Ooi, 2004). This offers a grounded spatio-temporal approach which goes beyond the mere application of corporate and product business models to places (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015) where place brands materialize as complex socio-political constructs composed of a multi-contextual understanding both in spatial and temporal dimensions, multi-level interaction among actors and by a legal, political, and aesthetic process.

Despite the fact that the second perspective is more largely endorsed, mainly due to the specific scholarship present in the Nordic research environment, both perspectives are used here as a point of departure in order

to spell out the Nordic perspective. In fact, by embracing a cursory view of the literature one can witness that, although a number of studies have addressed Nordic place brands and branding, the peculiarity of brands and branding within the Nordic perspective remains understudied. In this context, on one hand, the present book recognizes that if the unusual open access to the field of practice granted to researchers (at least compared to Anglo-Saxon and European standards), and the particular political, institutional, and cultural environment of the Nordic has not fully been unpacked, on the other hand, the limited scope of previous studies on place branding paired with a widespread international interest in the “Nordic” as a geographical place, moral orientation, and (normative) discourse calls for more research into the global relevance of Nordic place branding.

LOCATING THE NORDIC PLACE BRAND AND NORDIC PLACE BRANDING

Places are imagined and constructed in and through practices for certain purposes and ends. The Nordic region is made up of five countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, and the regions and provinces of the Aaland Islands, Faroe Islands, and Greenland including the Inuit land areas. Sápmi, which belongs to the indigenous Sámi population in the Nordic region, cuts across Finland, Sweden, Norway, and parts of Murmansk in Russia. Sápmi is currently considered as a cultural region without autonomy. The Nordic countries share similarities in terms of language and geographical location, but also in terms of a shared history, culture, values, and ideals. Yet, the Nordic countries differ and have developed unique characters in relation to one another over time (Ehn et al., 1993). In order to examine Nordic place branding, we identify historical and contemporary stereotypes of national and regional differences between the countries. We shed light on the values, ideals, and ideologies that the Nordic countries have used to construct themselves with particular relevance for place branding. Such claimed values include cooperation, consensus, solidarity, democracy, freedom, social cohesion, and gender equality. Equally, the book reflects on the social, cultural, and geopolitical reasons for why these values historically have been emphasized in the region.

We are interested in approaching the construction of the Nordic as an idea, the practices of this construction, and its consequences. This interest is reflected in the three parts that build the book. First, Nordic countries are small and dependent on maintaining good relationships with the surrounding world. Second, the legacy of the Nordic welfare state has

recently been called into question. Third, the mythologies and sagas in the regions involve themes of superiority and the obligation to act as a model for other countries to imitate (see Schough, 2008). Scholars have rightly criticized the conception of the Nordic countries as peaceful and benevolent, and challenged the myth of the harmonious Nordic countries by pointing to their violent relationship to former colonies (Adler-Nissen and Gad, 2013), growing problems with right-wing populism (e.g. Pamment, 2016) and involvement in international armed conflicts (Browning, 2007). The Nordic model should thus be understood as an aspirational idea that has more or less impact on Nordic realities.

It follows that the analysis of the relationships between the Nordic and place branding, as it is dealt with in this book, are complex matters. The contributions in the book deal either with the Nordic as a valuable brand which diverse industries (e.g. food, music, tourism) can capitalise on, or the Nordic as a context for place branding practices in which different place branding efforts emerge. Overall, with some exceptions, a practice-based approach to Nordic place branding is adopted with a focus on enactments and processes of becoming, rather than the instruments and effects of branding.

DISCLOSING NEW WAYS OF THINKING AND DOING PLACE BRANDING: POETICS, PRACTICES, AND POLITICS

The contributions in this book exemplify traditions of scholarship that deal with the relation between the Nordic and place branding. Even though each of the chapters provides a unique insight into particular empirical or conceptual aspects of Nordic place branding, they can be clustered along three themes that we refer to as the *poetics*, *practices*, and *politics of place branding* (inspired by Ooi, 2004). The idea is that the Nordic perspective modifies or even challenges place branding's *comme il faut*. Taken together these themes challenge the taken-for-granted concepts and practices within place branding and reveal new ways of thinking and doing research and practice. It should however be noted that the thematization was constructed for the sake of clarity of argumentation and that the themes are interrelated and at times overlapping.

Poetics

The first theme, poetics, deals with ways of constructing and representing Nordicity in place branding practices. But also, given the liaison,

in practice, between Nordic as place brand and the branding of Nordic places, the theme deals with the way branding practices are framed in a way that Nordic place branding is considered to be specific, peculiar, and foundational. It follows that the primary focus is given to identifying key narratives, rhetorical strategies, genealogical–historical and emerging storytelling templates in various empirical contexts and on multiple geographic scales. In other words, the contributions included in Part I all at different levels (i.e. not only ontologically and epistemologically but also more crucially empirically) analyze the way Nordic place branding has been in the past and present represented as specific idea, myth and socio-cultural context which is considered to be Nordic. Accordingly, one can see that the different chapters grouped under the present theme all contribute to creating an assembled account. For example, the (pan) Nordic research team composed of Lars Pynt Andersen, Frank Lindberg and Jacob Östberg consider the poetics of enchanting the Nordic *terroir* within the new Nordic cuisine wave. This is followed by Jörgen Eksell and Alicia Fjällhed who instead take the approach of a diachronic analysis of the Nordic region as a transnational brand based on multilateral agreements across historical and political collaboration. In the next chapter, Jessica Edlom, despite having a similar focus, follows the digital platform Swedish Affair to unveil the how the national brand provides branding synergies for the Swedish creative industries, most notably popular music. Further, the Swedish research team, composed of Sara Brorström, Sarah Degerhammar and Kristina Tamm Hallström, address the specificity of place branding among municipalities in relation to organizational complexity, size, and norms of how to brand in the Nordic context. Finally, Andrea Lucarelli discusses, by manner of a brief historical account of the interlink between Scandinavia and Nordic, how the branding of Nordic reflects difference in both the internal and external pattern of representation of the region.

Practices

The second theme, practices, refers to Nordic ways of doing place branding, and qualifies the characteristics of place branding practices in the Nordic context. Rather than pinning down stereotypical representations and narratives, the chapters in Part II highlight the particularities of branding processes in various empirical and geographical contexts. In addition, it deals with how the Nordic place brand travels, i.e. ways in which the Nordic is appropriated and incorporated into other place branding practices. Accordingly, one can see that the different chapters grouped under the present theme all contribute to creating an assembled account. Part II

starts with a large pan-Nordic and non-Nordic research team, composed of Daniel Laven, Tatiana Chekalina, Matthias Fuchs, Lusine Margaryan, Peter Varley and Steve Taylor, examining the processes of building and implementing a label for slow adventure tourism in the Northern territories. Further, in the following chapters the transdisciplinary research team, composed of Anne Marit Waade, Jens Christian Pasgaard, Mathias Meldgaard and Tom Nielsen, present and assess two different modes of collaborative place branding and place intervention approaches in a Nordic rural branding context, while Rikke Brandt Broegaard, Karin Topsø Larsen and Lene Havtorn Larsen investigate the critical role of translocal mobility and relations in branding remote islands. Two further chapters focus on specific issues: Ole Have Jørgensen analyzes the transformation of a Danish city brand, with specific focus on the controversial associations to its former prison and Susanna Heldt Cassel shows how the branding of Sámpí destinations and places can be seen as a complex and contested practice that involves the power to represent and to co-construct the culture and heritage of people and places (not least minority groups and peripheral areas), particularly in a Nordic context. Part II concludes with a commentary by Szilvia Gyimóthy in which she discusses the adoption, interpretation, and rephrasing of values considered to be essentially Nordic.

Politics

The third theme is about the political consequences and implications of Nordic place branding. Previous research predominantly understands the political aspect of place branding as a neoliberal form of governance (e.g. Eshuis and Klijn, 2012; Kaneva, 2011). In Part III, the Nordic is used as an allegory to reveal the politics of place branding in a broader sense, seeking to capture additional configurations of politics (see Lucarelli, 2015). The contributions in Part III consider place branding in relation to Nordic policy-making, ideology, and national identity, and in so doing they make struggles over truth, inclusion, economic interests, and social power visible. Accordingly, one can recognize that the different chapters grouped under the present theme all contribute to creating an assembled account. For example, Carina Ren, Ulrik Pram Gad and Lill Rastad Bjørst, by presenting an analysis of branding approaches in Greenland, present the tensions between Nordicity and postcolonial discourses, highlighting parallel branding processes in four distinct empirical contexts as diplomacy, mining, tourism, and the cultural industries. The following chapter by Kim Simonsen takes a different point of departure in analyzing the politics of Nordic food as a performance and as medialized re-enactment of a

nation's inner life, all with the aim of shedding light on food as a reflection and a constant conversation about national identity and identity politics. A similar topic, but related to traditional political discourse, is the topic that the Estonia-based research team, composed of Piia Tammpuu, Külliki Seppel and Kadri Simm, instead highlight in their chapter, which shows how the Nordic brand can be appropriated in a foreign (i.e. Estonian) political discourse. The next conceptual chapter by Mikael Andéhn scrutinizes the use of Sweden as rhetorical placeholder for ideologies in the context of so-called post-truth political discourse. In the chapter by Anne Heith, an indigenous perspective on Nordic Place Branding is offered, in particular by focusing on Sámi and Sámpi and the political uses of immaterial and material resources. Part III concludes with a commentary by Cecilia Cassinger, who reflects on the implications of Nordic feminist politics, in particular Sweden's feminist foreign policy, for mediating the region as a market to invest in and a moral example for others to follow.

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