

The Case of Thessaloniki's Branding: Constructing Social Networking and CSR

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Abstract

2012 was a celebratory year for Thessaloniki, Greece, mother land of Alexander the great, marking 100 years since its liberation. In 2012 the municipality of Thessaloniki initiated an international sustainable development (SD) strategy. Part of this strategy was to launch a branding campaign with four thematic categories: i) history; ii) social activities and culture; iii) environment and urban landscape and iv) entrepreneurship. The aim of this paper is to present and critically analyse these ongoing social, environmental and economic factors of Thessaloniki's SD strategy. Maintaining as a focal point social responsibility (SR) and social networking this paper reveals the importance of innovative services in digital communication and social networking when branding a city's profile. It unfolds the role of SR in branding and networking. It designates how Thessaloniki and its stakeholders are engaging, encountering and exploring digital and social profile potentials, opportunities and perspectives for the years to come.

Keywords Socially Responsible Networking; Sustainable Development Strategy; City Branding; Social Innovation; CSR

1. Introduction

Designing and constructing a socially responsible (SR) network to brand a city's profile is a complex task (Adam, 2008). It synthesises a series of strategic management and marketing networking activities. It embraces the primary city's stakeholders (Crane et al., 2013; Papagiannis, 2016): i) city residents for participating and volunteering; ii) local institutions and corporations for supporting and funding thematic activities; iii) leading collaborations with other national and international sister cities and institutions to jointly stimulate an extrovert promotion (Smith, 2010). Although place marketing literature is a scholar research field for a decade now, there are many challenges to be addressed for unfolding the role of SR in branding and networking (Kalantides and Kavartzis, 2009; Gundlach and Wilkie 2009).

The aim of this paper is to present and analyse the ongoing construction of a social responsible profile of Thessaloniki by focusing on social, environmental and economic factors of the city's sustainable strategy. This triple bottom line would lead towards the reestablishment of the city's identity and profile in a digital society. It will reveal the empiricism gained on the triptych of place promotion, SR conceptualisation and brand construction, both at local and individual level. There is an existing link between place and identity relating social reconstructing to the city and region identity. It focuses primarily to the bond between the identity of the city and its SR stakeholders and then the SR stakeholders' identification with the city (Lloyd and Peel 2008). Based on this approach this paper, both empirically and scientifically, exposes the "Thessaloniki 2012" campaign challenges encountered, its current results and the stakeholders' perception of designing SR networking at international level.

"Thessaloniki 2012" (see figure1) selected a SR strategy among various approaches to social networking and international brand awareness. It prioritised primarily its SD strategic goals by branding SR and its protarchic role for the city. Such a strategy conceptualises the construction of Thessaloniki's SR networking as a provider of quality living and social

engagement for its citizens, its visitors and collaborators. This strategic conception immediately raises the question of how SR relates to the branding of a city at national and international level. Thus, this paper reveals the promotional and branding services provided by this municipal initiative and their satisfaction ratio as perceived from the stakeholders engaged. Simultaneously, the role of a digital SR profile in this campaign reveals how local organisational stakeholders (e.g. museums, theatres, hotels etc.) are actively engaging and profiting from the construction of a CSR profile. For example one immediate result of their engagement is the increasing touristic trend of Thessaloniki (Greece Tourism Report 2015) with weekend thematic activities' visitors. In times of financial crisis such trends are creating new jobs and thus a significant benefit for the local economy.

There are multiple aspects relating to local growth that this case reveals. They concern primarily the socio-economic networking of the city's stakeholders (Porter and Crammer, 2011). These aspects link to: i) the corporate performance (CP) and CSR of participating organisations; ii) the effects of the SR communication and networking between the organisations and the society and iii) the creation of innovative products and services which are strengthening the city's pull attributes (Kaikati et al., 2012; Bhattacharya et al., 2009).



Figure 1: Branding Thessaloniki: The Centenary Campaign Logo
(Municipality of Thessaloniki, 2013)

The contribution of “Thessaloniki 2012” case to the SR strategies, and CSR conveys valuable knowledge to the dynamic role of the residents' conceptualisation of a SR city and its dynamic interaction with their quality of living. It empirically underlines the concepts of SR, and CSR (Busch et al, 2011) towards the triple bottom line construction of stronger bonds between the city and its primary stakeholders (Jackson and Deeg, 2008). Simultaneously, it provides an example for the active engagement of diverse institutions and companies within the CSR discourse.

Particularly CSR has been a catalyst, in several other cases, solving multifocal social and economic misconceptions (Burcell, J., Cook, 2013; Korschun et al., 2016). This case also conceals that the construction of a SR network with respect to CSR and SD could be a valuable engagement strategy for several corporate practices, maximising their CP. It also empirically provides valuable evidence for the strong ties existing between a SD strategy from the one hand and SR, CSR and CP from the other (Papagiannis, 2016). Finally, it presents the valuable social and organisational role of the volunteers and NGO groups, with in the CSR context. Their participation and contribution was not valuable as to negotiate or engage in a resistance discourse but rather to compromise a socially acceptable corporate practices and behavior that could be beneficial for all participating stakeholders (Kourula and Laasonen, 2010).

2. The Case of Thessaloniki Branding: Thessaloniki 2012

Thessaloniki Metropolitan Development Agency S.A. (TMDA S.A.) is the legal entity that organised, in cooperation with the municipality of Thessaloniki, the “Thessaloniki 2012” centenary branding project. The TMDA S.A. organising and steering committee led by the city mayor engaged the deputy mayors of: environment, culture, education and youth as dynamic strategic collaborators for most of its activities (available link at: www.thessaloniki.gr). Major business and cultural personalities, professionals and entrepreneurs contributed to the agency’s general direction and active participation of the city’s national and international stakeholders. Prominent campaign stakeholders and national and international collaborators include:

- i) The city residents, volunteers and especially the youth of Thessaloniki providing valuable support for promoting and branding several events (available link at: <https://elgr.facebook.com/thessaloniki2012>). Their valuable enthusiasm and contribution together with the municipal department of culture, education and youth led to Thessaloniki’s award as a European Youth Capital (See figure 2).
- ii) The ministry of culture and sports (available link at: www.culture.gr) in collaboration with the sister cities of Thessaloniki including: Ankara, Bucharest, Novi Sad, Sofia, Tirana etc. (available link at www.balcinet.org) contributing to SR international networking. Other participating stakeholder-countries also include: Bulgaria, Israel, Romania, Serbia, Turkey etc.
- iii) The organisation visit Greece and its European funded programme of “cultural crossroads” (available link at: www.visitgreece.gr) promoting the city of Thessaloniki as a host of some of the world’s greatest cultures. Such admirable cultures include several cultures of the South Eastern Europeans, the Middle East and others.
- iv) The touristic organisation in coalition with the chamber of commerce and industry, supporting local small and medium enterprises participating in branding and promoting activities with the city (www.ebeth.gr).

These national and international stakeholders and their valuable collaboration along with TMDA S.A. organising and steering committee delivered a branding campaign based on maximising the SR benefits of all engaging parties (e.g. residents, public and private institutions etc.). At the same time, these novel collaboration initiatives are still minimising the negative effects of any possible lack of the city’s environmental and economic resources due to the ongoing Greek crisis (Lai and Vinh, 2013). “Thessaloniki 2012” organised several events, primarily focusing on SD which leads to SR, and eventually to CSR and CP. These two main branding design attributes (SD and SR) supported from the joint effort of several national and international collaborators are still guiding the city’s social networking and touristic profile. They are constructing a tighter socio-economic engagement which is leading to institutional arbitration and promotion among collaborating stakeholders. The budget for all these activities was and still is limited, due to the financial crisis conditions prevailing in Greece (Eibel, 2015). Thus, these types of social and economic networking activities are empirically unfolding the vital momentum for the city’s branding. On the other hand, tourism related academic literature is discovering that the budget parameter employed in a branding and place marketing campaign is not directly linked to the volume of visitors’ arrivals or the economic impact and CP of the tourist industry (Martha and Raymond, 2009).



Figure 2: Thessaloniki's Logo of European Youth Capital 2014

For Thessaloniki's case, besides the municipal limited budget in effect, funding and sponsoring from several diverse public and/or private corporations and other participating stakeholders enhanced the campaign's budgeting. The organisational campaign's promotional pillars funded were thematically analysed. They were based on the centenary programme conception of city's celebrating activities, pull attributes and social profile (Truong and King, 2009). The holistic branding strategy towards a SR and efficient branding is hierarchically and thematically synopsised in figure 3.

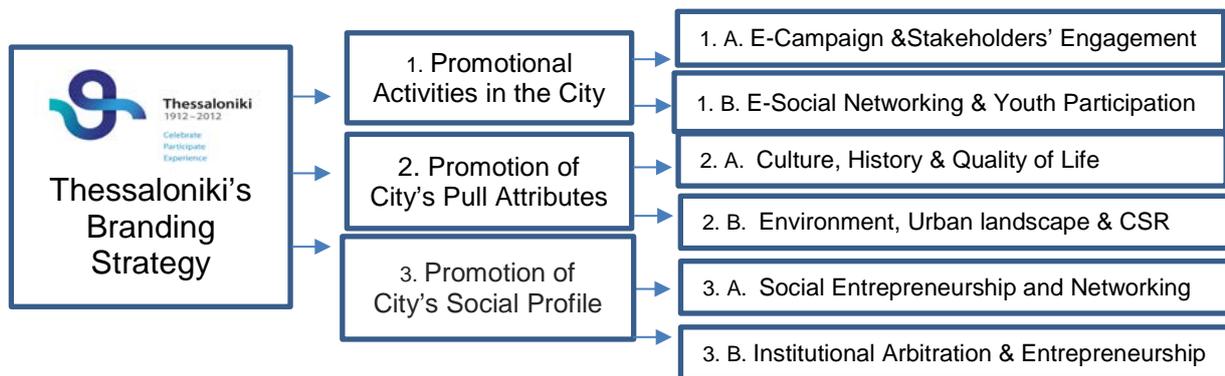


Figure 3: Thessaloniki 2012: The Thematic Hierarchy of the SR Branding Strategy

These celebrating thematic activities were supported by four different and discrete departments. These departments (D) were: D1) the public relations and press release; D2) social promotion and digital communications; D3) creativity and design; and D4) social support and volunteers. Then, they were functionally associated with the implementation of further filtered categorisation according to the promotional activities, services and tools necessary for implementing the promotional pillars (see figures 3 and 4). The tools and their related services employed for the digital campaign and stakeholders' engagement were: i) the auspices and the campaign logo (see figure 1); ii) the web-page and its digital services; iii) the municipal electronic platform and its digital services; iv) the social media networking services; v) the city's infrastructure (e.g. lecture theatres, auditoriums etc.). Specifically, the organisation when a selected project/event was placed under the auspices of the campaign several promotional activities were triggered (Gustafsson, 2014). These activities were delivered in a matrix departmentalisation form (Sarlin and Nyman, 2013). So, the construction of the social networking and branding was an organisational hybrid (Urde et al.,

2013). The organising and steering committee was functionally designed based on its thematic categories and promotional pillars which led to three functional departments (Wienclaw, 2015). On the contrary, the implementation of the thematic categories and promotional pillars was following a cross functional design. The strict and many times simultaneous projects/events' deadlines were demanding a flexible organisational structure. In fact, there were many cases where more than two or even three projects/events were implemented at the same time in different locations. Thus, there were two different and discrete organisational designs undertaken. The one was a functional organisational design with three functional departments appropriate for the organising and steering committee's purposes. The other was a cross-functional organisation design appropriate for the implementation of the thematic categories. Figure 4 graphically presents phase one with functional organisational design and phase two with the cross-functional implementation design.

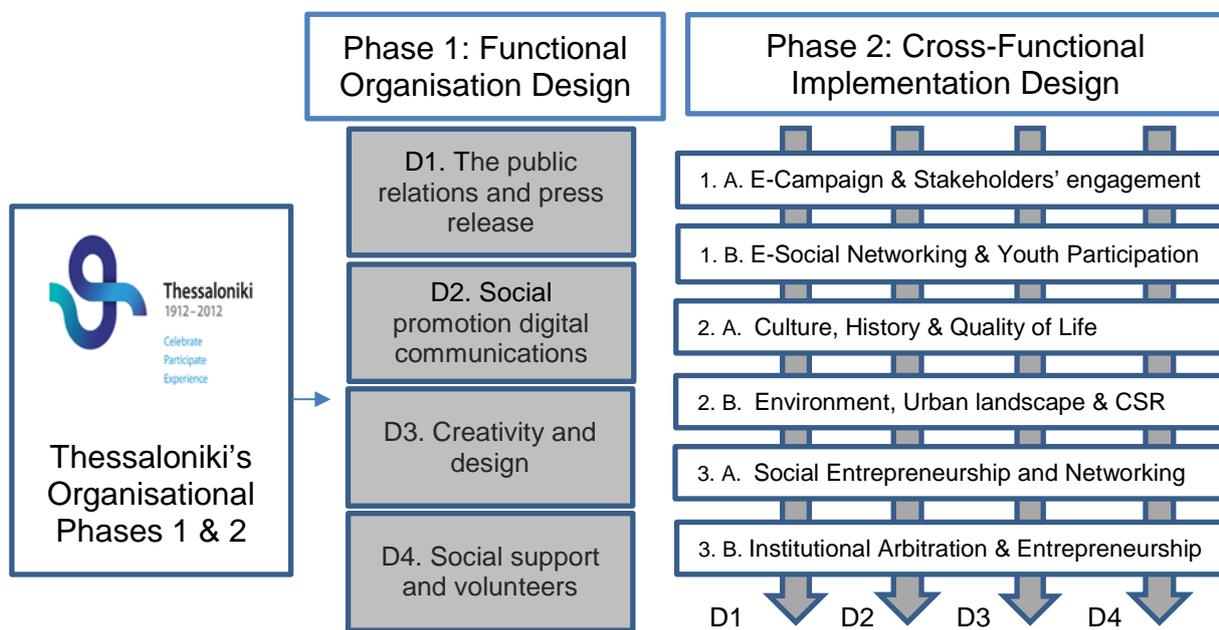


Figure 4: Thessaloniki 2012: The Organisational Phases of the SR Branding Strategy

Based on the matrix implementation structure managers were assigned to different functional departments briefly as follows:

D1 The public relations and press release department of the organisation. The campaign officers of this department were contacting the required engaged stakeholders, making them aware of the event and providing them the necessary material for their active participation and in many cases collaboration. A complete programme of all the selected activities was also issued and distributed to foreign embassies, councils, cultural and educational institutions and others, located in Greece. There was also an initial press release per event to several local, national and international presses. This department was also using the municipal national frequency with a television channel (www.tv100.gr) and a radio channel (www.fm100.gr), for announcing through different social programmes and news the promotional events for the city. There were also responsible for organising frequent thematic press conferences and meetings for

national and international stakeholders including media reporters covering the city's branding (e.g. National geographic, lonely planet etc.). Fundraising was also in this department's responsibility and it had to cooperate dynamically and cross-functionally with the social promotion and digital communication department. They were responsible for delivering, through letters or emails, correspondence from the mayor informing national and international institutions the social, environmental and economic value of the centenary celebrating activities. The fundraising activities were aiming towards the CSR managers of legal entities to provide scalable sponsorships (e.g. mega sponsor, sponsor and supporter) to SR events. Social and environmental sponsorships were supporting the installation of art in city's central locations, park and cultural monuments restoration and lighting as well as the marking, labelling and creating several historic and environmental trails within and around the city. It was another currently widely used social project. Another social initiative was from the municipality, "Thessaloniki 2012", the Greek ministry of culture as well as legal and physical city's residents. They all agreed, after a series of meetings, to initialise monumental trails of the city. The trails were revealing its ancient, Byzantine and contemporary history and art (See figure 5).



Figure 5: Thessaloniki Seafront: The Crescent Moon Sculpture

D2 The social promotion and digital communication department. The campaign officers of this department were employing the electronic tools (e.g. web page and social media) constructed and operated for this event. The implementation of the digital campaign from this department was crucial to the social and financial success of this endeavour. They had to promote to national and international stakeholders a SR campaign for the centenary celebration of the city. The historic, multicultural and cosmopolitan profile of the city's pull attributes were presented, discussed in a direct way through the daily Facebook updates and emails. During the peak celebration dates of spring, summer and fall of 2012 the daily Facebook visits, messenger messages and emails were around a thousand. Such a vivid response from the city's legal and physical residents (e.g. citizens, social and municipal communities) among other stakeholders indicates the impact of the SR and friendly campaign's profile. These SR, most of the time cross-functional activities which were promoted on 2012 are currently blooming and strengthening the social profile of the city. Couple of successfully ongoing SR examples, among many others, include activities that attracted city's citizens towards socially and environmentally friendly activities. One ongoing example is Thessaloniki's marathon 2016, where more than twenty thousand athletes from all over the world (<http://www.atgm.gr/index.php/en/>). These national and international athletes were gathered to initiate the marathon from the city's hallmark central location which is the white tower. Another ongoing environmental

event, engaging more than 12 million volunteers in 112 countries is “Let’s do it” (<https://www.letsdoitworld.org/country/greece>). Thessaloniki’s volunteers and corporations are currently supporting this event which is pragmatizing the global dream of living in a clean and healthy waste free world.

D3 The creativity and design department. This department was responsible for the artistic creation and aesthetic design of several promotional tools. These tools were including: i) an advertising campaign through the national mass media (e.g. the creation of TV and radio spots), ambient media and murals; ii) the artistic creation and profile of the digital campaign through the social media and web page employed; iii) the outdoor creative applications to several locations around the city to stimulate the engagement and collaboration of their primary stakeholders, its citizens (see figure 6).



Figure 6: An Outdoor Application at the Municipal Building of Thessaloniki

Besides the graphic designers, engineers and managers working for the department, there were several volunteers offering their valuable services. They were facilitating the applications of several, diverse and innovative creations. They were also, distributing promotional material through the digital databases as well as to designated info kiosks strategically located around the city’s neighbourhoods.

D4 The social support and volunteers department. This was and still is one of the most enthusiastic and dynamic departments, engaging more than 1.000 volunteers. They were responsible for several social and environmental projects primarily including the active participation of the legal and physical residents to the centenary branding activities. They were responsible for physically delivering the centenary celebration plan with all of the promotional activities through the info points and kiosks, door to door throughout the city, to private and public institutions and other agencies. They were also responsible to support the digital campaign updating the vivid online discussions through the social media of the organisation, the emails requesting information and other materials through the web page etc. Their contribution was also valuable for supporting the implementation of the demanding events scheduled. They contributed to more than 100 promotional and branding events scheduled.

Examples of large events implemented include Tedx, a technology, entertainment and design event (<http://www.tedxthessaloniki.com/talks-2012/>). Tedx is an international community organising events around the world. They are joining the celebration of locally-driven, entrepreneurial ideas. Their aim is to drive those entrepreneurial innovative ideas to a global setting. This organisation of these events is rather difficult as Tedx events are produced independently. Thus there is a great

need for volunteers for Tedx conferences, panels and discussions which should follow the Tedx's format and rules (see figure 7).

Another example of a prominent branding event is the womex (<http://www.womex.com/realwomex/2012/thessaloniki.html>). The world music expo (WOMEX) is an international world music project based in Berlin. It integrates a trade fair, showcases, conferences, film screenings, networking sessions, and awards. It receives a great support from youth and it did require a major support from this department to implement it. The project was implemented in partnership with Municipality of Thessaloniki, "Thessaloniki 2012" organisation, Thessaloniki's congress and exhibition centre (Helexpo S.A) and the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism.



Figure 7: Tedx Thessaloniki Promotional Event Logo

The results of this series of initiatives and projects, spearheaded by the Municipality of Thessaloniki and "Thessaloniki 2012" organisation are currently reestablishing the city's identity and image. A series of interviews and questionnaires with the engaging stakeholders were employed to evaluate the whole branding campaign towards the creation of social networks and PPP projects (Papagiannis et al., 2013). This questionnaire was a valuable tool for receiving participating stakeholders' input about the organisational structure as well as the level of efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided. The methodology and its findings of this research effort are signaling a starting point for understanding the value of SR and CSR in relation to the long tradition of multiculturalism of the city allowing Thessaloniki to encounter and explore its potentials, opportunities and perspectives for the years to come.

3. Research Methodology

The study utilises a mixed methodological approach in the data collection process and its subsequent analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2015). A mixed method approach was utilised to collect rich data to understand and uncover the key benefits of social networking and CSR as well as test stakeholder levels of satisfaction. This mixed method approach enables the collection of rich contextual information from key stakeholders as well as undertake statistical testing of structured data. The whole research methodology, both qualitative and quantitative (Bryman and Bell, 2015), was supported by "Thessaloniki 2012" administration staff.

Qualitative data was collected through a mix of face-to-face and telephone interviews lasting from 5 minutes to a maximum of 15 minutes. Interviews were undertaken with all stakeholder groups which participated in the rebranding effort during the centenary celebration of the city. There were communicated to provide an in-depth and detailed insight into the different issues and benefits delivered by the project to the city of Thessaloniki, based on the questionnaire's research orientation. These individuals were representing either

physical or legal entities. Physical entities are considered those participants that contributed on the project basis, without forming a legal entity. Legal entities are public or private institutions, national or international which participated with an event or project or a series of events or projects (e.g. Museums, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), multinational corporations (MNCs) etc.). Utilizing content analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Gibbs, 2012), the prevalent themes were identified from the qualitative dataset.

For quantitative data, participants in this interview were also recipients of hard copy questionnaires which were utilised as the most effective means to collect data in a timely manner and administered to a wide sample group (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Saunders et al, 2015). Similarly, given the need to ensure authenticity of the study, the use of hardcopy questionnaires provided means to ensure official “Thessaloniki 2012” watermarks and stamps were incorporated in the request for data.

Questionnaires were designed across 4 key concepts. These were focused upon the levels of satisfaction with regards to the services provided by the Thessaloniki 2012 organising committee, the availability of support services, promotional activities and most importantly the usage of digital media streams. These were designed to ensure simple straightforward responses that were easily and quickly completed. This approach was undertaken in a bid to ensure increased response rates as well as reduce chances of incorrect completion.

Hardcopy questionnaires were distributed to 55 private and public participating institutions through “Thessaloniki 2012”, over a period of six months, due to their interdisciplinary thematology and seven were directly contacted from their corresponding deputy mayors of Thessaloniki. A response rate of 100% was achieved. These were then reviewed within a period 4 months to ensure completeness and accuracy with an overall useable response rate of 100%.

It is important to note that for the purposes of this study only verified and authenticated responses were collected. That way this primary research enables robustness in the dataset and ensures that only stakeholders with direct involvement with the project were surveyed. Respondents were also informed of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. A 5-point Likert scale was utilised. Some element of ‘post-coding’ was undertaken once responses were received. For example, responses were coded against private and public organisations by the research team. This was to ensure that actual details of incorporation were included in the data set as opposed to perceptual responses.

The next section will reveal the findings of this primary research which was implemented over a period of six months. Its results will unfold the social profile of the city and its main stakeholder’s engagement for the creation of this profile. It will also exhibit the sustainable strategy that initiated in the city and its currently considered as a pole of attraction.

4. Key Findings

Interview results reviewed a number of key themes across respondents. This suggests novel and interesting results on the SR impact and viability of the initiated SD strategy in Thessaloniki. Content analysis revealed a number of consistent issues highlighted by interviewees. These provided an interesting insight into the positive outcomes of the branding strategy as well as areas where improvements or enhancements could be made. To enable robustness of results, the findings below are saturated i.e. no further issues were identified by additional interviewees.

The results were broadly consistent with the cross-functional implementation matrix design discussed earlier (see figure 4). To aid understanding and provide a structure for emergent issues to be displayed, figure 8 exhibits the prevalent issues against a matrix of cross-functional themes.

These findings reveal that there is not only some overlap between individual themes, but there are often associations and linkages across elements suggesting that success is based upon a synergetic value added of SR and CSR approaches. So, SR and CSR go hand in hand, as figure 8 underlines. Public or private corporations enhanced their SR picture and were having the opportunity to carefully reconsider their products within this synergetic tactical activities as actions speak louder than words. CSR positioning requires significant strategic design in the way that organisations think and act (Papagiannis, 2016). “Thessaloniki 2102” provided the opportunity for CSR related legal entities to embrace the SR profile of this branding campaign and truthfully and meaningfully communicate with its stakeholders (e.g. city residents). That way they had the opportunity as the results indicate to communicate and relate with the public activities and understood their behavior in the content of issue complexity due to the momentum accumulated with these synergies. For example many bus stations were restored across the town. Seven urban parks were also initiated during that period. A handful of CSR organisations contributed with valuable sponsoring with their products to the city’s volunteers responsible for these projects. Land scape architectural companies thus had the chance to understand how a city resident perceives its urban environment. Other organisations providing construction materials (e.g. paints, stones etc.) understood the momentum of this findings as social networking was revealing citizens develop a brand loyalty to the organisations that provide them the resources for a quality of life and thus assist them to develop their personal objectives.

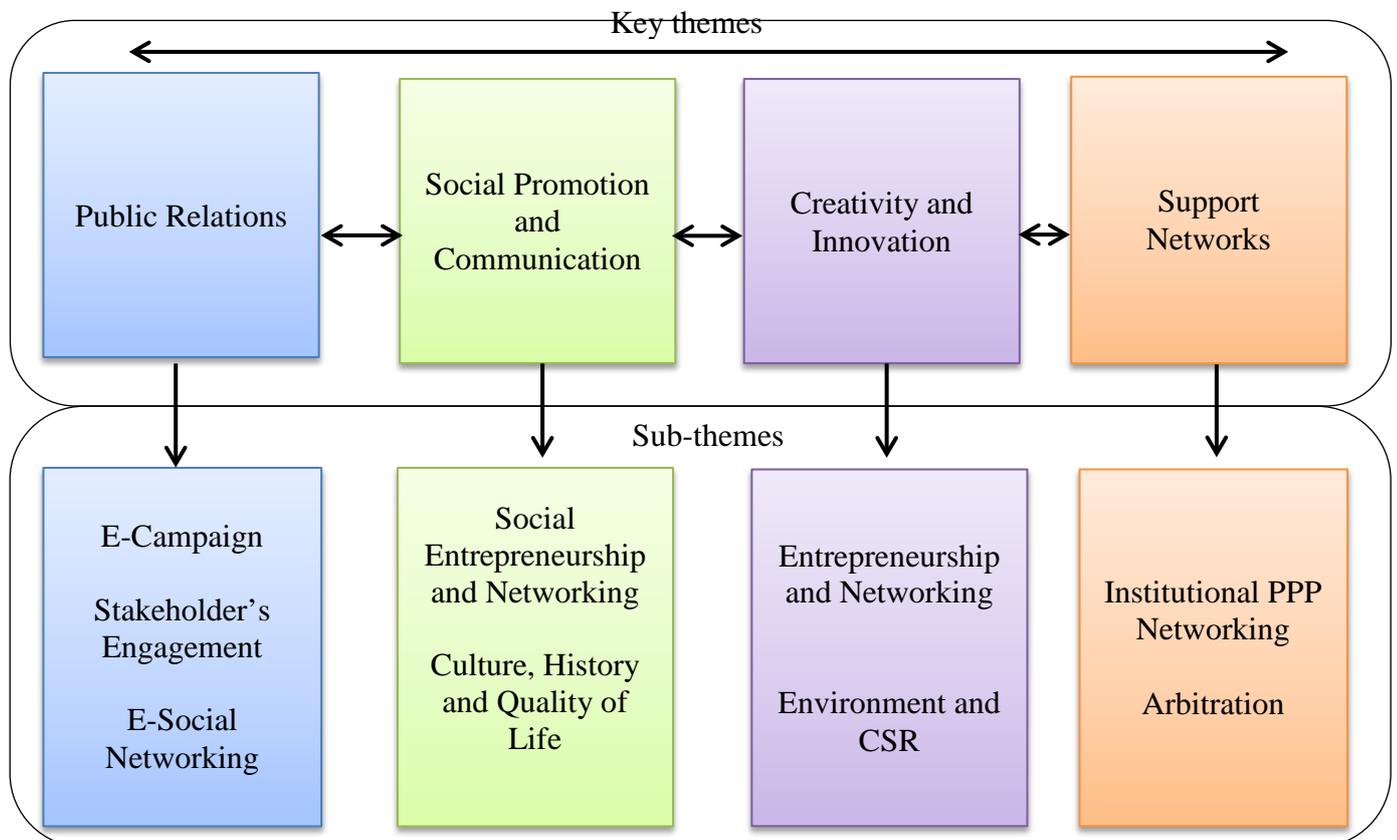


Figure 8. Thematic findings and relationships

These streams are interesting not only because they reflect cross-functional implementation matrices but also further indicate a consistent notion across interviewees of particularly important functions. For example, public relations and support networks are very likely interlinked with both, working in tandem to ensure successful implementation of project outcomes. Interviewees identified similar themes when considering the success of the branding strategy of “Thessaloniki 2012”, themselves suggesting this link between the two themes. Thus, findings exhibit that such kind of support is valuable for the socially responsible construction of a city brand. They also show that the city’s stakeholders (e.g. city residents) closely associate their personal aspirations with the project developed and thus they provide fertile ground for SR engagement with the city.

The findings are particularly interesting as they do not only signposts key factors that aided in the delivery of Thessaloniki’s branding strategy, but suggest pertinent implementation factors for future projects. In examining the quantitative questionnaire dataset similar findings were also identified. The 4 key concepts of D1-D4 were reflected in the questionnaire design. Figure 9 below displays overall levels of satisfaction of respondents with the branding project. Mean scores were reviewed to uncover any variation in satisfaction across the participating organisations. A key goal of the project was to ensure strong satisfaction of all stakeholders to ensure clear branding for the entire city and equality across participating organisations. The results indicate strong levels of satisfaction across the themes and suggest success in implementation approaches. Mean scores were above 3 on all areas with public relations being the highest and support networks being the theme with room for improvement.

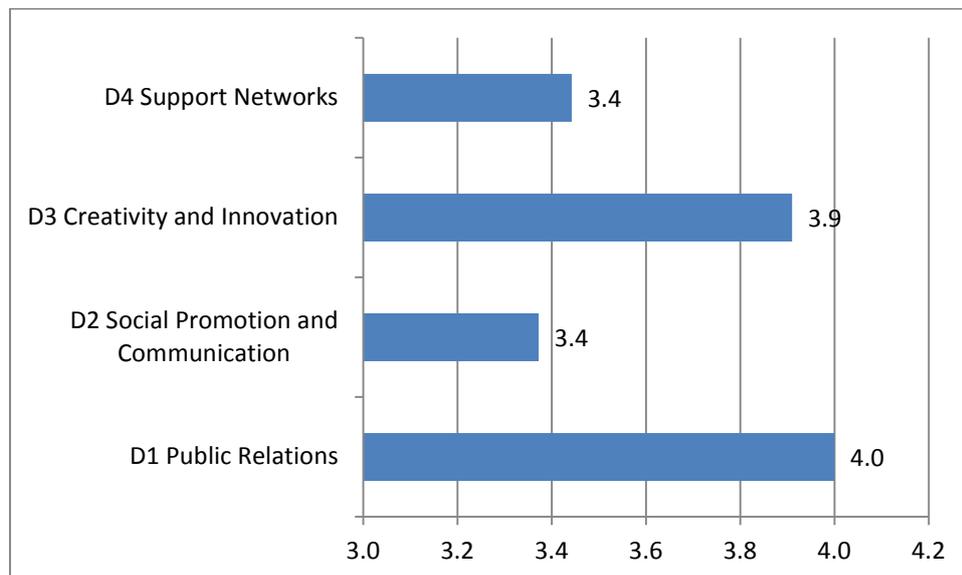


Figure 9. Mean scores of functional organisation design.

To examine the relationships between these concepts further a bivariate analysis was undertaken. Bivariate correlations review the strength of correlation between variables. It further provides some directionality of correlation where variables could be positively or inversely associated (Field, 2013). The results indicate strong positive correlations across all themes. This not only suggests strong linkage between concepts but that equal importance and priority should be placed across the board.

	D1 Public Relations	D3 Creativity and Innovation	D4 Support Networks	D2 Social Promotion and Communication
D1 Public Relations	1			
D3 Creativity and Innovation	.706**	1		
D4 Support Networks	.731**	.666**	1	
D2 Social Promotion and Communication	.705**	.666**	.831**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 10. Bivariate correlations against functional organisation design.

The results indicate that creativity and innovation is positively linked to support networks and social promotion and communication. This positive relationship suggests that in order for creativity and innovation to be useful, there needs to be emphasis placed upon social promotion and support networks and vice versa. So, as most of the participants were evaluating Thessaloniki positively as a SR city that reflected to their personal traits. That reflection strengthen the participants’ self-esteem, as they were feeling that they could be creative and innovative in such a fertile city environment. This result is particularly interesting for a SD strategy. As respondents indicate that while each theme is important for “Thessaloniki 2012” branding strategy, what is equally vital is the holistic approach of their application.

These signposts provide some key considerations for future projects suggesting the value strong infrastructure, support and social networks have in undertaking such large strategic projects. Similarly, it also suggests that while social networks and the digital approaches to branding are important, they need to be applied and considered in tandem with other factors such as public relations and support networks with elements of creativity and innovation. There is indeed a need for SR networking approaches in project delivery today but what is clear from “Thessaloniki 2012” branding strategy is that traditional infrastructure still needs to be retained. Indeed while questionnaire respondents indicate satisfaction with social networking and digital media, it is one of the areas that have room for improvement.

Within the case study of Thessaloniki, the results are particularly interesting as these four themes are interspersed across the functional organisation design. They suggests that there exist some strong synergies between different functional organizational designs and the promotional concepts that enables successful implementation of branding strategies. This provides an insight into a functional structure and design that facilitated Thessaloniki’s branding strategy.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper reveals that the thematic promotional concepts undertaken with the four pillars selected were vital for SR and CSR branding strategies. It argues that while the promotional concepts and its related activities are vital for SR and CSR branding strategies some form of cross-functional design needs to be applied. Such a cross-functional design provides the necessary flexibility for a SD strategy. It provides valuable input towards the specific aspects that they should be considered when organisations synergise with their stakeholders. There are many theories around this knowledge domain (Werther and Chandler, 2005) but there is not a specific process for evaluating the themes of this case. So, this case provides significant

constitution to further understanding the relationship between CSR and SR communities. It concludes that CSR and SR have a tight bond and organisations should be evaluating what specific aspects of CSR should be considered within their strategies and how these aspects directly related to their stakeholders. So, when organisations make strategic assessment about the value added of CSR there is a need for a specific practical philosophy and an action plan which should be actively engaging major stakeholders. It is vital for organisations to understand the necessary events, projects or activities that they should be engaged with, to integrate practically CSR into their overall strategy and philosophy (see figure 10). Filter alternative concepts of SR management and embed these concepts to their organisational structure. In the case of Thessaloniki, the stakeholders proposed four thematic pillars for the centenary celebration based on the city's pull attributes and potential for social activities in an effort to construct a social profile for the city's brand. They embraced these concepts into their organisational departmental functions and operated closely with the city's main stakeholders, the city residents (see figure 11).

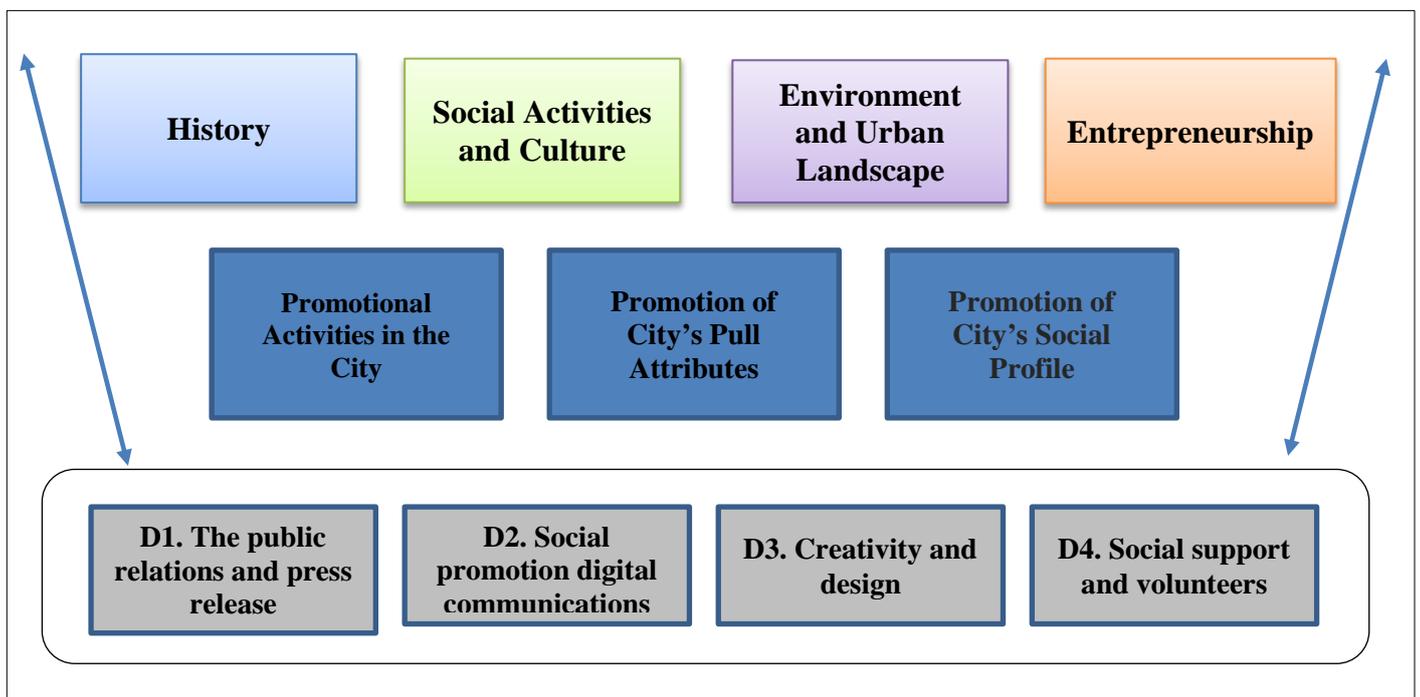


Figure 11. Conceptual Filtering of Relationships between Thematic Pillars and Organisational Design

It is foreseeable that the individual elements within these functions enable sustainable and effective branding strategies, as evidenced by the high satisfaction scores of each function (see figure 9). Yet the case study has revealed stronger effectiveness when cross-functional designs and the promotional concepts are applied in synergy. Indeed the bivariate results suggest strong positive correlation between all functions. The Thessaloniki case study on branding in relation to SR and CSR has provided some novel considerations both for academic literature and for future practice. It indicates that:

- i) While there is an inherent desire and need to apply social networks and modern promotional activities, these should not be applied in singularity. Organisations that synergistically engage with their stakeholders are more likely to effectively integrate CSR into their strategies and thus improve their CP.

- ii) There is room for improvement in the application of digital technologies and digital marketing in branding. The reason for that is that the greater the variety of the business environments that organisations function the more polymorphous should be the synthesis of their electronic tools employed. Such a need derives from the diverse needs of their individual, often contradicting, stakeholder groups.
- iii) That a traditional method of engagement along with strong functional design is vital for branding effectiveness and sustainability. This is particularly noteworthy as often literature (Blombäck and Scandeliuss, 2013) is keen to suggest the overarching benefits of social networking as an effective tool for branding.
- iv) The high satisfaction ratio of the participants was deriving from the focused CSR activities in which organisations participated constructing a more positively profile from their stakeholders.

This paper, and more specifically in the review of Thessaloniki's approaches, suggests that social networks are only one stream in a number of vital functional and promotional considerations. Instead, it is the assimilation and synergetic application of these that has proven important within Thessaloniki's branding strategy. The matrix system provided the necessary managerial flexibility to implement complex concepts, like CSR-related or other brand-related concepts (e.g. history, environment etc.). The findings in the previous sections have outlined the broad issues that should be considered when relating CSR and SR to city's branding. It is also proposed by the findings of this paper that there is a strong correlation among the organisations that have externally tested and evaluated their CSR activities and successful branding.

Finally, the complexity associated with the design and implementation of "Thessaloniki 2012" campaign resulted to ongoing city efforts to become more SR not necessarily for promoting the city's profile, but rather the quality of everyday living. These city endeavours are currently magnified to an extent that Thessaloniki is now a major pole of attraction benefiting its stakeholders.

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