

The Case of Thessaloniki's Branding: Constructing Social Networking and CSR in the Digital Era

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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 analyze 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: Sustainable Development Strategy; Digital communication; City Branding; Socially Responsible Networking; 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 has been a scholarly research field for a decade now, there are still many challenges to be addressed for unfolding the role of SR in branding and networking (Kalantides and Kavaratzis, 2009; Gundlach and Wilkie 2009).

The aim of this paper is to present and analyze the ongoing construction of a social responsible profile of Thessaloniki by focusing on the triptych of social, environmental and economic factors of the city's sustainable strategy (Vanderleeuw and Sides, 2014). This triple bottom line leads towards the re-establishment of the city's identity and profile in a digital society. Digital communication employed in this campaign engaged the city's primary stakeholders, through the use of technology (Lindstedt 2014). 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 prioritized primarily its SD strategic goals by branding SR and its protarchic role for the city. Such a strategy conceptualizes 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 organizational stakeholders (e.g., museums, theatres, hotels etc.) are actively engaging and profiting from the construction of a CSR profile. In this case, one immediate result of their engagement is the increasing touristic trend of Thessaloniki (Greek Tourism Organization, 2015) with weekend thematic activities' visitors. In times of financial crisis such trends create 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 organizations; ii) the effects of the SR communication and networking between the organizations and the society and iii) the creation of innovative products and services which are strengthening the city's pull attributes (Torelli et al., 2012; Bhattacharya et al., 2009).



Figure 1. Centenary Campaign Logo (Municipality of Thessaloniki Annual Report, 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, in a digital society (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, Cook, 2013; Korschun et al., 2016). This case also conceals that the formation of a SR network with respect to CSR and SD could be a valuable engagement strategy for several corporate practices, maximizing 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 organizational role of the volunteers and NGO groups, with in the CSR context. Digital communication and physical participation of the volunteers and the NGO groups contribution is 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 organized, in cooperation with the municipality of Thessaloniki, the “Thessaloniki 2012” centenary branding project. These public entities (e.g., TMDA S.A.) are recognised as state-owned enterprises (SOEs) formed by one or more municipal authorities (Alexius and Cisneros, 2015). The TMDA S.A. organizing 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 (digital profile available 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 (digital profile available 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 (digital profile available at: www.culture.gr) in collaboration with the sister cities of Thessaloniki including: Ankara, Bucharest, Novi Sad, Sofia, Tirana etc. (digital profile available at: www.balcinet.org) contributing to SR international networking. Other participating stakeholder-countries also include: Bulgaria, Israel, Romania, Serbia, Turkey etc.
- iii) The organization 'Visit Greece' and its European funded program of "cultural crossroads" (digital profile available at: www.visitgreece.gr) promoting the city of Thessaloniki as a host of some of the world's greatest cultures.
- iv) The touristic organization in coalition with the chamber of commerce and industry, supporting local small and medium enterprises participating in branding and promoting activities with the city (digital profile available at: www.ebeth.gr).

These national and international stakeholders and their valuable collaboration along with TMDA S.A. organizing and steering committee delivered a branding campaign based on maximizing the SR benefits of all engaging parties (e.g., residents, public and private institutions etc.). At the same time, these novel digital collaboration initiatives are minimizing the negative effects of any possible lack of the city's social, environmental and economic resources due to the ongoing Greek crisis (Lai and Vinh, 2013). Among the ongoing crisis indicators is the unemployment rate in Thessaloniki which is reaching for the city's youth 52 percent and an overall unemployment rate for its residents of 25 percent (Eurostat, 2016).

“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 by 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 (Boisot and Marshall, 2008) and promotion among collaborating stakeholders. The financial resources for all these activities was then 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 budgetary parameters 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 (Honey and Raymond, 2009).



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

For Thessaloniki’s case, besides the limited municipal budget in effect, funding and sponsoring from several diverse public and/or private corporations, as well as other participating stakeholders, enhanced the campaign’s financial resources and core competences (Campbell et al., 2011). Following are the organizational campaign’s promotional pillars funded which are thematically analyzed. They are based on the four centenary thematic categories of: i) history; ii) social activities and culture; iii) environment and urban landscape and iv) entrepreneurship. These thematic categories are filtered through the three centenary promotional pillars of: i) centenary activities in the city; ii) the city’s social profile; and iii) the pull attributes of the city (Truong and King, 2009). This strategic approach creates a value added mix (Kotler et. al., 2015) that resulted to a successful centenary program implementation. Thessaloniki’s branding strategy is hierarchically and thematically synopsised in figure 3.

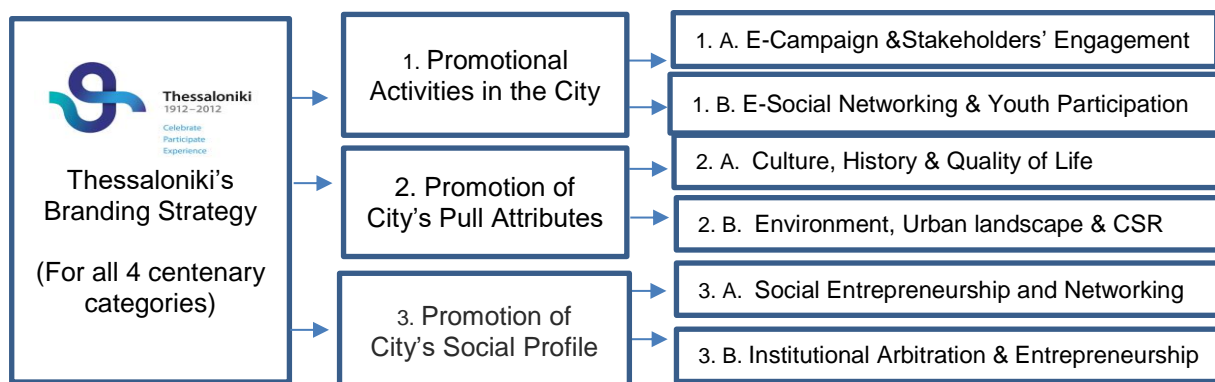


Figure 3. Thessaloniki 2012: The Thematic Hierarchy of the SR Branding Strategy

These celebrating thematic activities were managed 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, these departments were cross-functionally associated with the centenary program implementation activities, based on the city’s three promotional pillars (see figures 3 and 4). The organizational unique resources and core competences (Agha et al., 2012) employed for

the digital campaign and stakeholders' engagement were: i) the centenary auspices and the campaign logo (see figure 1); ii) the organization's web-page and its digital services; iii) the municipal electronic platform and its digital services; iv) the social media networking services of the organization; v) the municipal and public facilities (e.g., lecture theatres, stadiums, auditoriums etc.). So, when a legal entity with a specific project or activity proposal was selected to participate to the campaign it was placed under the auspices of the organization's campaign logo of: "Thessaloniki 2012". These auspices of "Thessaloniki 2012" were providing: i) marketing staff; ii) managerial staff; iii) volunteers; and iv) municipal resources for the successful completion of their project/activity. (Gustafsson, 2014). These projects/activities were delivered in a matrix departmentalisation form (Sarlin and Nyman, 2013).

A hybrid organizational structure is employed, in this case, to implement the city's social networking and branding (Urde et al., 2013). From the one hand, the centenary organization is led by a steering committee which is functionally designed. It is based on its four thematic categories and three promotional pillars which are managed by four functional departments (Wienclaw, 2015). On the other hand, the implementation of these four thematic categories and three promotional pillars is following a cross-functional design (see figure 4).

The strict and often simultaneous projects/activities' deadlines were demanding a flexible organizational structure. In fact, there were many cases where more than two or even three projects/events were implemented at the same time in different geographical locations. Thus, these two different and discrete organizational designs were guiding the organizational structure. The first functional organizational design was led by the steering committee and managed through four functional departments. It was responsible for planning and organizing the centenary projects/activities. The second cross-functional organizational design was responsible for the implementation of the centenary projects/activities. Figure 4 graphically

presents this hybrid organizational design, where phase one employs a functional organizational design and phase two employs a cross-functional implementation design.

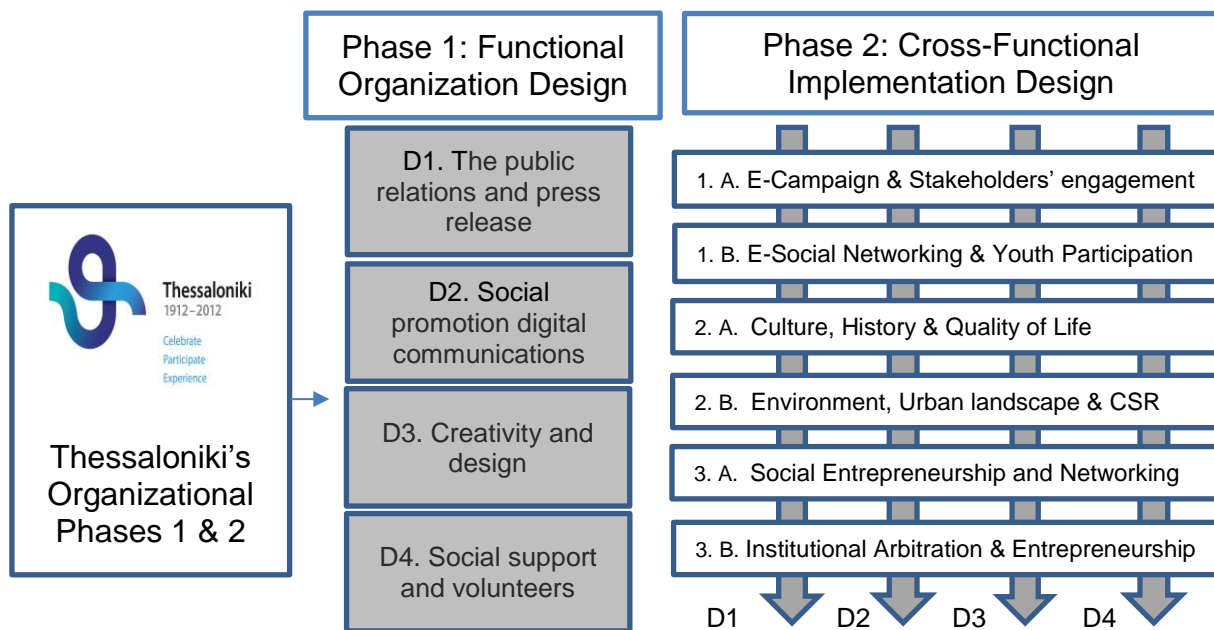


Figure 4. Thessaloniki 2012: The Organizational Phases of the SR Branding Strategy

The cross-functional design implementation follows a matrix structure (Eppinger and Tyson, 2012), as managers are assigned to different functional departments briefly as follows:

D1 The public relations and press release department of the organization. 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 program 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 programs and news the promotional events for the city. There were also responsible for organizing 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 projects/activities. The fundraising campaign was aiming towards the CSR managers of private corporations and their related stakeholders to provide scalable sponsorships (e.g., mega sponsor, sponsor and supporter) to SR events. Simultaneously, these social events were also partially funded from the city's municipality, "Thessaloniki 2012" organization, the Greek ministry of culture as well as the European Union (e.g., national strategic framework program). In this case, such a vivid social networking and funding, between public and private organizations, created value added sponsorships. Thus, through these projects/activities, all three promotional pillars of the city were revealed. These centenary projects/activities in the city included the: i) installation of modern art in the city's central locations; ii) cultural monuments restoration and lighting iii) marking, labelling and formation of several historic and environmental city trails. These projects/activities are currently revealing the city's pull attributes of ancient and byzantine history while promoting its contemporary dynamic profile.

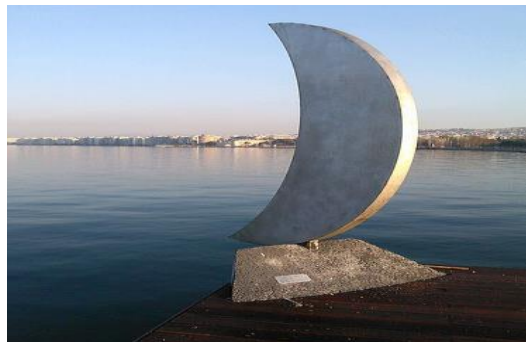


Figure 5. Thessaloniki Seafront: The Crescent Moon Sculpture

D2 The social promotion and digital communication department. The campaign officers of this department were employing the electronic tools (e.g., web page, social media, blogs, etc.) constructed and operated for this event. The efficient implementation of the digital campaign from this department was crucial to the social and financial success of this endeavour. Their aim was 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 and discussed in a direct way through the daily Facebook updates and emails.

During the peak celebration dates of spring, summer and fall of 2012 Facebook visits, messenger and blog messages as well as emails were soaring to a thousand per day. 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 socially responsible activities which were initiated from "Thessaloniki 2012" campaign, are currently assisting to the blooming and strengthening of the city's social profile. There are many examples of these successfully ongoing socially responsible activities. One ongoing example is Thessaloniki's marathon 2016, where there were 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, that is the white tower. Another ongoing environmental event, engaging more than 12 million volunteers in 112 countries is "Let's do it". 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 (<https://www.letsdoitworld.org/country/Greece>).

D3 The creativity and design department. This department was responsible for the artistic creation and aesthetic design of several promotional resources. These resources included: 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 in 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 information points and kiosks, door-to-door throughout the city, to private and public institutions and other agencies. They were also responsible for supporting the digital campaign and updating the vivid online discussions, through the social media of the organization. They were also responding to the emails requesting information and other materials through the web page. 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.

In this case, large events implemented include TEDx, a technology, entertainment and design event (<http://www.tedxthessaloniki.com/talks-2012/>). Tedx is an international community organizing 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 organization 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. WOMEX receives a great support from youth and its implementation was highly complex and demanding. The project was implemented in partnership with municipality of Thessaloniki, “Thessaloniki 2012” organization, 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” organization 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, in this digital era (Papagiannis et al., 2013). The designed questionnaire was a valuable tool for receiving participating stakeholders’ input about the organizational 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 digital potential, 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 up to 15 minutes. Interviews were undertaken with all stakeholder groups which participated in the rebranding effort during the centenary celebration of the city. There were selected to provide an in-depth and detailed insight into the different issues and benefits delivered by the project to the city of Thessaloniki. 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 Organizations (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, interview participants 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 organizing 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. A response rate of 100% was achieved. These were then reviewed within a period of 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. This approach to the primary data collection process 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 organizations 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 was initiated in the city.

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 vertical and horizontal associations and linkages across both themes and sub-themes. Figure 8 reveals that success is based upon their holistic synergetic value added which practically filters in tandem the concepts of SR and CSR approaches. Therefore,

SR and CSR provided a common relationship filter for all thematic pillars of “Thessaloniki 2102”, as figure 8 underlines. Collaborations between public and private corporations also enhance further their CSR picture providing the opportunity to carefully reconsider their products and services. Thus, these dynamic relationships between all themes, that figure 8 presents, boost holistically the synergetic value added of SR and CSR. As a result, SR and CSR engagement requires a holistic approach, underlying the need for a significant strategic design in the way that organizations 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 participating institutions had the opportunity, as the results indicate, to directly relate their public activities to their prominent stakeholders. On the other hand, stakeholders had the opportunity to practically understand their corporate behavior in the content of CSR and link it directly to SR activities produced for the local growth and development. An indicative CSR example which was supported from several SMEs (e.g., constructing corporations, steel producers, etc.) was the restoration of many bus stations across the town. Residents volunteered to assist such a SR activity, as it was significantly improving their everyday quality of life. Another CSR example was the creation of seven urban parks which were sponsored from several private institutions (e.g., landscape architects, paint producers etc.) in collaboration with the municipal authorities. City residents, valuing such a CSR activity volunteered to assist to their creation based on the same holistic approach, where meaningful synergies provide a SR value added. Thus, a handful of CSR organizations contributed with valuable sponsoring of their products to the city’s urban development and growth. The corporations had the opportunity to practically experience the value of CSR and the SR benefits that provides to the local community. Thus, the participating corporations (e.g.,

landscape architects) had in turn the opportunity to understand how the residents in the city perceive their urban environment and improve or innovatively adapt their services accordingly.

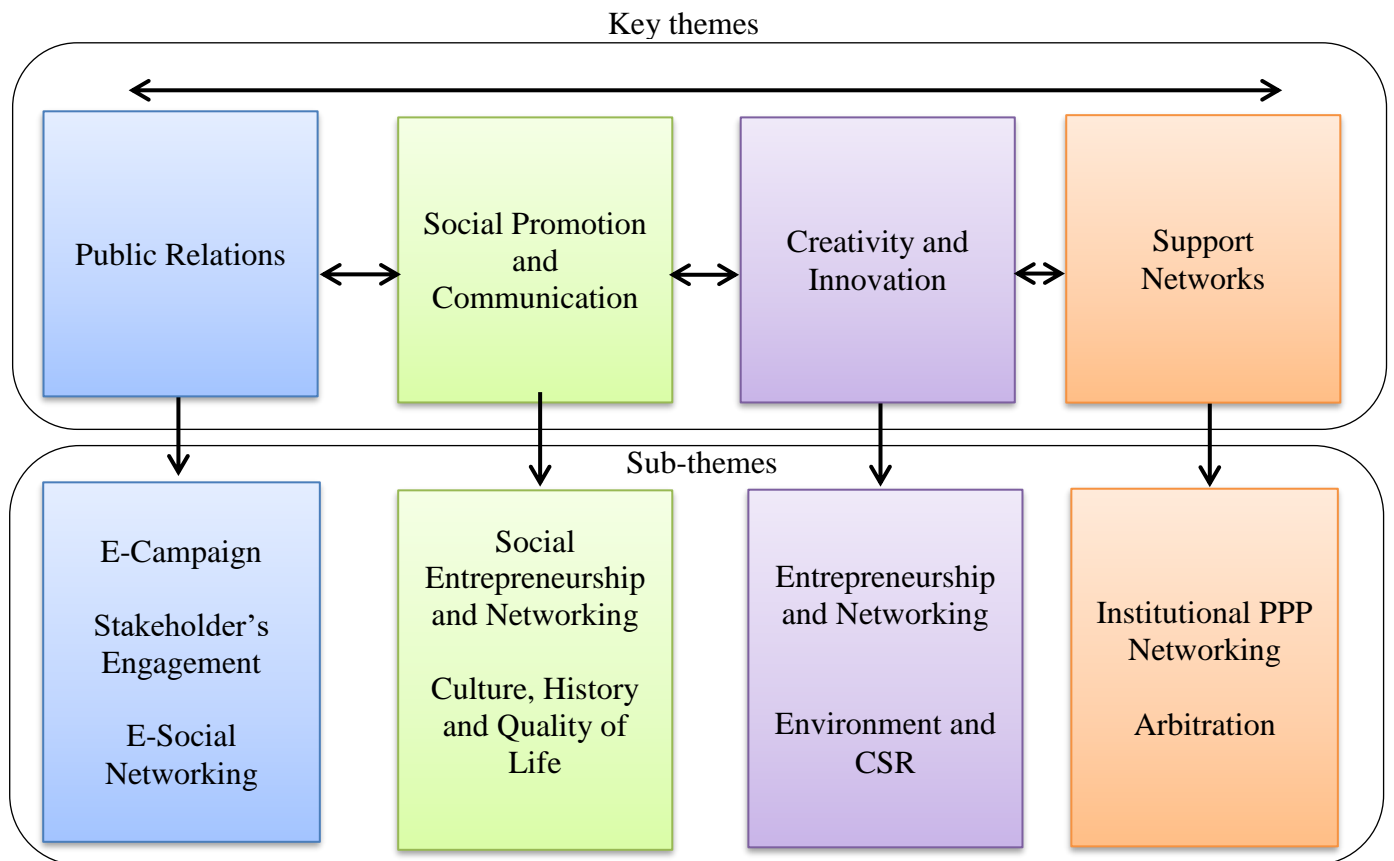


Figure 8. Thematic findings and relationships

Other participating organizations (e.g., providers of construction materials like paints, stones etc.) understood that social networking provides direct communication with their customers (e.g., city citizens) and developed brand loyalty marketing programs based on the empiricism gained from such public private collaborative projects. 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. In Thessaloniki's case, public relations and support networks are very likely interlinked with both, working together 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 signpost 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 organizations. 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 organizations. 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.

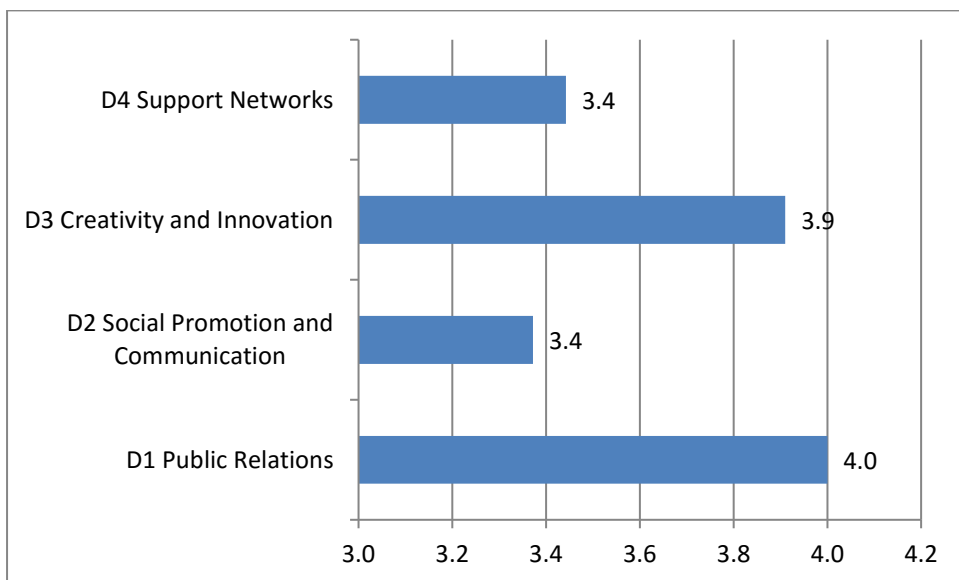


Figure 9. Mean scores of functional organization design.

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 organization design.

The findings 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. This suggests that most of the participating stakeholders, both legal and physical entities, were evaluating Thessaloniki positively as a SR city that reflected their organizational or personal traits. That reflection strengthens the participants' self-esteem, as they felt that they could be creative and innovative in such a fertile city environment. This result is particularly interesting for a SD city 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 clearly 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 organization design. They suggest 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 the value of Thessaloniki’s thematic promotional concepts and their digital application, in coordination with the four centenary pillars selected 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. Cross-functional design provides the necessary flexibility for a SD strategy. Simultaneously, digital resources provide valuable communication channels towards this specific design, that should be considered when organizations synergize with their stakeholders. There are many theories around this knowledge domain (Werther and Chandler, 2005), but there is not a

specific explicit process for evaluating the themes of this case. This case provides significant constitution and tacit knowledge to further understanding of the relationship between CSR and SR communities, in the digital era. It concludes that CSR and SR have a tight bond and organizations should be evaluating what specific aspects of CSR should be considered within their strategies and how these aspects directly relate to their stakeholders. So, when organizations make strategic assessment about the value added of CSR, there is a need for a digital approach to the action plan, that should be actively engaging major stakeholders. It is vital for organizations to integrate CSR to their projects/activities in order to engage their stakeholders with their overall strategy (see figure 10). They too need to filter alternative concepts of SR management and holistically embed these concepts to their organizational 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 digitally embraced these concepts into their organizational departmental functions and operated closely with the city's main stakeholders, the city residents (see figure 11).

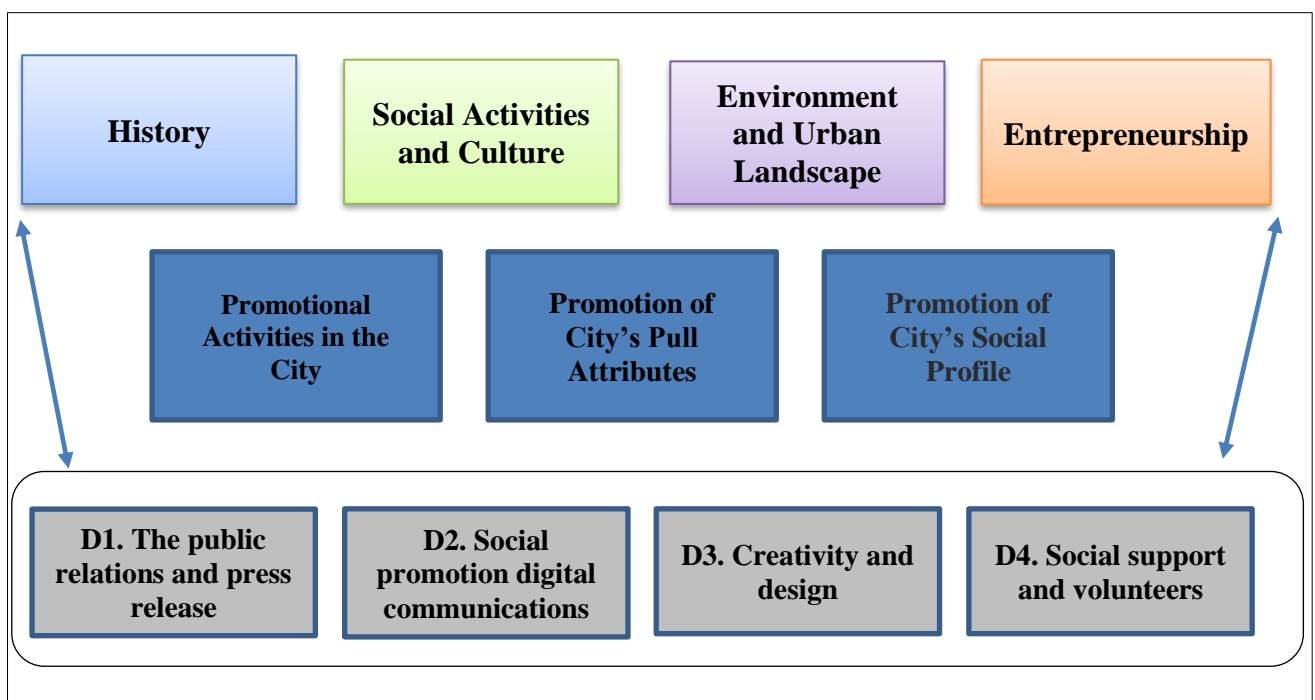


Figure 11. Conceptual Filtering of Relationships between Thematic Pillars and Organizational Design

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. Organizations that digitally synergize to engage 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 this is that the greater the variety of the business environments that organizations function, the more polymorphous should be the synthesis of their electronic resources employed. Such a conclusion derives from the diverse needs of Thessaloniki's stakeholders, that were often contradicting (Municipality of Thessaloniki Annual Report, 2013);
- iii) A traditional method of engagement along with strong functional competencies and digital resources is vital for effective and sustainable branding. 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 derived from the focused CSR projects/activities. Participating organizations positively enhanced their social profile for their stakeholders, which was digitally promoted.

Thessaloniki's case suggests that social networks should not be single and unilateral streamed in a number of vital promotional attributes of a city. 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 employ digital resources for the implementation of 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 organizations that have externally tested and evaluated their CSR activities and successful branding.

Finally, the complexity associated with the managerial design and its primarily digital implementation of "Thessaloniki 2012" campaign resulted to ongoing city efforts to become more socially responsible. SR is not necessarily solely promoting the city's pull attributes in a digital era, but rather the quality of its citizens' everyday living. Simultaneously, the digital resources employed in the centenary campaign for the city's economic simulation, diffused innovative practices to the local community and their engaging SMEs. Digitization forms a necessary condition for EU legal and administrative harmonization in public and private partnerships (Elder, and Georghiou, 2007). These city endeavours are currently magnified to an extent that Thessaloniki is now a major pole of attraction benefiting its stakeholders (Balomenou and Maliari, 2015).

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