

A Service Ecosystem Approach to Conceptualising a Place's Unique Brand: Exploring Cultural Leadership Ecosystems

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Since the turn of the twentieth century the main focus of academic research conceptualized marketing and branding as a managerial process undertaken by for-profit organizations in a dyadic relationship with customers (Copeland, 1923). As service economies grew the breadth of research expanded to include more complex organizational offers with the focus on values, relationships and experiences being identified as developing from the 1930s onwards (Merz, He & Vargo, 2009). Since the turn of the twenty first century the recognition of the influence of a wide range of stakeholders, with organizations becoming only one of many actors in a wide range of stakeholder networks, has become increasingly prominent.

These developments in theoretical thought potentially provide some exciting opportunities for place marketing and brand scholar to move away from reductionist, managerialist controlled thinking and to inspire an era in which more socially sensitive and co-created academic and citizen thinking is developed. Within the academic marketing community one mindset which could offer a foundation on which to develop place marketing and brand theory is service dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch 2004, 2008). Identified by Thompson-Reuters in 2014 as being part of a group scholars who are the most influential scientific minds in economics and business these scholars are developing a systems thinking approach to service in which multiple stakeholders are represented in actor-to-actor networks.

In post-industrial urban economies the importance of the role of creative industries in influencing the direction of urban development, and therefore potentially the place's marketing and brand, has been clearly identified (Scott, 2008). Within these industries cultural leaders act as key catalysts for urban renewal and redevelopment. Understanding who these leaders are and exactly which ecosystems they create and inhabit may be of vital importance to the success of urban regeneration projects and the wider urban ecosystem(s). However research in this area is highly debated and multi-disciplinary conceptual development remains frustratingly

elusive to both scholars and practitioners alike (Dinah, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden and Hu, 2014).

In order to explore this phenomenon in detail a service ecosystem approach (Vargo *et al.*, 2010) was used in a four stage multidisciplinary primary research project to map the actor-to-actor value co-creation systems of a number of emerging and established creative industries within a city. In the first three stages of the project the cultural leadership ecosystems of individual creative industry sectors, identified as key drivers to urban regeneration in that particular city, were mapped separately using multiple research methods from a variety of disciplines. The final stage of the project will be a multi stakeholder conference, to be held in September 2015, at which the key members of the creative industries will be brought together to discuss the leadership styles and mapped ecosystems for their particular industry. A collaborative ecosystem encompassing each of the various industry sector ecosystems will be developed and key elements of cultural leadership, synergy and difference identified. The details from this collaborative ecosystem can then be used to represent the place's uniqueness in it's brand and marketing.

In this paper the mapped ecosystems from the first stage of the project will be presented in detail. The results will be analysed and an co-created cultural leadership model presented that can be used to communicate with other actors that has been derived from using a service-ecosystem perspective to provide structure to complex and potentially fragmented micro and meta level analysis of cultural leadership.