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An Analysis of the Transformations of Leadership and Direction-Setting in Place Marketing: A United Kingdom Contextual View and Case-Study.

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Abstract

The marketing of places has experienced challenges in recent years. Prolonged and severe financial constraints have led to a considerable reduction in the public sector funding of initiatives. This is presenting new leadership imperatives. This paper elaborates place marketing and its changing identity and considers the nature and increasing need for effective leadership in the marketing of places.

The study adopts an inductive approach and employs semi-structured interviews with senior executives from a range of destination marketing organizations. The research is contextualised

within the United Kingdom and it uses places in North-West England to provide its' focal setting developing two case studies with which to complement the wider data. The study identifies that the complexity of place marketing intertwined with financial pressures, creates a particular dynamic and a need for leadership to clarify, decode and respond to the resulting situations.

The evidence presented points to a compelling need for leaders in the sector to accept and embrace the new realities and to provide a clear vision for the future.

Key Words: Place Marketing, Destination Marketing, DMO, Leadership, Cheshire, Warrington, Liverpool

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Introduction

It is generally held that the marketing concept and the study of marketing emerged as academic subject areas during the twentieth century (e.g. Jones and Tadajewski, 2015, Kumar, 2015, Tadajewski, 2009, Vargo and Lusch, 2009), but it has been claimed that the marketing of *places* has a much longer history. Ashworth and Voogd (2004) refer to the very early example of Leif Erickson who, some 2,000 years ago, named a very large, newly discovered island as 'Greenland', in order to project a favourable and attractive image to prospective visitors and potential settlers. Bath is a historic city in South-West England and Heeley (2015) argues that Richard 'Beau' Nash who was appointed as Bath's Master of Ceremonies in 1705 established the embryonic format of the world's first destination marketing organization (DMO). Nash's local government department was charged with being 'responsible for organising entertainments and diversions' and he also promoted the town and personally welcomed visiting dignitaries (Heeley, 2015:20).

The governance of place and destination marketing in England is currently experiencing significant change. To some extent, this parallels international changes in practice but in England, the changes are primarily the result of austerity measures and current government policy. At the heart of government policy is the intent to reduce significantly the public funding of destination marketing activity and to encourage the private sector to take on this responsibility. This raises the question of whether or not the private sector is willing and/or able to take on such a responsibility. Thus, the consequences of this policy change, the leadership challenges and the future of destination marketing in England and in one particular sub-region of England is the subject of this study.

A substantive body of literature exists which is associated with the broad subject areas of destination marketing/management, place marketing, place promotion and place and city branding (Ashworth and Voogd, 2004; Heeley, 2015; Kladou, 2016). However despite the volume of work that has been produced there is a relative paucity of published empirical data to support theory building in this academic sphere and very little attention has been directed towards the existential threat that DMOs presently face with regard to their previous core funding. Moreover, the leadership challenges that the changing landscape presents have also not been explored in any depth. This paper seeks to cast light on these interconnected but neglected areas. Therefore, the research question that the study seeks to answer is:

'By what processes and though what frameworks of leadership can a place marketing organization engage with its stakeholders in order to operate effectively in contemporary circumstances of reduced government support?'

Place Marketing: An Overview

Place marketing, which concerns various promotional and information/message efforts to disseminate awareness and build reputation regarding a particular location is, in many regards, a relatively recent field. Kindred with this term have been the terms 'destination marketing' and 'destination management' and all of these domains have seen a substantial growth in literature (Morrison, 2013).

The emergent nomenclature has generated the commonly found debates and confusions in an emergent field as boundaries and labels are determined. The commonly used acronym is DMO (destination marketing organization) (Middleton, 2009, Pike, 2012). However, also prevalent and frequently understood within the same acronym is 'destination management organization' (Morrison, 2013; Wang, 2011). Nevertheless, there is a sense DMO is increasingly changing from destination management organizations to evolve into destination management and marketing organizations (DMMOs) and an ongoing debate continues regarding the terms in the field (Wang and Pizam; 2011; Hankinson, 2010, Martinez, 2011; Skinner, 2008):

'Place marketing is the business of setting a particular place apart from others; of creating an image for a place such that it appears more attractive to a wide array of inward flows of capital, revenue, skills, human capital, tourists and so on. Destination marketing has a similar meaning, except that it is more specifically oriented towards attracting tourists and developing tourism activity' (Quinn, 2013:.85).

As a consequence of the development of place marketing a range of further terms have come into play 'demarketing' (Medway, Warnaby and Dharni, 2011), 'success assessment' (Zenker and Martin, 2011), 'collaboration' (Wang et al, 2013), 'destination ambassadors' (de Diesbach, 2012), and 'foreign direct investment' (Metaxas, 2010). Nevertheless, in all of these developments a key issue remains the engagement of a diverse audience of stakeholders (Braun, Kavaratzis and Zenker, 2013; Cox and Wray, 2011; Elbe, Hallén and Axelsson, 2009.)

However, the rapidly changing nature of contemporary economic environments combined with the reverberations of the financial crash of 2008 and its consequences in the post-austerity period have meant that governmental resources for DMO activities have been substantially reduced if not completely eliminated. This raises a plethora of significant challenges for the stewardship and future trajectory of these organizations and presents clear demands on leadership in these contexts. The next phase of the discussion addresses these issues.

Leadership in Place Management Organizations (DMOs)

Given the innate complexity of destinations as 'products' (Fyall in Morgan et al, 2011: 91), it is hardly surprising that one of the key themes emerging from research underpinning this paper is the importance of leadership. One needs only to pause to consider the make-up of destinations to understand why this might be so. All destinations are, almost by definition, an amalgam of products combined from the disparate organizations that together create the visitor experience. Such organizations are notable for their diversity of activity, providing the essential elements of a destination which could be broadly labelled as the "6 A's": *Attractions*; *Access* (both to and within the destination); *Accommodation*; *Amenities*; *Activities*; and *Ancillary Services* all of which require differing leadership responses. The organizations providing these services are equally diverse in terms of their size, make-up and relative influence, combining a preponderance of small-to-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with a comparatively smaller number of large multi-national and international companies (Tourism Alliance, 2016). The destination 'product' also relies on a combination of private, public and not-for-profit organizations, each mindful of the need to satisfy a wide range of stakeholders and their differing requirements (Cox et al, 2014; Garcia et al, 2009). This leads to one final

layer of complexity which emerges when reflecting on what might be labelled as two more "A's": *Associations* and *Ambience*. The first relates to the more generally accepted uses of 'brand association', but which also reflects the differing perspectives of visitors and residents when applied to destination brands in particular (Kladou et al, 2016; Manente and Minghetti, 2006). Ambience here is used as catch-all shorthand to address the range of factors which contribute to the 'feel' of a destination. This is perhaps best illustrated by the notion of 'creative destinations' which develop strong brands based on tone; tradition; tolerance; talent; transformability; and testimony (Morgan et al, 2011:11).

It is clear from the complexities outlined above that destination brands can only really be created, developed and sustained through collaborative partnerships (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2007:863). Given the scale and scope of destination brand management, in reality this mostly means collaborative partnership between private and public sectors (Carter, 2006). DMOs are arguably the best-known examples of organizations which exist to facilitate this collaborative dimension to destination marketing. They are generally charged with a range of functions in relation to destination development, including: policy and planning; product development and promotion; advocacy; and improving standards of quality and professionalism (Spyriadis et al in Costa et al 2005). However, whilst DMOs will have an overview of destination activity as a whole, the broad remit of such bodies is one of co-ordination and direction rather than of control, particularly in relation to regional, sub-regional or local destinations, where there is a preponderance of private sector involvement. And, given the range of stakeholders already identified, it seems apparent that effective coordination and direction can be achieved only by the application of effective leadership techniques. Especially, if we take as a starting point in examining such techniques, that leadership is: 'the process of *influencing* others to *understand and agree* about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the *process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives*'[Emphasis added] (Cole and Kelly, 2015:70). Or perhaps more colourfully, Dwight D. Eisenhower's oft-quoted definition of leadership as '…the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it' (Higson and Sturgess, 2008).

Implicit in these definitions of leadership are some basic skills needed by all leaders, most obviously the need for vision, analysis, communication, negotiation, and co-ordinated action. These and other basic leadership skills have been well encapsulated in Adair's widely-used and functional 'task, team, individual' model (Adair, 2013). This illustrates the role of the leader as one who balances the goal of task achievement with the needs of the teams and individuals

who are actually charged with achieving those goals. The leader's main focus in relation to 'task' is to engage in defining, planning, briefing and controlling the specifics or generalities of the goals and the broad methods used to achieve them. Whereas the leader's focus with regard to 'team' and 'individual' is more about motivating, organising, evaluating and showing the way (Adair, 2013:18). Useful as this approach may be to leadership in general, Adair further augments it in relation to strategic management. Here, he adds to the skills needed to balance 'task, team and individual' with a range of other skills and traits, including: awareness; understanding; knowledge of your business; enthusiasm; integrity; fairness; toughness; calmness; humanity; resilience; humility; clear thinking; and reasoning (Adair, 2013:54). However, given the complexities inherent in leading the collaborative partnerships needed to sustain destination brands, perhaps an adapted selection of Adair's strategic leadership functions (and areas of responsibility) might be the most salient of all (Adair, 2013:55):

- Providing overall direction (purpose and vision)
- Aligning strategy and policy (strategic thinking and planning)
- Overall implementation responsibility/oversight (operations and administration)
- Encouraging brand 'buy-in' and collaborative spirit (agreement, energy, morale, confidence, *esprit de corps*)
- Relating and communicating brand strategy to all relevant stakeholders (alliances, partnerships, collaborators, local community, other stakeholders)

Nevertheless, the collaborative nature of destination brand management further complicates the way in which its leadership needs to be addressed and applied. As we have seen, a destination is a complex amalgam of diverse organizations and stakeholders. And, important as it might be, its DMO might be viewed not as the leader but as 'the guardian of the destination brand - responsible for the development, coordination and implementation of the destination network brand (Marzano & Scott, 2009, cited in Cox et al, 2014:85). The concept of 'network brands' clearly illustrates the complexity of destination branding and the difficulties inherent in attempting to co-ordinate and lead the activities of its complex network of stakeholders. This is perhaps why Allan (2011) thinks that successful destination branding requires something other than the development of personal leadership skills, which are arguably of more use to leaders within individual organizations. Allan argues that effective destination brand leadership requires an emphasis on: 'cooperative or shared leadership', although we must be careful about how the latter term is applied here (Allan, in Morgan et al, 2011:84). Shared

leadership is both a key leadership principle and a notable leadership skill, seen by many as a fundamental mechanism for developing leaders and enabling organizational success (Higson and Sturgess, 2014:168). Although Allan repeatedly refers to shared leadership in relation to effective destination brand leadership, it is perhaps more appropriate to stay with the idea of 'co-operative' leadership as a label for best practice. This refers to the need to exercise soft, rather than hard power (i.e. negotiation, consultation and respect, rather than coercion or dominance) as a mechanism to encourage buy-in from the wide range of destination stakeholders. There is much logic in this approach given that organizational stakeholders will each have their own leaders, who will each seek to achieve their own (personal and organizational) goals (Allan, in Morgan et al, 2011, p.84). This point is reinforced by Cox et al, who reflect on research indicating that leadership based on power and hierarchy are actually counter-productive in relation to DMOs. Stressing the need for flexible, empowering, inclusive approaches to leadership, there is an obvious inference to be drawn from their work in relation to this paper. Whilst there can be no doubt about the importance of leadership to successful destination brand management, it is equally critical to ensure the right kind of leadership is applied (Cox et al, 2014).

In drawing attention to the growing recognition of the importance of leadership in destination brand management, it should be noted that there are already clear echoes of the language of leadership in the literature on destination brands generally, and on public/private partnerships (PPPs) as particular mechanisms to manage them (Chaperon, 2017, Heeley, 2011). For example, some recent references to brands look at them as more than just names, terms, signs, symbols or designs, to identify and differentiate goods or services between competitors (Kotler and Keller, 2006). Hatch and Schultz (in Kladou et al, 2016) conceptualise them more as 'catalysts for corporate strategies', an expression and concept which has clear echoes of strategic leadership. Another example of the existence of leadership principles can be seen in best practice documentation designed to support PPPs, such as the 'Ten Principles for Successful Public/Private Partnerships' (Corrigan et al, 2005). Whilst it is quite clear that point 7 relates to leadership (as it contains the word), most leadership developers or educators would argue strongly that all of these success principles are firmly grounded in leadership theory and practice:

1. Prepare Properly for Public/Private Partnerships
2. Create a Shared Vision
3. Understand Your Partners and Key Players

4. Be Clear on the Risks and Rewards for All Parties
5. Establish a Clear and Rational Decision-Making Process
6. Make Sure All Parties Do Their Homework
7. Secure Consistent and Coordinated Leadership
8. Communicate Early and Often
9. Negotiate a Fair Deal Structure
10. Build Trust as a Core Value

This echoes the work of Zhang and Zhu (2014) who conducted a useful review of research relating to tourism destination governance, meaning the rules and mechanisms for policy and strategy development which incorporated all collaborative partners and stakeholders. Citing the work of Beaumont and Dredge (2010), they summarised the characteristics of good tourism destination governance:

- Positive cultures, constructive communication and engaged communities;
- Transparency and accountability;
- Vision and leadership; Acceptance of diversity and the pursuit of equity and inclusiveness;
- Developing knowledge, learning and sharing expertise;
- Clear roles and responsibilities of participants and clear operational structures and processes of the network.

Other, even more specific evidence of such references to leadership, can be seen in similar practitioner publications aimed at destination brand managers specifically. Such publications clearly echo the language of leadership theory already discussed, using terms such as: motivation, inspiration, convincing, persuading, objective buy-in, champions, co-ordination, liaison, drive, enthusiasm, vision, etc, in reference to brand success factors. For example, the Handbook on Tourism Destinations Branding (ETC/UNWTO, 2009) contains comprehensive guidance on the destination branding, from explanations of the marketing/branding process, advice on managing the brand, insights into challenges to both along with several case study examples. Once again, the importance of leadership is both implicitly and explicitly addressed in this publication, most notably in relation to leadership 'from the top', use of brand champions and advocates, 'encouraging buy-in', engaging the full range of stakeholders, and the need to foster a sense of shared brand ownership throughout the organization/partnerships.

The value of good leadership to organizations can be clearly evidenced by the growth of resources designed to support leadership development. There is now no shortage of leadership development programmes, activities and resources, formal and informal, from both the private and public sectors. Many of these are informed by a body of knowledge created by a well-established area of academic research. The application of this research can be evidenced in a wide range of academic publications, just a few of which have been used to inform this paper. The likelihood of successful DMO development will almost certainly be enhanced where they invest in developing their leaders, by whichever of the above means they find most appropriate. And, given the importance of encouraging buy-in and consistent application of a shared vision, such leadership development should be encouraged at all levels of their organizations. A point well made by a UK Government report which stated that: 'Effective leadership runs through organizations like writing through a stick of rock' (DBIS-LMNG, 2012, in Higson and Sturgess, 2014:169). The paper now proceeds to elaborate a methodology with which to surface and consider leadership issues in relation to place and destination marketing.

Methodology

The present study adopts an interpretivist stance and analyses qualitative data derived from semi-structured interviews with destination marketing stakeholders and practitioners conducted across a range of DMOs. A total of 16 semi-structured interviews with senior and high-level DMO executives were undertaken and these have generated some 40,000 words of data. Interview subjects included the chief executive of a national tourism organization, the chair-person of a major sporting club and a public sector chief executive, 8 chief executives of DMOs, one partnership manager, two DMO board members, one senior and experienced civil servant, one executive chairman of a large retail organization and two managing directors of major tourist attractions. The interviews were conducted at locations throughout England and all the interview subjects either led DMOs that promote places where the visitor economy generates significant economic activity. In addition, in order to drill down and provide focal data to complement these broader scoping data, the research developed two case studies – Liverpool and a second case of Cheshire and Warrington – based in the United Kingdom - which allow the contextualisation of place marketing leadership issues. The key stakeholders in the destination marketing/management of Liverpool City and also Cheshire and Warrington were interviewed.

Cheshire and Warrington Case Study

The visitor economy in Cheshire and Warrington generates around £2.5 billion per annum and it supports the employment of a large number of people (www.marketingcheshire.co.uk). The boundaries of the area known as Cheshire and Warrington have changed over the years and this area is now divided into three local authorities; Cheshire West and Chester, East Cheshire, and, Warrington Borough Council. Although the administrative county of Cheshire no longer exists except in a ceremonial and symbolic sense, the Lord-Lieutenant of Cheshire represents HM The Queen in the area but whilst what is known as The Cheshire Lieutenancy includes the local authority areas of Cheshire West and Chester, East Cheshire and Warrington it also includes the area served by Halton Borough Council (cheshirelieutenancy.org.uk). In terms of the area served by the DMO *Marketing Cheshire*, the Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) serves as a unifying entity in that its remit is confined to the three local authorities that *Marketing Cheshire* covers (871candwep.co.uk/about-us/). LEPs are quasi-governmental bodies led by local business and which operate in partnership with local authorities with a brief to play a key role in economic development and job creation. There are 39 different LEPs throughout England (thelepnetwork.net).

As indicated above, Cheshire and Warrington is a sub-region which is located in North-West England. North-West England is home to two large cities, Liverpool and Manchester. These two cities are both located close to Cheshire and Warrington to the north-west and north respectively. A common perception of Cheshire and Warrington is that it is a predominately rural economy which acts as a dormitory area for the neighbouring cities of Liverpool and Manchester (871candwep.co.uk/content/). In fact, according to the Chief Executive of Cheshire and Warrington LEP, around 10% more people travel to work in Cheshire and Warrington on a daily basis than travel out (Cox, 2016). With a gross value added of over £20 billion and a 430,000 strong workforce, Cheshire and Warrington outperforms every other economy in the North of England and it is also one of the best performing and fastest growing economies in England (871candwep.co.uk/about-us/). Despite the economic success that it currently enjoys and its potential for growth, Liverpool and Manchester both have considerably stronger identities than Cheshire and Warrington and a case study of Liverpool is offered here for comparative purposes. The DMO configurations for Cheshire and Warrington have been assembled and dissembled repeatedly in the light of the post-2008 period. This has created a need for leadership in setting clarity and direction for DMO activities.

Liverpool Case Study

Liverpool is (by British standards) a large and historic, maritime city. In terms of place marketing and destination management, Liverpool may be considered to be more established than its neighbours and rivals in Cheshire and Warrington in terms of its tourism and conference business. Much of the City's historic importance can be traced back to its global reputation as a major trading port, once arguably the busiest in Britain, if not the world. By the late 19th Century, forty percent of the world's trade passed through Liverpool, due largely to its famous docks facing the Atlantic and the emergent USA (Sykes et al, 2013).

The zenith of the City's importance came during its key role as command and operations centre for the Second World War's Battle of the Atlantic. Since then, the City has been through significant periods of economic and social decline. The high unemployment figures and resultant social unrest of the late 1980's, due to both a national recession and a demise in the city's maritime role, resulted in the creation of a very negative image for the city (Sykes et al, 2013). Indeed, Liverpool was seen by some as the 'beaten city' of the post-industrial age (Sykes et al, 2013). However, the past 30 years have seen a major regeneration of the city and its image as a place in which to live, work and visit. The City centre in particular has experienced something of a development boom, with the appearance of new hotels, leisure activities and, more recently, the development of an impressive new waterfront area with its entertainment arena and conference centre (Sykes et al., 2013). The main catalyst for this recent regeneration came through the city's successful bid to become the 2008 European Capital of Culture (ECoC). The annual ECoC was an initiative set up by the European Commission, which allows cities to showcase artistic and cultural brilliance (Griffiths, 2006). Winning this keenly contested bid became a crucial turning point in the re-branding of the city (Boland, 2010).

The city's DMO, *Marketing Liverpool*, was established in 2013, charged with promoting the city region as a global destination for visitors, conventions and investment. *Marketing Liverpool* is a Division of 'Liverpool Vision', the city's economic development company, responsible for communicating the city's brand to local, national and global audiences. *Marketing Liverpool* has an impressive track record in attracting major conferences and events, both increasing the number of visitors and improving Liverpool's reputation as a leading UK business destination (www.marketingliverpool.co.uk, 2017). The City's growing reputation as an international destination for high-profile conferences and events is due to a number of

factors, including: quality facilities and services; and local connectivity through the network of airports, major roads, rail and sea routes (liverpoolconventionbureau.com, 2017).

Findings and Discussion

The financial challenge has figured strongly in most of the interviews to date and the creation of new funding streams has emerged as a central issue. As an example of the scale of this problem Marketing Cheshire suffered a '90% cut in its public sector grant income between 2011 and 2014' (Heeley, 2015: 41). Since Heeley's book was published Marketing Cheshire have merged with Cheshire and Warrington LEP (871candwep.co.uk/latest-news/, 2017) and this may have gone some way towards the alleviation of the loss of funding from the local authorities which make up the geographical area of Cheshire and Warrington. Additional consistent themes that have featured are the poor survival prospects for destination marketing/management organizations with a weak or undifferentiated product proposition, the relative dominance of large and established players in the form of the UK's best-known cities and the critical importance of the role of leadership in the sector. The following comment was made by an anonymous participant, (P1), in an interview in connection with the current research project. At the time P1 was the chief executive of a national tourism organization.

> 'And it's about having great destination leadership. Because I look up and down the country and see where destinations do it well, it's about having great leadership in those destinations. Somebody with a vision, somebody with a dynamism. Somebody with an influence to encourage people to work behind one plan and to one vision and to one aim and so I think the trick in it is to establish the vision, the plan and the leadership.' (P1)

Thus, leadership presents considerable challenges in the place marketing of Cheshire and Warrington. The articulation of a clear vision, which can be used to inform the promotion of the sub-region as a desirable place to visit, live, work, study and invest, is fraught with difficulties. Cheshire no longer exists as an administrative entity and this cannot be other than a negative factor in the promotion of the 'Cheshire brand'. And what of Warrington? Although Warrington is the most economically successful area in Cheshire and Warrington (Cox, 2016) there is no mention of Warrington in the name of the organization, Marketing Cheshire, that purports to promote it. The existence of three separate local authorities each with their own priorities and agendas produces a risk of parochialism which could inhibit development and the cooperative working that is so important in successful partnership:

> 'Well a lot of it comes down to, to er, effective leadership, and err, and err leadership. When we look at models that work effectively, they tend to be effective because of very strong leadership around the back erm that, that drives the strategy and, and increases the culture and a lot of this is around cultural behaviour and how you work effectively. Quite often the reason why the private sector are dissuaded from working in partnership is that they come across too many silos. They come across too many different asks. They're never quite too sure if the ask of tomorrow is going to be repeated by somebody else the next day.'(P3 – Director DMO)

The disparity of the product offering across these three local authorities also presents challenges. On the one hand there is the city of Chester, the former county town of Cheshire which possesses many historic architectural gems and which has a considerable Roman and medieval heritage which is attractive to many tourists. On the other hand the sub-region contains the large industrial town, Warrington. Unlike Chester, Warrington lacks a cathedral, a castle, a historic racecourse, an internationally renowned zoo and many other of Chester's obvious attractions but it aspires to city status and is an undeniably successful large town with a business-friendly approach, an excellent location relative to the transport infrastructure of North-West England and a strong record of business start-ups and entrepreneurship. This overall picture reflects the frequent issues of complexity surrounding place marketing (Fyall in Morgan et al, 2011: 91). In between Chester and Warrington there are a number of smaller but largely attractive and successful towns surrounded by some equally attractive countryside.

In terms of cross-fertilization, what can Cheshire and Warrington learn from Liverpool and what wider lessons may be gleaned? Liverpool perhaps represents a 'creative' approach to DMOs and place marketing from which others can learn (Morgan et al, 2011: 11). One of the key factors behind the success of Liverpool in terms of its visitor economy is that is that its DMO, Marketing Liverpool does not exist merely to promote Liverpool but rather to promote the whole of the Liverpool City Region and central City leadership has been a key factor in this (Adair, 2013).

The Liverpool City Region embraces the hinterland of the city and includes six local authorities (Liverpool City Council and Halton, Knowsley, Sefton, St. Helens and Wirral Borough Councils). These six local authorities have concluded that from a place marketing perspective Liverpool should feature as the 'attack brand' as the city's name has much greater recognition nationally and internationally than the other parts of the Liverpool City Region. It is understood that if Liverpool is successful as a destination some of that success may disseminate to other parts of the City Region. This unity of approach is not so apparent in Cheshire and Warrington.

Although Liverpool is enjoying great contemporary success in respect of its visitor economy it cannot match the overall economic impact of Cheshire and Warrington. According to Chris Brown, the Director of Marketing Liverpool, for a city of its size, Liverpool is short of approximately 6,000 businesses (Brown, 2016) and there is a further leadership role required to ensure this is addressed. So despite its burgeoning reputation as a place to visit Liverpool would love to enjoy the economic success of its neighbours in Cheshire and Warrington. Liverpool has an enviable reputation in attracting and staging events which Cheshire and Warrington could certainly learn from. In many respects the marketing of events in Liverpool has become synonymous with the marketing of Liverpool. Amongst the events that Liverpool City Region will host in the next two years are the 2017 Open Championship, Royal Birkdale, Fusion Music Festival 2017 and the Netball World Cup 2019 (Brown, 2016). Events such as these will attract vast crowds and global television audiences which should in turn generate a great deal of positive publicity for Liverpool. To some extent the future of Cheshire and Warrington is inexorably linked to the future of Liverpool and Manchester but the sub-region is, nonetheless, an entity in its own right with its own individual dynamism. In economic terms the future looks positive for Cheshire and Warrington but the sub-region could achieve better recognition if it could adopt a clearer identity and present a more unified front to the rest of the world.

In summary, it was evident from the field data that leadership plays a central role in reconceptualising histories, reconfiguring messages and (re-)assembling the available and the required fabric to be able to generate reputational and economic destination benefits. The challenge appears to be a dialectic between building on historical past blended with a constant reinvention of the DMO and the destination that is being promoted and effectively 're-invented'.

In tandem with the above, drastically reduced public funding has created an emergent economic landscape which introduces new challenges and a new imperative to pursue alternative and different funding models. The senior leadership of DMO's may find it difficult to successfully engage with these new realities and the changed landscape may therefore require a different form of leadership than in the past. In situations where the senior leadership of a DMO gained most of their experience in a quasi-local authority environment they may have difficulty in adjusting to the demands inherent in a more private-sector led approach and that may in turn require a change of leadership.

Limitations

As with all research studies there a number of limitations to be duly noted regarding the research. First, the study focus on the United Kingdom context. While this naturally provides a macro-national setting and fabric it is nevertheless particular to the political, social, cultural and economic factors that have formed and continue to form that country. While the lessons derived from the paper are pertinent to a wide range of city settings in the United Kingdom, in seeking to generalise to other national contexts, it may be necessary to outline the socio-cultural and historical factors germane to alternative country settings. Equally, the study employs a combinations of high-level organizational interviews contextualised against two specific and focal case studies. Again, there will evidently be particular contextual factors at play and in seeking to apply the findings more widely these may need to be adjusted.

Conclusion

The primary research underpinning this paper has proved a range of clear indications regarding the importance of leadership in destination brand management. These findings are supported by the literature relating to both practitioner publications and to academic research into brand management in general, and destination brand management in particular. In particular, the paper points at the issues underpinning most important dimensions in relation to which to develop leadership in destination organizations by considering strong case examples. A range of antecedent factors may well play a role in facilitating the capacity of leadership to generate destination branding and place marketing. Among these, heritage is a key factor that provides the material with which DMO leaders can work but this is equally a constant process of re-invention and renegotiation. A further factor for leaders to take into account is an *a priori* understanding that DMO is by its very conceptual and operational nature often a very complex and multi-layered phenomenon. This suggests that varying forms of leadership approach will be called for in the coming dynamically changing decades.

In terms of managerial and practice implications, there is a need for DMO executives in the UK context (of which this paper has offered Cheshire/Warrington and Liverpool case studies) to actively recognise and embrace complex and inter-locking organizations as 'normative conditions'. But equally, in addition to this they need to build value in exchange, mutual learning and collaborative leadership. In other words, the unravelling of the DMO fabric in the post-2008 context will require a potent sense of vision and regeneration – albeit derived from and built on heritage – but a heritage reinvigorated and regenerated for the 21st century.

This comes in spite of budgetary and austerity conditions and political transformation as the sector moves from a public to private domain.

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