

## **Editorial Introduction: Sustainable Place Marketing**

Dimitrios Stylidis\* and Matina Terzidou

\*Department of Marketing, Branding & Tourism, Business School, Middlesex University London, The Burroughs, NW4 4BT, London, UK; Email: [d.stylidis@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:d.stylidis@mdx.ac.uk)

This special issue of the *International Journal of Tourism Policy* examines different stakeholders' perspectives of a place as a tourist destination, thereby advancing existing theoretical knowledge on sustainable place marketing and offering practical insights for destination marketers and planners. Destination image refers to the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination (Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1993). Sustainable place marketing depends to a large extent on effective stakeholder management and inclusive processes with the collaboration and agreement of a range of stakeholders such as the tourists, local residents, business operators, and local government officials (Hall, 2008). Yet, so far the vast majority of destination image studies in the tourism literature have focused on the tourists' perspective (Chew and Jahari, 2014; Stylidis, Bellhasen and Shani, 2015a) as this group commonly stimulates economic activities for the host communities (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009).

Academic attention to internal stakeholders' image is scarce and limited research has been devoted to local residents (e.g., do Valle, Mendes and Guerreiro, 2012; Hudson and Ritchie, 2002; Schroeder, 1996; Stylidis, Sit and Biran, 2016), business operators (Baloglu and Mangalolu, 2001; Burgess, 1982) or to comparing the destinations images held by the various stakeholder groups including residents vs. tourists (e.g., Henkel, Henkel, Agrusa, Agrusa and Tanner, 2006; Stylidis, Shani and Belhassen, 2017), tourists vs. business operators (Sternquist-Witter, 1985) and tourists, local residents and business operators (Stylidis, Belhassen and Shani, 2015b). This lack of attention is theoretically and practically unjustifiable given that all stakeholders are critical to the planning, development and marketing of tourism (d'Angella and Go, 2009). Past study findings, for example, suggest that local stakeholders' destination image is critical for understanding their behavioral intentions, including willingness to recommend the destination to others

(Bigne, Sanchez and Sanz, 2005; Schroeder, 1996) and/or to support tourism development (Ramkissoon and Nunkoo, 2011; Stylidis, Biran, Sit and Szivas, 2014), both being central to the sustainability of any tourist destination.

Additionally, empirical evidence indicates that significant image differences exist in the perceptions of the various stakeholder groups. For example, Henkel et al. (2006) found a difference between Thai residents and international tourists' images of Thailand as a tourist destination. Such differences were attributed by Stylidis, Shani and Belhassen (2017) to the different effects the cognitive and affective image components have on overall destination image. Among the sample of tourists in their study conducted in Eilat, Israel the affective component exerted a greater influence on overall image than its cognitive counterpart, whereas for residents, both cognitive and affective image components exerted almost equal effects on the overall image. A potential dissonance between the representation of the destination as marketed to tourists, and the image held by the local residents can lead to resentment towards the tourism industry by the local population (Bandyopadhyay and Morrais, 2005) or to tourists' dissatisfaction (Terzidou, Stylidis and Terzidis, 2017). Such divergences between stakeholders' image may herald future problems, given that multiple visions can even result in conflicts between different groups (Michaelidou, Siamagka, Moraes and Micevski, 2013; Virgo and de Chernatony, 2006) like residents and tourists (Jutla, 2000). The way to avoid such an unwelcome outcome is to identify these differences in perceptions and equip marketers with realistic knowledge about destination images (Stylidis et al., 2015b).

The special issue on "Sustainable Place Marketing" aims to respond to this challenge by underlining the different perspectives through which a destination can be perceived and provides avenues for stakeholder engagement in tourism marketing. The first study (Iordanova, 2017) of this special issue explores the impact tourists' socio-demographic characteristics (nationality, age, gender and education) have on the "a priori" and "in situ" images of tourist destination. Iordanova's (2017) study used data collected from 400 visitors in Linz, Austria to confirm that respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and destination images are interrelated, with some characteristics (i.e., age and gender)

being more critical at the ‘a priori’ stage in contrast to some others (nationality and gender) that were more prominent at the ‘in situ’ stage. Iordanova’s (2017) study also suggests that the cognitive image component is more prone to change compared to the affective image component during the “a priori” and “in situ” stages of destination image formation. Her findings point out the need to develop different promotional campaigns for different target markets, especially as destination image changes in the course of a trip.

To further unpack the role of tourists’ demographic characteristics in decision making in tourism, Jani (2017) studies the links between sources of travel information used by travelers with selected demographic (i.e., gender) and tripographic variables (i.e., planning horizon). Using a self-administered questionnaire, 625 valid cases have been collected from travelers to Tanzania. Jani’s (2017) results indicate significant variations in the use of different sources of travel information with gender, education, planning horizon, extent of decision made prior to traveling, and travel arrangements. A notable finding of Jani’s (2017) study is that those who travelled in a flexible manner (fully independent) tend to use more friends and relatives as a source of travel information than those who travel in a full package mode. These results further reinforce the role of local residents who often act as destination ambassadors (Rompf and Ricci, 2005), especially as friends and relatives living in the destination constitute the primary motivation for about one third of tourists’ visits (Hsu, Wolfe and Kang, 2004).

John (2017) examines destination image from the business perspective in the context of medical tourism. His research investigates the use of social media for the marketing and promotion of four medical tourism destinations in Asia including Thailand, Singapore, India, and Malaysia. The corporate websites and social media platforms managed by 70 international medical care providers were examined. John’s (2017) study highlights the critical role local businesses play in shaping the image of the destinations in which they operate. His findings also suggest that most of the medical tourism providers are not fully utilizing the potential of social media for tourism marketing. This study concludes that online comments, reviews, and queries must be monitored and adequate responses have

to be posted promptly to generate a positive destination image among medical tourists, residents, travel and tourism operators and other stakeholders to ensure sustainable growth in this sector.

The importance of local community participation in the development of tourism marketing and planning is examined by Jones and Zarb (2017) in their article “Developing Community Based Tours for Greater Stakeholder Benefit and Commitment.” Using a project entitled “Discovering Malta and Gozo through its People and Culture” Jones and Zarb (2017) are showcasing in practice how a number of pilot tours can benefit small communities and stakeholders who might otherwise be excluded from such activities. The tours offered for tourism consumption are different from the typical tours as they are community based. The emphasis is on the host-guest interrelationship by proposing alternative routes that enable interaction with the host community; learning about traditions, history, legends and folklore from the locals themselves. Given that these promoted itineraries have been developed considering residents’ and local entrepreneurs’ images of their destination, they reflect to a great extent the local community perspective and present as such a sustainable, interactive and responsible form of tourism.

Overall, the findings of the studies included in this special issue further highlight the need for community involvement in tourism planning, stakeholder management and engagement when formulating a destination marketing strategy. Only then will sustainable development of a place, its tourism industry, and its image be warranted (Concu and Atzeni, 2012; Henkel et al., 2006).

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Please cite as: Styliadis, D., & Terzidou, M. (2017). Editorial Introduction: Sustainable Place Marketing. *International Journal of Tourism Policy*, 7(3), 173-176.

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