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Nation branding for education and research: Could Greece become a beacon?

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the concept of Nation branding for education and research in Greece. The concept of nation branding for education and research is a brand new concept, therefore there is a need for further research on this topic. The authors have produced a critical discussion, based on the existing literature but also on personal comments, on whether Nation branding for education and research can apply in Greece. There are many obstacles, such as the legal framework, the lack of entrepreneurial culture among the academics but also a hesitation to allow the operation of private universities in Greece. However, a future empirical research may produce the necessary data which help us to understand what can be the potentials of this concept in Greece.

Keywords: Nation branding for education, Greece

1. Introduction

During the past years there have been many changes in terms of how European Union and its member states regard the concept of education and research. A recent paper (Sataøen, 2015) refers to the fact that branding has become an important issue within higher education but also among other educational institutes, such as research centers. The same rule applies for nations which seek not only to excel on education but also to attract a high volume of students, researchers and other academic staff, so as to improve the academic quality of their institutions but also to attract students who will pay fees and contribute on the local economy (Drori et al, 2013).

The relationship of nation branding for education and research is a pretty new concept. It is a concept which is quite new and while it can contribute on the regeneration of an economy, there is a lack of related research. The aim of this paper is to examine the concept of Nation branding for education and research in Greece. Having in mind that there is a lack of research on this field, the authors will try to make investigation, using secondary research, on this topic and then to draw some personal remarks on what are the potentials of Greece on this.

2. Methodology

Essentially, a survey can be divided into two categories: primary and secondary research. In secondary research, consideration is given to the use of information and data collected from similar studies conducted in the past. There is research that has been done at first-hand

research data that have been found by other research bodies. In most cases, those institutes can be independent researchers, scientific institutes, research centers, scientific publications and information acquired from organizations such as reports, data from an accounting department, etc. The main disadvantage of conducting secondary studies has to do with their purpose. These kinds of surveys have been conducted in order to satisfy the needs of another, different survey, conducted in another time and based on another object. As a result, the data used will likely support the purpose of this study's research, as well as give the researcher an account of what is to be anticipated; however, the data from the previous research can be used as a point of comparison.

Withal, primary research is conducted in order to convey to the interviewer tangible evidence related to the investigation. At this point, the interviewer has the ability to create a survey that will be exclusive to their own research, as well as collect raw data based on which the researcher can reach certain conclusions. It should be mentioned that the disadvantages of primary research are that it is costly and that the course of processing the findings of the research is time consuming (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

In this case, the researchers will rely on the use of secondary data. This is due to the fact that the authors would like to examine what the results of the existing literature and the overall views of other authors on relevant matters are. For this reason, the authors have selected a wide range of papers and printed material in order to construct the following literature review.

3. Literature review

3.1 Branding as a concept

Branding may be a thought that has been heavily related to companies and the way they use their company or product branding in a way of positioning their product to make a positive stance of their services or products so as to sell them (Clifon, 2005). However, the whole branding literature has been focusing on the industrial brands leaving aside the notion of branding that is linked to other disciplines. Hankinson and Cox (2000) have examined a sample of twelve English cities and made two vital conclusions; one of them was the idea of nations being linked to the destination branding and that there are several variations to the idea of branding with several different characteristics on each nation.

However, branding linked to nation has been underestimated due to the fact that several cities' public sector organizations and native tourism authorities have undermined the worth of promoting or they may be lacking in understanding the value of national branding that may be utilized in business enterprises at a national level (Buurma, 2001).

3.2 The value of national branding

Regarding the whole idea of national branding, its numerous and important applications, Merrilees et al (2009) have linked the idea of national branding with the whole national picture of a country. The buyer tends to like a national brand due to the picture that he already has in mind. For instance, Athens is linked to the idea of a city that has numerous monuments, whereas the Greek islands area stands for a place that could offer peace and relaxation. However, there is a big chance that the brand image has a negative impact on a destination. Tsartas (2010) refers on the whole image of a Greece that is based on the Sun, sea and sand, a concept which has been a sucessful one dring the 1980's and 1990's but still it has become obsolete . Buhalis (2000) claims that national branding refers to the whole image and

temperament of a nation. Even though national branding seems to be restricted in a few analyses that do not define its background, there's an accord (Buhalis, 2000; Merrilees et al, 2009; Tsartas, 2010) that national branding is related to the whole image of a nation.

3.3 The constructs of national branding

Kotler and Keller (2009) claim that the whole idea of branding isn't a straightforward task. It depends on several variables that are linked to the concept of the market and of the merchandise in conjunction with the preferences of customers. However, the case of national branding constitutes a key objective linked to an important added value for a country (Merrilees et al, 2009).

Spearitt (2012) refers to the exclusiveness of each country and claims that one should establish the national branding construction in a unique way for each country. Smidt-Jensen (2006) on the other hand, mentions that there are cases where one should take under consideration some common variables that ought to be noted once national branding is applied, due to the fact that there are several differences between smaller areas and a metropolis. Anholt (2007) claims that each area should be focused on its own exclusive brand in order to become competitive.

This suggested, the construction of a national branding should be in alignment with the country's qualifications. As an example, one might say that the case of a country that has designed its name as a national brand that has archaeological monuments, like Athens does, cannot produce a brand that is linked to other than the one it already does, that is, the monuments and the civilization, thus, the branding cannot be linked to high technology innovation as it does in the case of New York.

However, national branding can be orientated towards the reposition of a destination. Mead and Brajer (2008) and Owen (2005) have studied the organization and advertising of the Beijing Olympic games, that took place in 2008, and the way that they affected the country's national branding. Beijing Olympic Games' complete image was related to some negative notions like the riots that happened during its conduct, the reminiscences from the era of the Communism and the pollution of the country. However, Mead and Brajer (2008) claim that the Olympic Games branding of China was focused on two aims; The country was interested in indicating the power of China over the developed world, and in underlining the country's environmental policy with a view to the negative reviews. Owen (2005) claims that the advertising of the branding of China ended in the tourism multiplying 18 times from 2004 to 2010. Thus, branding has several key structures that can be used in order for a country to lessen its negative image. Winfield-Pfefferkorn (2005) analysis shows some of the constructs that can be used in the case of national branding, some of which are:

- People's experience of the country. People's experience of the country is related to the promotion of high added value advertising that boosts the national branding idea that has showed an increase during the last decades. Branding affects the perception of tourists that visit a country, in a way that is highly linked to the perception that they have of their destination based on where they live. For example, a tourist that lives in Germany may in some cases be surprised by the fact that there are no bicycle lanes in South Africa due to the fact that there are in his country. Other facts such as incidents taking place during their visit may also affect his perception. Owen (2005) claims that events such as the Olympic Games may give the country a highly positive image due to the organization of both the

private and public sector and the way that everyday life is affected by the Olympics' implementation.

- The difference in the perception between the population and the visitors. There are several differences between the way that the visitors and the population perceive the image of a country. The fact that each category links branding to a series of values consists an example of how business opportunities occur. On the one hand, visitors and tourists link branding to highly important personalities; on the other hand, population is orientated towards the importance of science and well-being. Such is the case of Oxford and Cambridge where science is highly linked to the branding of the cities.

- Belief within the country. There are several cases of countries that are deliberated and highly interested in the rights of minorities that are linked to high moral diversity and tolerance. Social groups such as the homosexuals and handicapped constitute, in some countries, a high priority. Other countries though, such as America, pay attention to their economic evolution and constitute a tourism destination for their famous economic center, the Wall Street, and the Harlem.

- Appearance of a country. Appearance constitutes another very important topic when it comes to branding. There are cases of cities, such as the Dutch capital or Venice where branding is supporting their appearance. Barcelona is another case of the same category, where branding is based on the city's monuments and its history. Thus, branding embraces the culture, the history and the heritage of a country, whereas there's another association of branding related to historical events or projection of documents that are organized during national festivals. (Hankinson, 2004). However, a vital success issue, that should be studied, is the way that the national authorities can benefit from their resources, so as to make a strategic arrangement which can foster the creation of a prospering for the country as a whole. Csaba and Bergtsson (2005) claim that there are cases of lack of unity among the events that lead to ineffective branding, ending in countries failing to construct their image.

3.4 Nation branding for education and research

It is well accepted that nation branding is a concept which can bring many benefits to a nation, while it has been used a lot in the tourist sector. However, it seems that it can be used on other sectors, in this case on the education and research, where the research is limited. Sataøen (2015) argues that countries which have adopted the Nordic model, which highlights equal access to education and opportunities for all, can be quite attractive since it creates the nation branding of a country which it is a country which fosters and supports free education. In addition to this, Sataøen (2015) refers to how different branding perspectives (corporate branding and nation branding) are matched and harmonized with respect to higher education in two Nordic countries, while universities are competing each other so to attract more funds, better personnel and more students from abroad.

For Drori et al (2013) education and research can be part of a wider cluster which will foster the regional or even nation branding. With the education, this will integrate with the rest of the economic factors that a country has. For example, in Silicon Valley, which is well known for hosting some important IT firms, most of the educational institutes are involved with teaching and research related with IT. Hence they are part of the wider branding, which fosters the whole area as the birthplace of tens of start-ups and of many IT innovations.

Another case has been Cambridge Mass, which is well known as a city famous for its top universities. The same happens with Britain and few other countries which are known as countries and regions which have some of the top universities in the world. This affects their nation or regional branding, something that attracts not only students and academic staff, but also it is a factor which attracts many top firms which want to be close to the research centers of the universities (Ek et al, 2011). Of course, the countries which have invested into nation branding for education and research are few, if any exist. However, it is expected that in the upcoming years higher education will change where more private universities will operate and the same government subsitites will be reduced. This is a global trend; universities are looking for new ways so to compete each other (Hemlsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007). Overall, the concept of national branding for education and research is quite new and it seems there is a need for further research on this.

A vital point is to discuss on whether Greece can seek new opportunities on this concept.

4. Nation branding for education and research: Could Greece become a beacon?

The previous section indicated that there is a limited research on this field. In the case of Greece there is a complete lack of significant research. However, the authors will try to make some suggestions. Greece is a country which has a quite old-fashioned higher education system. Universities are not fully autonomous, while there is a high level of intervention from the political parties. In addition to this, the constitution (Article 16) does not allow the universities to be governed as corporate entities, as it happens in other countries.

It is well accepted that Greece has many potentials but problems such as statitism and clientism do not allow the universities to develop as corporate entities and to link with corporations, so as to generate greater value for the national economy. Greece has two major industries; shipping and tourism. All together they generate more than 30% of the nation's GDP. However, the state universities related with those two industries are few; while many private universities are related with those two industries. However, the ideal would be to have terns of private and state universities that would focus on those two sectors and they would generate value and a possible competitive advantage. However, this requires not only changes in the legal environment but also to the nature of the whole system, which will not support such as move.

Conclusions

Nation branding for education and research is a quite new concept, which means that there is space for a lot of research. The authors believe that there is a lot of space for research regarding Nation branding for education and research in Greece. Based on their own view and experience, education and research could be contributing in tourism and shipping, something which would leverage the nation branding of Greece, as a country which specializes on those two sectors from both professional and academic perspective. However, it is important to stress that such an attempt may lie several threats coming from two sources. The first one is the legal framework, which has several reservations regarding the commercialization of education in Greece. On the other hand, high levels of statism and unions probably will pose a

threat towards such as change. However, the first move will be to allow the operation of private universities in Greece.

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