



## WHY URBAN AND RURAL PLACE MARKETING STRATEGIES DIFFER: A THEORETICAL DISCUSSION<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This paper promotes a theoretical discussion on the applicability of city marketing techniques when place marketing a rural area. The discussion focuses on the preconditions for successful place marketing in both cities and rural areas, illustrating how place marketing needs to be applied to be successful. The findings suggest that rural areas differ from cities and metropolitan areas – in terms of e.g. population, resources, vulnerability and resilience – thus making it difficult to essentially 'copy-paste' city marketing strategies and techniques onto rural areas. Place marketing has however

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become a lucrative area for private sector consultants uninterested in the time-consuming gathering of empirical evidence because their business model is based on reusing the same product.

This paper offers important insights on the importance of theory when conducting place marketing; theorising successes and failures in place marketing could actually increase the efficiency of place marketing activities. For rural areas this could stimulate regional development.

**Keywords:** place marketing, urban, rural, regional development, theory

**JEL classification:** O18, R12, M31, Z13

## 1. Introduction

The intensification of competition for investment, tourism and human resources among European cities and towns has increased the importance of being unique (Zenker & Martin, 2011; Metaxas & Kallioras, 2004; Kozma, 2006, Kotler et al, 1999). Most studies on place marketing focus on unique selling points and thus on brands of already extensively ‘marketed’ countries (e.g. Braun, 2008; Metaxas, 2007; Capik, 2007; Fujita & Dinnie, 2010; Kozma, 2006), and on national capitals and other large metropolitan areas (e.g. Hospers, 2004; Kavartzis, 2007; Kotler et al, 1999; Anholt, 2007; Rainisto, 2003; Metaxas, 2002, 2010a; Kavartzis, 2008; Zenker et al, 2010). Significant focus is also placed on different target audiences for specific activities in well-defined geographical areas (Dawson et al, 2011; Duxbury & Campbell, 2011; Velayudhan, 2007; Qu et al, 2011; Stăncioiu et al, 2011).

The common denominator is thus that place marketing is necessary to attract tourists and promote tourism. As such, this discourse is determined by an underlying focus on ‘destination marketing’. Furthermore, the existence and use of various marketing tools to make place marketing profitable has also been discussed in numerous scientific publications (e.g. Sicilia et al, 2008, Pike, 2009; Mihailović & Moric, 2011; Rauhut Kompaniets & Rauhut, 2013, Metaxas, 2010b). The number of theoretical studies are however limited (Niedomysl & Jonasson, 2012; Parker et al, 2015; Rozhkov & Skriabina, 2015).

Rural areas are most vulnerable and susceptible to changes in economic business cycles, affecting welfare, tourism and investments; cities and metropolitan areas are more resilient to these kinds of problems (Capello et al., 2015; Hadjimichalis, 2011; Andreotti & Mingione, 2014). As rural areas differ from cities and metropolitan areas, in terms of resources, vulnerability and resilience, it could be argued that these areas would benefit relatively more than cities and metropolitan areas from successful place marketing (Ilbery et al, 2001; Markova & Boruta, 2012; Dominguez Garcia et al, 2013; Dinis, 2004; Vuorinen & Vos, 2013).

The relative lack of material and non-material resources in rural towns and rural areas, which undoubtedly impacts their marketing activities, is however often ignored (Niedomysl & Jonasson, 2012; Hospers, 2011). Practical experience thus reveals the huge differences here and the likely results of applying the same marketing and branding tools used in respect of urban areas to rural areas (Kerr & Johnson, 2005). Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005:507) conclude that marketing researchers “too easily assume that places are just spatially extended products that require little special attention as a consequence of their spatiality”. In line with this, the problem in the (in)efficiency of place marketing activities is in part assumed to be related to the fact that the theories or models used are borrowed from marketing research (Niedomysl and Jonasson, 2012).

The process of place marketing must combine promotional activities with spatial and organisational measures, which has to be aimed at various target groups. While spatial and organisational measures are aimed at improving the actual situation in the region, city or town, the primary purpose of place marketing promotion is to change the image of territorial entities. The success of place marketing partially depends on the extent to which such images are subject to change (Meester and Pellenbarg, 2001).

The image of capitals and big cities is easier to maintain and develop, because it has already been formed in minds of the target audience (Morgan et al, 2004). Some empirical evidence shows that population size matters for the place brand (Brencis & Ikkala, 2013). Rural towns and rural regions – unique or not – face a completely different situation when they want to create an image of themselves in order to place themselves on the map: they are too small or too insignificant to have been heard of by any target group. One way of promoting and marketing a specific geographical place is to use the residents there as agents (Giles et al, 2013; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Braun et al, 2010; Messley et al, 2010; Zenker & Petersen, 2010).

Place marketing has, moreover, become a lucrative field for private sector consultants with little interest in empirical evidence or theory (Berglund & Olsson, 2010; Niedomysl & Jonasson, 2012, Parker et al, 2015). Within place-marketing theory, special spatially designed plans are included (Kotler et al, 1999). The main problem may not however actually be that place marketing is using tools and models from the marketing field, but rather that these tools and theories are not, in practice, being used properly or effectively. The key question here then relates to the extent to which rural areas can simply ‘copy-paste’ place marketing activities for capitals, urban areas and metropolitan regions.

The aim of this study is to promote a theoretical discussion on the applicability of city marketing plans when place marketing a rural area. The following questions are addressed: 1) why will it not be successful to use city marketing strategies when marketing rural areas? 2) Why should

city and rural place marketing strategies differ? 3) What is the potential for a separately designed rural place marketing strategy?

The paper is structured in the following way: In section two, place marketing is defined. Sections three and four discuss place marketing in both its urban and rural contexts. The benefits of successful place marketing strategies in rural areas are discussed in section five and in section six the extent to which city marketing strategies can successfully be applied in rural contexts will be discussed. The final section of the paper offers a brief discussion followed by a summary and conclusions.

## **2. What is place marketing?**

Place marketing is about designing a place to satisfy the needs of its target market(s). ‘Place’ refers to a geographically limited area: a region or state; a cultural, historical or ethically-bounded location; a central city and its surroundings; a market with various definable attributes; an industry’s home base and a clustering of like-industries and their suppliers; or a psychological attribute of relations between people (Kotler et al., 2002). This process is known under several different names, such as *place marketing* (Kotler et al. 1993, 1999, 2002; Kozma, 2006; Van den Berg & Braun, 1999; Metaxas, 2002, Eriksson, 2010; Braun et al., 2010; Zenker & Petersen, 2010), *city marketing* (Deffner & Liouris, 2005; Braun, 2008; Kavaratzis, 2007), *urban marketing* (Kavaratzis, 2008), *rural marketing* (Velayudhan, 2007), *geographical marketing* (Meester & Pellenbarg, 2001), *destination marketing* (Baker & Cameron, 2008; Buhalis, 2000), *village marketing* (Kozma, 2006), *territorial marketing* (Dinis, 2004) and *location marketing* (Makombe & Kachwamba, 2011).

Several different models have been designed to describe place marketing activities. The ‘10-C’ model consists of the key elements in the marketing-spiral (consumer-orientation; communication; consensus; coordination; cooperation; creativity; conception; campaign; continuity; and control) and can be used in place marketing activities (Kozma, 2006). The traditional marketing mix model ‘5P’ (product, price, place, promotion, people) has also been advocated for place marketing (e.g. Kotler et al., 1999; Metaxas, 2002; Braun, 2008). These models, however, constitute *strategies or plans* for place marketing activities and as such they are important for that reason. Before these models can be applied however we need to identify the unique selling point, the target audience and the agent informing the target audience about the unique selling point.

Every place has to retain the attention of its target audience in order to present itself in the best way possible and to identify its *unique selling point* (USP). The unique selling point will differentiate the place from competitors. Each place must formulate a combination of offerings and

benefits that can meet the expectations of a broad range of investors, new businesses and visitors (Kotler et al., 1999).

Place marketing procedures are about satisfying the needs of the *target audience*, which means that the target audience needs to be identified. Place marketing is successful when it satisfies two main parameters: a) the enterprises and the residents satisfaction from the purchase of goods and services that the place provides, b) the satisfaction of the expectations of the potential target markets (enterprises and visitors), as long as the goods and services that the place provides to them are those that they wish to consume (e.g. Kotler et al., 2002, Rainisto, 2003; Van den Berg and Braun, 1999, Dawson et al., 2011, Zenker et al., 2010). Several suggestions in terms of a classification of target groups have been made. Kotler et al. (1999) suggest four target groups (visitors; residents and employees; business and industry; export markets), while Kozma (2006) suggests three: economic participants, tourists and inhabitants. These two classifications do however to large extent overlap.

The importance of effectively including resident views is often emphasised in research as important for place marketing to succeed (Giles et al, 2013; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Braun et al, 2010; Messley et al, 2010; Zenker & Petersen, 2010). If the residents are satisfied with where they live, they can generally be seen to be implicitly satisfied with the labour market situation, the housing market, leisure activities, communications, services etc. In another words, if the residents are satisfied, it has to be a nice place. According to Kotler et al. (1999) and Kozma (2006) it is however not only inhabitants or residents that should be considered important target groups, but also, tourist and business-related visitors. Tourists and business-related visitors are also important *agents* when it comes to transmitting positive images of the place of destination to other target groups at their places of origin (e.g. a tourist who spent a vacation in a place will of course tell everybody who wants to listen about the wonderful place s/he has been to; a businessperson will do the same). By extension, travel agents and local or regional governments can also be seen, potentially, as agents here.

One 'place' is not like another. This basic observation may appear trivial, but it needs to be emphasised. Every city has its own particularities and distinctive characteristics and this basic point needs to be acknowledged if place marketing activities are to succeed (Metaxas, 2010b). Thus it is important to acknowledge that small towns and individual rural areas also have unique characteristics. Empirical studies show that it is difficult for a small town with a poor image, few resources and a need for economic development to market itself effectively (Kerr and Johnson, 2005). Moreover, other empirical studies show how small communities in rural and peripheral areas often simply imitate each other in place marketing activities, in the main because of the limited

resources available to them (Rauhut Kompaniets and Rauhut, 2013). Urban and rural areas are not only different; they have completely different prerequisites when it comes to place marketing. In the following two sections a review of place marketing activities in both urban and rural areas will help illustrate this point further.

### **3. Place marketing of cities and urban areas**

Urban areas generally boast a broad mix of differentiating functions rendering them unique. The Built City (BC) is made up of built up areas and is what we usually consider to be an urban area. The Consumption City (CC) is an area within which most of the consumption of goods and services occurs in the BC; the Employment City (EC) is an area in which the bulk of the employed workforce works in the BC; and the Workforce City (WC) is an area upon which the BC draws for a given majority of its labour requirements. These four dimensions of the city are brought together and shown to be interrelated (Parr, 2007).

Based upon the description by Parr (2007) a city and an urban area have a relatively high population density with strong business activities and hence a dynamic labour market. These aspects imply the existence of a good transport network and easy accessibility to welfare services etc.

A reasonably-sized city of 150-200,000 inhabitants will host museums, galleries and cultural sites. A continuous flow of persons on business trips into the cities is likely but these people will want to return home when off-duty. The supply of shops, cafés, pubs, clubs, restaurants, cultural activities, leisure activities etc., creates a level of demand in itself. A city of this size will most likely also have some sort of tertiary educational institution, which means an exchange of academic scholars and students. We can also assume, given all of the abovementioned characteristics, that this city will have good inter-regional, national and international communications and accommodation for business travellers. In this hypothetical town it is possible to identify several different unique selling points from the discussion so far. Needless to say, if we instead focus on the capital city or the second or third biggest city in a country, it is obvious that the supply of services, goods or facilities will increase, that the infrastructure will improve and that the number of available hotel beds and restaurants, among other things, will increase.

In line with Metaxas (2010b) all of these factors constitute important characteristics that could function as the foundation for a city's strategy in relation to the exploitation of its competitive advantages. What is most important here however is that each of the city's distinctive characteristics is a 'distinctive good' in itself? City marketing aims to promote and support these characteristics in a strategic manner in order to better set out a competitive city image.

Already with this hypothetical city of 150-200,000 inhabitants it is possible to identify several different target audiences (residents, commuters, business travellers, students, tourists, visitors from the surrounding areas etc.). Place marketing succeeds when residents, visitors and businesses are pleased with this specific 'place' and when the expectations of visitors and investors are met. To satisfy the needs of the identified target audience is of central importance. Just as it is relatively simple to identify target audiences in terms of the hypothetical city discussed here, the very same target audiences can appear as agents for spreading the unique selling points of this specific 'place'. A strategy or plan may be used if a specific target audience needs to be addressed. This hypothetical city has the potential to reach the target audience(s) with its USP because there are many agents to spread the message.

#### **4. Place marketing of rural areas and towns**

Rural used to be defined as everything which was not urban. 'Being rural' is however something more than just belonging to a certain administrative-geographic unit on the map (Isserman, 2005). Population density matters when determining rural areas though obviously it is never as high in rural areas as in urban areas. Many rural communities are marginalised in economic, social and spatial terms (Ögdül, 2010). Peripheral areas, which in some sense are also rural, often suffer from low or falling population density and limited access to large markets, constraining business development (Davies & Michie, 2011).

In this paper rural areas are characterised by their relatively low population density, weaker business activities and by labour markets which are not dynamic. Hence, transport facilities and accessibility to welfare facilities can be assumed to be less developed than in urban areas. A rural town is, for instance, defined by Ögdül (2010) as, a small or medium sized town in a region far from the main economic, political or cultural centres and which is, in many ways, marginalised in economic, social and spatial terms.

There are, of course, areas that can be defined as rural in terms of e.g. population density, business activities and transport facilities, but are nevertheless located in the vicinity of urban areas. These areas can, however, benefit from the image and place brand of the nearby urban areas. These kinds of rural areas are *not* discussed in this paper.

Let us consider a town of 25-50,000 inhabitants and a rural place as hypothetical examples here. In the case of the rural place we can assume that this place can offer a unique selling point for activities with a *niche* target audience, e.g. ski resort facilities, wine and food, agri-tourism, special events and cultural activities. This place will not only be dependent on a limited number of target groups, but also on the fact that the number of cities and larger towns nearby are few, meaning that

the distances between different activities will be huge; there are fewer museums, galleries and cultural sites; there is not a continuous flow of persons on business trips to the cities; there is not the supply of shops, cafés, pubs, clubs, restaurants, cultural activities, leisure activities etc., creating a demand by itself for these services and there are fewer accommodation choices etc. This may actually also be true for our hypothetical rural town.

Not only will the number of target audiences for the identified unique selling point in the hypothetical place and rural town be discussed here, so too will the number of agents transmitting the USPs to other potential target audiences. As noted previously, it is of the utmost importance in spreading a positive image of a place to have satisfied residents, so what happens if the residents become highly dissatisfied? As an example, the residents in several rural and peripheral regions in the north of Sweden are often the most dissatisfied in the country with their residency in terms of services, facilities and communications (Lundgren, 2010); being from the region 'Västernorrland' lingers like a bad smell for many of its inhabitants, the smell of a loser (Rauhut & Littke, 2015). If the residents of a place have nothing positive to say about it, who will? Although we may have a unique selling point, we have identified target audiences and we have a strategy, the key agent – the residents – may not want to signal what is good in this place or rural town. This problem has been discussed by Rozhkov and Skriabina (2015).

Peripheral areas are geographically disadvantaged in terms of their distance to the market. Although production costs may be significantly lower in a peripheral area, transport costs usually price the product out of the market. The demand for products is much higher in central areas with a higher population density. Low transport costs and economies of scale make it cheaper to produce products close to the market (Krugman, 1991). The distance, measured in travel time and money, to these two hypothetical examples must be included in the USP calculation. If it takes six hours by train to go to place A and one hour by plane to place B and the cost is three times as high going to A than B, all other things being equal, why should we go to place A? Consumers want to feel that they get value for the money spent on going to our hypothetical rural town and rural place. Following the argument of Dinis (2004) place A must use its competitive advantages relative to place B. It is obvious that place A has to offer something B cannot offer, otherwise we will go to B.

Prices in rural areas may be relatively high, given the absence of economies of scale and the realities of limited competition (Krugman, 1996). Clearly, competition between e.g. restaurants and hotels is low in rural and peripheral areas, so they can set whatever price they want. Monopolistic and oligopolistic markets have a tendency to increase price levels (Begg et al., 1987). It is, moreover, difficult to obtain economies of scale in sparsely populated areas as aggregated demand is relatively low compared to densely populated areas; the number of visitors is also relatively low.

As such, the number of trains and flights, or other services provided by public and/or private actors, will necessarily be lower as population density is a primary determinant for these services (Humer et al., 2015). Again, this will raise prices level.

To place market a small rural town or a rural area thus requires a clear strategy or plan, the target audience(s) must be identified as they can be assumed to be few and not so numerous, the unique selling points must be clear and well-articulated, and, finally, the agents to carry the good image of this place must be identified and they must be willing to be agents. Thus, the place marketing of a rural place requires significantly more effort to succeed, but is in no way impossible.

### **5. A rationale of failure**

A small rural town or rural area beyond the vicinity of a major urban area does not have the diversified economic structure of a major city, nor has it the population density or the communications infrastructure. While the supply of services may be plentiful in a major city, it will be relatively limited in a small rural town or a rural region. In fact, the major city will have a steady flow of target audiences visiting the city for various reasons. At the same time the small rural town or rural area will be dependent on fewer target groups, longer distances between attractions, and a lesser supply of services etc., all of which pose a significant challenge in terms of formulating a place marketing perspective. As noted previously, the place marketing of a place is successful when the expectations of visitors and investors are met.

While many cities have a diversified economic structure, a good supply of services and excellent communications, this is rarely the case in more rural settings. Unless a place, i.e. a region or a town, has a diversified economic structure, it is vulnerable to external changes and less likely to undergo the necessary changes and economic transformation. These issues are extensively covered in the regional science literature (see e.g. Capello et al., 2015; Hadjimichalis, 2011; Krugman, 1996). Kotler et al. (1999) stress the importance of a community being able to provide basic welfare services and infrastructure to the satisfaction of residents, businesses and citizens as one of the most important marketing steps to make in any place marketing process. This provision cannot be taken for granted in all rural areas and definitely not in peripheral areas. If place marketing plans for cities are just copy-pasted into a rural place, and this has not been controlled for, the marketing plan for this rural place will fail.

Furthermore, long term visions are required to address the problems as well as a plan for the intermediate stages of investment and transformation. In a place with a diversified economic structure this is taking place constantly, but for a small rural town which have traditionally been dependent on one major industry and which wants the transformation process to be relatively rapid

adjustment and restructuring are likely to be difficult and extremely painful. Clearly, in this context, simply ‘copy-pasting’ place marketing plans from cities onto a rural environment will fail.

Besides developing a strong and attractive image of the community and setting attractive incentives for both current and potential buyers and users of goods and services, the community has to promote the its products and services in an efficient and accessible way such that the target groups feel that they are getting good value for money. Potential investors, tourists and residents should be fully aware of the distinctive advantages of this specific place and this requires promotion of the community’s attractiveness and benefits. Kotler et al. (1999) note that “too often, communities fall into the trap of concentrating on only one or two of these marketing activities, often concentrating on the promotion functions. They may spend money on expensive advertisement or an unfocused slogan without first doing the diagnostics and planning”. In a big city, with many and frequent target audiences, promotion may be well enough to satisfy the needs of the target audiences, but for small rural towns and rural areas more work is needed to succeed with a place marketing plan. As the number of attractions is fewer, so are the potential target audiences. Again, simply copying a city marketing plan will not lead to success.

Many small communities do not have the resources to do the diagnostics and planning themselves as their finances are usually strained. Instead they try to benchmark themselves relative other communities in a similar situation (Niedomysl & Jonasson, 2012). They may also try to copy the way other communities deal with the same situation (Rauhut Kompaniets & Rauhut, 2013), which is effectively a search for best practice or good practice. Again, both these strategies are doomed to fail as the community in search of change must identify its own *unique selling points*, its own *target audience(s)* and the *agents* it can best use to transmit the positive images of the community it wants to promote. If this is not done, the necessary diagnostics and planning is not done properly, and as Kotler et al. (1999) concludes, all efforts will be in vain.

The methodologies used to operationalise best or good practices suffer from some shortcomings: 1) the lack of theory. We can see if something works – or not – but we cannot understand why; 2) these two methodologies violate all types of threats to what is called ‘validity’, i.e. whether the intervention is implemented in view of the theoretical concept as intended; 3) both methodologies ignore the problems of ‘reliability’, i.e. to what extent the findings are transferable and general for all situations of a similar kind (Vesely, 2011). As such, ‘best practices’ is basically a copy-paste strategy which focuses on activities rather than on achievement. Whether the ‘best practice’ approach actually works in another context is of less importance than the fact that the check-list is ticked off in accordance with the instructions. When practitioners and politicians ask for ‘best practice’ solutions this suggests that evidence-based knowledge is put aside (Ermeling et

al, 2015).<sup>2</sup> Relying on best or good practice means that, yet again, the diagnostics and planning emphasised by Kotler et al. (1999) is not done properly.

In order to mitigate these external pressures and maintain its cohesiveness and desirability, a place could develop a place marketing plan. Such a plan should be made by a planning group consisting of public and private actors and should deal with three things: (1) define and diagnose the community's condition; (2) develop a long-term vision on how to address the problems faced; and (3) develop a plan on how to attract investment and stimulate transformation. Kotler et al. (1999) point out that distressed places usually seek government subsidies and short term projects while actions to prevent expanding businesses from leaving the area are usually overlooked. By undertaking a process of strategic market-oriented planning the economic development prospects for any given place can be turned in a more favourable direction. In our case we are interested in rural towns and rural areas and how they can best stimulate place-growth dynamics.

To succeed in the global competition for human resources, tourism and investment each place or community has to focus on its own unique selling points, its own target audiences and its own agents. Copy-pasting city place marketing plans will not pay off for rural places. On the contrary, it is a rationale for failure.

## 6. Concluding remarks

This paper discusses, from a theoretical standpoint, the extent to which rural areas can 'copy-paste' place marketing activities for capitals, urban areas and metropolitan regions. In the hypothetical examples discussed above it is obvious that the contexts within which large cities, capitals and metropolitan areas operate are so different from those of small rural towns and rural regions that it is questionable whether similar methodological tools can be used. A city with 150-200,000 inhabitants has many easily identifiable target audiences while a small rural town with 20,000 inhabitants does not. The number of attractions, the distance between attractions and services, the diversification of economic activities, infrastructure, and the supply of services etc., is simply on a different scale in a city with 150-200,000 inhabitants to that of a small rural town with 20,000 inhabitants. All this must be included in the place marketing plan made individually for each place; the diagnostics and visions for a place must be made specifically for the analysed place. This answers the first question posed in the introduction.

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<sup>2</sup> The idea that a 'best' practice exists, and can be identified analytically, is essentially a 'pure' type. Any empirical attempt will fall short. The answers that are given will force the analyst to make a number of simplifying assumptions trading off some characteristics in the design against others in an attempt to sort the 'good' from the 'bad' practices. Methodologically, this is a highly questionable approach.

The second question asks why city and rural place marketing strategies should be different. A place marketing strategy or plan must, according to Kotler et al. (1999), be tailor-made for each place. Again, the contexts and potentials of cities and rural areas to attract investments, business, tourists and new residents are different. To copy-paste successful place marketing strategies for cities and metropolitan areas will most likely lead to a failure in a rural context.

If place marketing is done properly, it is obvious that many rural and peripheral areas can profit from it. Kotler et al. (1999) note however that dying and chronically or acutely depressed areas may be beyond rescue despite the correct use of place marketing. If the vicious spiral of decline has already been entered a lot more than place marketing is required. For other rural and peripheral regions however it is obvious that place marketing can stimulate regional development and produce place-growth dynamics.

It has to be stressed again that this paper is a *theoretical discussion* of place marketing as a tool to attract target audience(s) in cities and metropolitan areas and in small rural towns and rural areas. The practical implication of the theoretical discussion is that spatially designed place marketing strategies should be applied in rural areas. As such, there is no such thing as a ‘one-size-fits-all’ strategy in place marketing. Depending on promotion activities alone is not enough to make place marketing successful.

This paper also offers important insights into the importance of theory when conducting place marketing; theorising successes and failures in place marketing could actually increase the efficiency of place marketing activities. From a theoretical point of view this could stimulate regional development in rural areas. In reality, the result may be rather different, although this issue remains outside the scope of the current paper. Local communities are not totally free to act when it comes, for example, to infrastructure investments and the provision of welfare services; here the regional and national authorities have discretion.

A further insight here is that it is often rational – in the context of tight fiscal constraints - for rural communities to simply copy-paste successful place marketing strategies or to use what they perceive to be good or best practices: the proper use of place marketing to attract investment, business, tourists and new residents requires economic resources and most rural communities have limited resources to spend on this. A ‘low budget’ alternative is then applied, and this alternative will not lead to the desired outcome. Blaming place marketing for being too dependent on marketing theory for this failure appears to be an attempt to find a scapegoat for a broader socio-economic failure.

This paper offers important insights into the importance of theory when conducting place marketing. Theorising successes and failures in place marketing could actually increase the

efficiency of place marketing activities. For rural areas this could stimulate highly desirable regional development.

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