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NEW POWER RELATIONS IN THE DIGITAL ATTENTION ECONOMY AS A CHALLENGE TO PLACE AND CITY BRANDING

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Abstract. The paper examines the factors changing the global paradigm of competition between places and cities in the information and networked society. Three groups of factors are determined: (1) the transformation of the global paradigm of civilization confrontation, (2) glocalization in all many-valued inconsistencies of this process, and finally (3) the digital-interactive revolution and the Web-generated social. The second part of the presentation is devoted to the challenges posed by the digital transformation of social structures for place marketing and city branding. Based on the concepts of economics of attention and critical digitalism, the author shows how the network environment changes the communicative practices of the place. A structural model of new power digital actors for a megacity / region is proposed. This includes traffic monopolists, network elites and network brands. The possible directions of communication logistics of a place in interrelation with these actors of network power practices are shown.
Key words: place branding; city marketing; communicative logistics; critical Internet studies; political elite; digital elite; digital society; attention economy.

The history of the competition of cities for resources is no shorter than the history of the urban format of the spatial organization of social life. The rivalry between Athens and Sparta in ancient times, Rome and Avignon in the Middle Ages, St. Petersburg and Moscow in the glorious years of the Russian Empire was always associated with conscious or unconscious attempts to redistribute resources of three types – high status residents, capital investments and temporary visitors – merchants, pilgrims, etc. Today, these components are associated with three dimensions of the external image of the modern city – for residents and migrants, investors, and tourists [9, p. 23-26; 11, p. 17].

It can be said that the paradigm of place marketing itself does not change in its substantive meaning. But conditions and technologies of its implementation are changing. The latter are determined by the current civilization chronotope. For a long time, state and bloc borders on the one hand and low speed of communication on the other were the restraints of competition between large cities.

In the mid-twentieth century, Vienna as a tourist or investment destination could not compete with Budapest, like Leningrad with Stockholm or Bangkok.

As a financial center, London did not compete with Singapore or Shanghai. Modernity is changing the configuration of the challenge for effective communication in an urbanized location, especially if the latter pretends to be called an extra-big city – a modern megapolis.

Let us single out the most important macro factors that have launched the process of the competitive space transformation for large cities at the beginning of the XXI century. The discourse of the special literature of recent years, both branding and economic-geographic, is built around the dynamics of the communication sphere, – the invasion of the social Web, Wiki-resources, mobile applications, etc. This is true, but the situation, as we see it, is more complex and complicated.

It's true. But it's not the full truth. The macro factors determining this transformation are undoubtedly wider and more complicated. In our point of view in the most general form here we can speak of three groups of factors. First, it is a transformation of the global paradigm of civilizational confrontation. Secondly, this is glocalization in all the many-valued contradictions of this process. And finally, this is the digital-interactive revolution and the social Web generated by it.

We would attribute the first macro factor mainly to the political sphere, the second – to the economic one. Only the third is of communication nature both technological (as applied to the city's communication tools) and psychological (as applied to changing the audience communication behavior).

Indeed, the third one, the factor of the communications revolution, is a macro factor that transforms all the components of the place's communication. It is extremely important and opens a whole range of fundamentally new opportunities for the city branding. The second factor – glocalization – is also not overlooked in the discourse of place branding, regional studies and regional PR.

Much less attention is paid to the role of the political civilizational macro factor. Meanwhile, as practice shows, political macro-factor in many cases determines the positive or negative dynamics of the megacity reputation for significant external audiences.

We presume that the corresponding political macro factor is determined by the transformation of the basic axis of the civilizational conflict in the modern globalized society. During almost the entire XX century it was the axis of the conflict between the world of socialism, led by the USSR, and the world, we denote it conditionally as anti-communism, led by the United States.

Now the axis of the conflict lies in confrontation between the Western-based understanding of freedom and progress, embodied in the modern Euro-Atlantic technological civilization, and traditionalism, and even ultraconservatism, largely linked to passionate radical Islamism. Although, not only with it. This dangerous axis passes straight through modern global metropolitan areas and global cities.

The demand for cheap labor force generates migration flows, which leads to the formation of ethnically homogeneous traditionalist enclaves in large cities. The "melting pot" stops working; multiculturalism, as the liberal hope of politicians, ethnologists and urbanists of the second half of the XX century, remains only on the pages of monographs and textbooks. And what happens in practice can be seen in the evening Paris or London, and now in the Moscow subway. Or in suburbs where migrants live compactly, explicitly demonstrating the absence of any movement towards cultural relativism, and even more so – towards real integration.

The authorities of megacities for the most part understand the situation, but do not always understand how to solve the existing and, moreover, future problems. But, at the same time, as a rule, this problem is hidden for academic scholars of city branding and place marketing.

The information flows generated by the official structures of megacities for all three major groups of external target audiences – investors, tourists and capital-intensive potential residents as a rule ignores the indicated problem. But on the other hand, it is presented in the informal Web discourse – on social networks, the blogosphere, telegram channels, UTube, and also in the media space. And, most often – in the most image-unfavorable content sections – criminal news and the chronicle of incidents.

This generates not yet fully realized marketing and image risks for megacities as objects of place branding. And it is quite obvious that the problem would never be solved by silencing, or by means of mere branding or marketing technologies.

Megacities have to solve such issues in reality – on the merits. Implement migrant adaptation programs, prevent place segregation, work with diasporas, identify positive leaders and arrest negative ones, apply special police measures, etc. But, at the same time, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of communication programs for hedging designated political risks. On the agenda is not only the communication of institutions with stakeholders, but the creation of conditions for the self-organization of stakeholders in the communicative space of a megacity to promote its brand. Moreover, the social Web creates the necessary conditions for it.

If we return to the most important communicative group of macro-factors we should first of all designate the features of the information space of the first decades of the 21st century, which cause new challenges for place branding.

This space is [2, p. 17–20]:

– information redundant, highly competitive, extremely noisy;

– poorly managed within the framework of the power vertical, uncontrolled by the governor, the mayor, or the administration of the place;

– the transposing role of traditional / non-traditional speakers;

– global, local and individual simultaneously;

– interactive (UGS = Web 2.0) and capable of generating Web waves.

What new should be discussed in this respect?

Our position is that the most important factor in the change of place branding is the social and political transformation towards communicative network society. There is a change in the power relations paradigm of the digital society and the digital economy of the mega-city.

Cities that do not understand this will lose in the global competition.

I will consider the transformation of power and domination formats from the position of political economy of attention, one of the directions of modern critical digitalism. Here we rely on the following authors: Jody Dean with the concept of communicative capitalism [3, 4], Christian Fuchs with digital labor [8], Tiziana Terranova [15] (Network Culture) and David Mumby [12]: (New types of human organization), and also, on our own theoretical publications [5, 10].

Let's start with the economy of attention. The Internet is a space for fierce competition for attention. Every user who wants to be successful in a digital environment tries to attract the attention of other users to his digital track – a blog, a community or even a separate post, photos, and videos. For a limited amount of time, a user can perform a limited number of mediated communications on the Web. It becomes crucial to keep the attention of the audience in the big informational flow when a lot of technologically equivalent sources coexist in the same space and act according to the same rules.

Attention of the user becomes the basis for competition and cooperation on the so-called attention market, which is divided into nodes – sections of the network. The audience rewards the most interesting content on various parts of the Network with its attention, thereby increasing their symbolic use value. In turn, all these "rewards" in the aggregate give the value of another type – the exchange one. In other words, a network site that has attracted attention is valuable as an area of economic interest for market participants: owners of other websites, cities, regions, countries, big businesses, and political and media groups.

The possibility to capitalize attention [5, p. 27–29] generates intricate relations involving Internet users, opinion leaders, business and political actors, cities, regions, media and even governments. In turn, the processes of commercialization of the network environment are aimed not only at encouraging users to direct financial transactions, but also at retaining their attention and further converting it into political, economic and cultural influence.

The place, or the city, being represented on the network in different communicative statuses, on different platforms competes for attention in an asymmetrical communicative space. Without understanding the essence of this asymmetry and the typology of the most important players, the successful functioning of the urban brand in the network is impossible. In this regard, we turn to some aspects of network stratification.

For the city, or the region we distinguish a number of power actors in the economy of attention. And the successful brand of the city / region has to win the struggle for influence on these power actors.

The main actors of power are:

– traffic monopolists;

– network elites;

– and network brands [10].

The city has to communicate and to work with all relevant digital power actors in order to turn itself into a successful and influential network brand.

Let us consider these actors in a more detailed way.

Local traffic monopolists – Web 3.0 prosumers – I invented a new word – profisumers.

The second half of the 2000s on the Web has marked the transition from Web 2.0 to the Web 3.0 concept [1] when the quality of content and services is enhanced not only by increasing the number of users but also by increasing the competence of individual participants.

Any user who controls and owns a segment of the Network can draw attention to their product. However, the users who constantly produce a professional product become local monopolists of

traffic. By investing knowledge, skills and other resources in the development of their network websites, these prosumers become professionals (digital profisumers) and acquire a special type of social capital then invested in digital branding of the owned network area (web site, or account).

Thus on the Web segment, there are local traffic monopolists, who become professionals due to social capitalization [7, p. 22–26]. Some of them get the opportunity to enter the network elite, which becomes elite when it starts to influence stronger, forming values and patterns of behavior.

And this is the next level of power digital actors to integrate into the process of place branding. It occurs when a part of traffic monopolists organizes virtual communities, develop certain rules and even codes, and also distribute these values to their audience. In this case they become the **network elite – digital opinion makers**, those whose opinion is listened to by the audience both on agenda items and in the process of everyday consumption of digital content.

Network brands. Both business and place actors – cities, regions, and countries interested in being presented in the network space, create network projects aimed at intensive promotion. Network areas of these projects clearly have a marketing component. As a result, appear network brands – the new power actors. They can be either virtual reference points of an organization, a place, or even a public person, or have a purely "digital" origin.

A network brand has a specific communicative strategy and clear property rights. A network brand, being a "virtual referent" of an organization, place, city, or person, attracts the audience's attention [12].

In any case, the goals of such brands are the loyalty of the audience, the maintenance of awareness and reputation, and further the formation of behavioral patterns in relation to the offline product underlying the network, including the patterns aimed at increasing the social and direct capitalization of the city (region). And in this regard, the city is also able to become a network brand.

Note that any successful region, city, network actor or project may have one or another characteristic, combining, for example, features of a traffic monopolist and a network brand. At the same time, its communicative capitalization becomes a basic feature of a real power actor with power potential realized not only in the network space, but also in adjacent spaces – cultural, economic or political [14, p. 98–111].

Thus, as foreseen by Manuel Castells [2, p. 68], in the conditions of the developed attention economy appear new network formats of power and domination. In this case, we can talk about the redistribution of resources affecting the social capitalization of places from exclusively institutional actors – mayor's offices or city administrations – to decentralized players – place stakeholders. In megacities, where smartphone penetration and the concentration of social networks users are high, it creates a unique situation for producing the communication synergy of stakeholders in the place brand promotion.

The question is in the formation of the correct – transactional – architecture of the communicative space of a megacity. It is the transactional architecture of the megacity stakeholders – among themselves, with external audiences and city managers that creates new opportunities for solving place branding tasks. If this turns out, the social capitalization of the place grows and a regional collective world – "Colworld" – is formed – according to the scheme described by C. Shirky [13, p. 122]. Groups of people – residents, NGOs, activists, greens, members of interest communities, and others – begin their communication with a simple exchange of information (sharing), moving to cooperation (cooperation), then collaboration (collaboration) begins and, finally, the collectivism stage begins (collectivism). At every turn, the amount of coordination increases.

In conclusion, we note that any modern place do without communicative logistics for the formation and optimal branding strategies cannot.

Communicative logistics is an activity on the effective distribution of information flows between social actors in order to achieve communicative synergy of the allocated city stakeholders.

For the modern metropolis, communicative logistics is a key direction in the implementation of marketing and branding strategies in a highly competitive environment.

Let us name its main principles:

- open architecture, flexibility and adaptability;
- public-state partnership in the development and implementation;
- openness of project procedures to the public;
- stakeholder engagement – involvement of all stakeholders and public decision making;
- and new power actors involvement.

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