Book review

Imaginative Communities: Admired Cities, Regions and Countries

Before going deeper in the review, it must be anticipated that, however punctual, descriptive and concise, this is definitely not a manual or a "how to" toolkit for tourism marketing. On the opposite, this book might not directly address some pressing challenges of the tourism of tomorrow or even today, like overtourism (Carvão *et al.*, 2018). Instead, it offers an optimistic view by seeding possible generative answers to a key social and cultural question: "How can places leverage their vernacular uniqueness by preventing that they become just travel destinations?" In doing so, Govers implicitly provides ideas and insights about how tourism will have destinations that people admire, hence they want to visit. But just because this agile and actionable work is not about tourism, the practitioners and students of tourism futures might find it triggering, inspiring, and, ultimately, relevant.

Based on an inside-out perspective, this book has the clear purpose to re-define place branding by "de-marketing" places by inspiring their communities, in order to prevent the excesses and the risks of contemporary destination management. The author leans his analysis on several recent extracts from the World Values Survey, a major global data reference that, in the mid-2000s, constituted a reference in the foresight and futures research practice of teams like Philips Design. The richness and texture of this source was demonstrated, among others, by generating the empirical backbone of robust socioeconomic studies of modernization (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Complemented by data from Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brand Index™, and by the

Good Country Index, the World Values Survey establishes the landscape of cultures, cultural differences and cultural change as the natural context of this book, hence setting the focus from immediate commercial concerns to societies and communities. The latter, being at the core of the vision, are described as follows: "Imaginative communities are neighborhoods, cities, regions, countries -possibly even continents that reinforce or build local character and civic pride, while at the same time captivating outsiders." Key constituencies of Imaginative Communities are further specified by the author as follows: "[…] a sense of identity, belonging and virtue, by which to influence international perceptions, with access to mainstream and social media buzz, through building unique experiences through imagination and leadership and community collaboration." Having established the object of his active enquiry and building upon his "Place Identity," Govers and Go (2009) provides a summary of the constructive elements of place identity from "hard" to "soft": structural or static (history, geography), semi-static (physical appearance and people's mentality), signifiers (events, food, language and others), and coloring elements (symbols, behaviors and communication). This framework is articulated as opposite to the simplifications required by mass marketing and commercial branding.

With the explicit aim of regaining control on community identity, the reader is offered a lean flow, reaching a deeper description of how Imaginative Communities collectively think, and what they convey to the outside and experience from the inside. The reference to theories or thorough review of examples in anecdotal mini-cases, from the nation branding of Kazakhstan or Finland, the latter based on digital "shareables" like emojis, or Estonia, based on the innovations of open digital citizenship, to smaller and small cities like Eindhoven or Den Bosch, both in the Netherlands. Within this great variety of references to cases, perhaps the greatest synthesis is offered by the author in the

final chapter, "How we rise enlightened communities," where the different themes and threads as presented so far converge, sketching a way forward beyond traditional destination marketing. Admiration, and therefore reputation through media framing and ultimately through earned content on social media, is what "Imaginative Communities" convey by breaking stereotypes. How? For example, mobilization of the population and deeper involvement in the context of events is emphasized as a principle for potential mission-critical events, but the ability to re-imagine the role and the function of the "place" and community is even more crucial, as in the case of the Bosch500 program in Den Bosch. For this program, celebrating the 2016 anniversary of Hieronymus Bosch, the Dutch small city, where no painting was available, re-engineered their role from host city to sponsor of a world-class curatorial project, investing €12.000.000 in the Bosch Research and Conservation project. As confirmed in the extensively validated in other dedicated works on this specific project (Richards and Duif, 2019), this project included marketing but it should be conceptualized indeed as "long-term placemaking."

As a repeatable approach to generate imaginative solutions, Govers offers that of Imagineering, the design approach devised by Alcoa Steel to merge "imagination" with "engineering" and then adopted by Walt Disney for theme park design, here adapted as: "Community Imagineering is an attempt to connect to a global imaginary, while simultaneously appropriating the cultural realm as a means of maintaining a sense of cultural identity." The author highlights here principles and examples that keep the focus on the "genius loci," by remarking how functional and utilitarian features of places, e.g. infrastructure, are mere hygiene factors, while participation in "experience networks" is key to create value-matching assets, as in world-class events. This is perhaps the point of the book where the reader will experience a desire for more, by not finding any process or toolkit for automatic deployment as a given solution. Furthermore, Govers makes the editorial choice not to develop his analysis of Imagineering toward recent debates that describe it even as a new design discipline, enabling system innovation at a higher organizational level (Nijs, 2019) for the purpose of business consulting. On the contrary, "Imaginative Communities" effectively remains anchored to the direct enunciation of case-based examples, as a means of abstracting general (working) principles, therefore, closer to the historical understanding of what is Imagineering is, and what Imagineering can do.

Being himself at the crossroads of consulting practice and of scholarly work, in his latest book, Govers and Go (2009) provides, to some extent, a follow up to his major achievement "Place Branding", of which a number of key elements find here their natural evolution and expansion. In a way, this new work represents a milestone in Govers' intellectual journey, as "Imaginative Communities" is first dedicated to the memory of aforementioned Frank Go, Govers' academic mentor. Second, Govers makes explicit reference to political scientist and scholar, Benedict Anderson (1936–2015), and his explorations of how nationalism has been imagined and culturally constructed to replace religion and royalty as socially binding factor. An ideal dialog is staged between Anderson's "Imagined Communities" and Govers' "Imaginative Communities." The need to recuperate history, memory and the ability to connect to our past roots seems to be rising in terms of both Big History and epistemologies applied to longer term futures thinking (Brand, 2019) as well as in the realm of urban futures. Here, the drive might exist to ground future scenarios in the deeper DNA of cities as the place of residence over years, decades, centuries from viewpoint of their community culture as expressed by events (Bevolo and van Stiphout, 2018). This mindset, besides paying due homage to past mentors and masters, seems urgent and very relevant because it offers the opportunity to stretch insights and solutions beyond conventional mass marketing that clearly failed (UNWTO, 2018) the mission-critical task to align commercial exploitation with social and cultural sustainability.

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Further reading

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