Strategic Planning and Place Marketing: the Italian Case

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SUMMARY

This paper offers an overview about the connections between Strategic Planning, Place Marketing and City Branding and intends to give an insight on some Italian cities as empirical cases such as Turin, Genoa, Venice and Piacenza. These successful examples have been able to combine together the three elements mentioned above. Given the assumption that the Strategic Plan is the starting point, that Place Marketing makes a city move forward and City Branding helps to define (or renew) the Identity of a Place, it’s interesting to investigate the relations of these issues with big events occurred in these cities. Some opportunities set by the Strategic Plan strive to ensure the best conditions to maximise the city’s potential and gain recognition through Place Marketing actions and City Branding techniques, according to a cross-fertilizations of many different themes in order to make cities become vibrant cultural hubs. Creative place make creative economy and skilled workforce. On one hand Strategic Planning means to be a forum for the local interests in order to achieve the consent on some strategic goals and define a strategic view through problems analysis processes, outcomes monitoring and collective learning, on the other hand Place Marketing aims at becoming a real policy tool in order to make demand and offer meet on urban and territorial issues. Today, what is more and more emphasized are the immaterial aspects of urban life, such as emotions, knowledge and creativity, all belonging to the field of image-making dealt by City Branding.
This paper aims at integrating three contemporary issues in urban studies: Strategic Planning, Place Marketing and City Branding.

First, it describes the Strategic Planning as a process of sharing actions aiming at facing an urban development approach by many actors, both public and private, citizens and youth.

Second, it moves a step further by defining the concepts of Place Marketing and City Branding and it analyzes some links and implications among them, by focusing mainly on the role of big events for the enhancement of some cities.

Third, the attention is drawn on some Italian cases such as Turin, Genoa, Venice and Piacenza, being all of them expressions of cities able to re-create their own image, by using precise and targeted actions revealing new resources for the future.

Global competition puts under pressure both enterprises and territorial areas, imposing development strategies’ re-shaping and re-configuration on a productive and on a urban point of view (Sassen 2002; Krugman 1997; Stiglitz 2002). During the last decades many cities experienced a redevelopment for city post-industrial uses, often related to culture, tourism, and technology: opportunities and events have often been the trigger to start an extensive process of image building and productive re-conversion that is still on its way. According to a strategic vision integrated with actions of Place Marketing and City Branding, events are meant to be temporary, highly visible and often expensive projects aiming at attracting a large number of highly focused visitors in a relatively short time span but able to change the idea people have about a city. Many of these events have been opportunities for important infrastructural investments which helped to modify the aspect of a city, according to its endowment and ambitious urban policies.

This kind of image re-definition has been usually supported by a massive and targeted communication plan and advertisement campaigns by a careful monitoring of its perception from both inside and outside, both on the national and international level.
Strategic Planning

Strategic Plans are new forms of territorial socio-economic planning that provide the active involvement of local actors. In comparison to territorial ruled planning, typical in the 60-80s and characterized by a public regulation arrangement, the Strategic Planning shows significant elements of innovation. Strategic Planning means to be a forum of the local interests’ representation and a kind of local government organization for the actions’ coordination of many local actors and their interaction. In other words, the Strategic Planning is a tool aiming at achieving the consent on strategic goals and at defining a strategic view of a concerned area through problems analysis processes, outcomes monitoring and collective learning. Some of the main features of Strategic Plans consist in re-shaping the patterns of urban development and in increasing of competition, by setting the scene for more strategic actions in the global panorama. They consist basically in strategies of improvement of a local system involving local stakeholders, by following a performative and sustainable approach for medium-long term objectives and goals. Strategic Plans tend to build consensus through extensive negotiations and a decision making process in order to produce collective learning. They can be considered as a new form of democracy process and focus mainly on supply, according to a vision - driven approach by sharing decisions: Strategic Planning aims indeed at overcoming any fragmentation given by different single actions and un-integrated policies, in order to conceive different and at the same time complementary lines to follow. As an expression of governance, the Strategic Plan is a bottom-up pact shared by different local actors willing to build and follow a common strategies, axes and lines aiming at modifying and make a city better.

In Italy, the first strategic planning attempts came out at least two decades later than the best foreign experiences in European and North American cities.

Some key elements are present to trigger the process that is a combination of factors which will eventually create favourable conditions for translating intentions into an operational and successful program of intervention able to change urban texture and re-qualify the appeal of a city, for the inhabitants’ well-living and for tourists and investors’ attraction.

Yet, the most successful cases see the combination of Strategic Planning – which is the starting point – with other important actions belonging to Place Marketing and City Branding. Many cities have already launched such operations, some Italian examples follow here below, as representative of such process consisting of different steps and ways to achieve a new image.
**Place Marketing**

The use of product marketing strategies in an increasing competitive scenario sit in the need to satisfy stakeholders, public and private actors, inhabitants and to attract tourists and investors. Place Marketing is thus becoming a indispensable tool in terms of operative implications associated with a specific place. The strategies for Places Marketing consist in resource and knowledge-based perspectives rather than in "traditional" product-based approaches and it mainly bases on relational resources and networking activities. In a resource-based perspective, every place can be seen as a learning organisation competing in the contemporary soft economy.

Not only have these strategies an economic effect but also precise cultural consequences: art and culture, image and design, architecture and fashion, sports events and festivals thrive in certain places which are just more conductive in allowing creativity to produce and people to come and stay. Place Marketing techniques can be considered instruments of the Strategic Plan and focus mainly on demand, according to target-driven and outside-in approach, by sharing a decision making process. Place Marketing activities intended to promote awareness and favourable opinion about a particular place or region.

**City Branding**

City branding is meant to act as a powerful image-building strategy. While branding has been applied to consumer products for decades, the concept of strategically branding countries, cities and regions only appeared during the mid-90's to assist places to compete more effectively in an increasingly marketing environment. City Branding is indeed more than a mere promotion of place, as it is used in some cities to rebuild and redefine their image. Examining the experience of Turin, Genoa, Venice and Piacenza, this paper focuses on the implications raised by the use of such policies and targeted actions, showing that they have turned out to be successful cases thanks to the symbiotic relationships and cross-fertilizations with Strategic Plans and Place Marketing. City Branding is an act made by the place itself which tells the outside world how it wants to be seen and considered, according to an inside-out approach. Every technique belonging to City Branding intends to make a place attractive and recognizable by a precise and targeted image to be spread outside in different ways and through a consistent behaviour, not only by mere communication tools. The identity and essence of a place as immaterial values ground its brand and image – (re) making.
2. THE ITALIAN CASE

The assumption starts from the identification of the role of innovation and creativity which are considered to be as crucial for giving new patterns to a city and are seen as the foundation for inventive processes both on the economic and social levels. Nowadays what is really important isn’t any longer goods purchase and their consumption, rather the so-called aesthetic consensus obtained through strategies creating and promoting new identity built on symbolic dimensions and shared emotions.

Italy has always had at the same time the advantage and the disadvantage of being embedded with arts: this condition has often lead the Country to give for granted new forms of enhancement and development. The downturn in the economy that negatively affected many cities - the ones which lived post-industrial crisis, such as Turin and Genoa, have realized the importance of being kept up-to-date with today’s ever-changing and challenging world - was significantly positive for some of them which really wanted to re-invent and re-position themselves. That’s why these places have invested money, energies and brilliant thoughts to re-new the structure and the identity of the city, without losing the importance of a glorious past.

In such a context, culture is asked to be part of a multi-faceted regeneration process focused both on physical renovation and re-qualification of buildings and on a deep rethinking of the social logic of space utilization. For this reason many disciplines and subjects intermingle and intertwine to re-draw the image of a place and its identity, making a city as a creative hub’s endeavour. Some events and targeted actions become instrumental to the produce and disseminate creativity and to make identity be recognizable.

The following examples have been forerunners in exploiting some event-based opportunities and in creating a conductive atmosphere to strengthen their own identity, to re-build a new image, preserve and transmit their heritage, provide original forms of artistic expression, widen participation and stimulate creativity both on physical infrastructures and on ideas and actual proposals.
2.1. Turin: the first Italian Strategic Plan and the Olympic Games

Turin was one the very first Italian cities which conceived and adopted a Strategic Plan in 1999. Then a second edition was elaborated and arranged by a coordination structure called *Torino Internazionale*, an association shared by public and private bodies, economic, social and cultural operators, which aims at fostering, supporting and monitoring the Plan implementation process. Strategic actions require work on international, regional and local level.

"A strategic plan is not a list of requests sent by a community to its administrations; nor is it a book of dreams; it is rather a type of agreement between everyone responsible for a development path recognised as possible and shared, where everyone is held responsible for their own part. Strong direct participation of the community in the construction of the Plan is the keystone in a project aimed not just at outlining a precise objective, but also at channelling human and economic resources towards it."\(^1\)

Hosting the Olympic Games means offering the opportunity to show a city and its inhabitants on a global stage, interact and engage with foreign peoples (athletes and tourists). The Olympics usually provide a way to revitalize and even transform the host city, facilitating the rejuvenation of local economy and the construction of new facilities that can change a city’s culture and image for decades. Along with and thanks to the Olympics, Turin have been giving shape to a comprehensive design and communication project with many actions able to ensure an integrated message to be internationally broadcasted.

Its will to become a vibrant place has soon made Turin's Look for the Games become Turin’s new look of the City.

That’s exactly what happened to Turin in winter 2006 when the Games helped to reframe the image of a city ever since connected with the idea of the car production and industry, whereas the Italian tourist appeal has always belonged to Rome, Milan, Florence and Venice. Following the economic transformations of the 21st century, both on a local and on a global level, Turin undertook significant efforts to improve its infrastructures to get it ready for the big international event. Taking advantage of the Olympics as a platform meant to prove the

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\(^1\) Torino Internazionale, *Piano strategico per la promozione della città 2000-2010*, pag. 6
city’s ability to rebuild its image, Turin demonstrated its importance in an international panorama. Since that big opportunity, Turin has been attempting to transform itself into a winter destination, thanks to its location at the foot of the Italian Alps and on a very strategic geographical position. One of its grounded idea about the identity of the city sits on the belief of having something important to offer and to be discovered. The city has turned out to be, through an effective advertisement campaign, a city of passion (*Passion lives here*) and a city able to combine together past and present, history and modernity (*Torino always on the move*). Following to its strategic concept, a substantial urban renewal has been going along with the restoration of selected parts of the cultural heritage and their mixed uses, according to a co-existence of past and future to make an appealing present to live today.

Thanks to its good and precise job, Turin has transformed itself into a city that keeps attracting global attention for years to come. Somehow, it’s like going back to the time when Turin reigned as the former capital of Italy and was a cultural and intellectual hub. In Turin's future, there is also actual and attractive bases for becoming a technology excellence (this year it has been elected 2008 World Capital of Design), and a stronger tourism destination because of the presence of history and arts surrounded by the massive nature of the Alps.

Winter Olympic Games have therefore played an important role in reformulating and reinforcing the images of the city, a clear evidence of the successful mix among Strategic Planning, Place Marketing and City Branding because a city enters a tourist’s mind only when it is recognizable and makes the difference in comparison with all the others. “An urban strategic plan defines a vision of a future which is desirable for the city, to be reached by a time limit whose specification serves as a stimulus. The three aforementioned visions (Torino, a European metropolis; Torino the resourceful, a city of action and know-how; Torino the decision-maker: the intelligence of the future and the quality of life) are justified given the history and resources of the city. They are visions which complement each other and as a whole constitute a vision that Torino can conceivably reach by the year 2010.” And its image along with its techniques to communicate it will be consistent and coherent.

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2 Torino Internazionale, *Piano strategico per la promozione della città 2000-2010*, pag. 10

“Torino has a long history behind it. More than once it has had to reinvent itself, find its role again in generally changed conditions, and at least twice it has been a capital which has driven forward Italian modernisation. (…) Streets, piazzas, palaces, and monuments are the most immediately visible traces of the old political capital. But widening our view, we find that there are traditions connected to those roots which are humanistic, juridical, theological, or related to university research, museums and musical institutions, the varied world of the liberal professions and commerce, the high medical and hospital tradition, the great social religious experiences, libraries, publishers, and the thousands of bonds that tie these public and private worlds to their corresponding points of excellence in the world. We can also see this origin of Torino as a leading city in the fact that an Italian banking group on the scale of major international finance has its headquarters here.”

3 Torino Internazionale, *Piano strategico per la promozione della città 2000-2010*, pag. 11
2.2. Genoa: The European Capital of Culture combining Past and Future

In 1992 a big event called Colombiadi, the celebration of 500 years since Columbus’ arrival on the America, represented one of the earliest steps towards Genoa’s transformation and regeneration process.

Then, in 2001 Genoa hosted the G8, the international forum for the governments of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, UK and USA. This annual summit meeting of all heads of government was another important situation to set and get the city ready for the event: that’s when Renzo Piano designed the Glass Bubble, one of his first constructions in the Old Port placed close to the Aquarium. Thanks to a sophisticated "system of sails" this tropical environment is protected from the direct irradiation of the sun. Inside this Bubble there are equatorial animals such iguanas, butterflies, birds.

Yet, the real re-definition of the image of Genoa passed through the 2004 European Capital of Culture nominee along with Lille in France.

The European Capital of Culture is a city designated by the European Union for a period of one year during which it is given a chance to showcase its cultural life and cultural development. A number of European cities have used the City of Culture year to transform their cultural base and, in doing so, the way in which they are viewed internationally. This title acts as a catalyst and trigger for the branding of a city.

Since ever Genoa has had strong commercial and political ties with the rest of Europe through the sea and since then Genoa has remained, above all indeed, a sea city. That’s why the main interventions have been made on the water front and on the harbour: the main theme of 2004 international event was "the voyage", focusing on the spreading and merging of cultures through the act of travelling. Structural interventions have come along, by focusing on the improvement of the cultural proposal, settling a better museum system, restoring some ancient buildings and heritage, and raising the environment quality. In a word: embracing the city on all its facets. Genoa succeeded in combining together modern and original elements with its past spirit: Piano’s constructions go along the city centre narrow streets called carrugi flanked by tall and old buildings: among the others, an example of it is the Piano’s Bigo, an
ancient dialect word to say navy crane, consisting in a spider-legged elevator that gives a breathtaking view: this huge permanent structure reminds of a ship pole towers over a public square that has turned out to be a new meeting point for the city at the waterfront.

Along with these actions towards the enhancement of arts and culture, what has always been taken into consideration is the amusement aspect, which is a real element of attraction and belongs to the big events’ appeal (Bobbio, Guala, 2002).

In relation to City Branding approach and techniques, the Genoa 2004 campaign won the Grand Prix Pubblicità Italia as the best public communication campaign for the year and the Globe Award for the Best New Tourism project Worldwide, yearly assigned by the British Guild of Travel Writers.

2.3. Venice: Renewing old Traditions

A city as Venice benefits from its being both a centre of cultural production and a centre of arts taste, both of which generate extensive economic reward.

Yet, in spite of its strong identity linked to the past, of its strategic position between Eastern and Western trade, of being packed with tourist all year long, Venice felt the need to re-create and re-new its image and its patterns, for example by focusing on former productive areas, from their abandoned condition to a contemporary and aesthetic re-use (for instance in Marghera).

During the last 300 years, many changes have taken place to transform the original structure and use of the city. Being an historical crossroad of cultures and a bridge between many civilizations and old traditions, La Serenissima has urban elements so peculiar to build up a precise identity and sense of place: the Strategic Plan envisages Venice as a Metropolitan City, a modern, competitive and dynamic city characterized by quality, work, culture according to the idea of social sustainability and political cohesion. That's how some cities turn out to be multi-vocational, both because of their actual and historical nature and of strategic areas to be implemented. Strategies of economic and territorial development need to grasp the idea of a multi-centred city: a city made and linked not by hierarchical relations but synergetic ones, each with a specific role, so that even the spaces which are peripheral today have their own connotation and can develop a sense of identity and belonging among the citizens.
“Venezia 2004-2014” articulates in Structural Conditions and Strategic Lines to activate many precise Policies and defined Actions: as an international city, it intends to increase and enhance tourism and culture, higher education, research and development, logistics, service supply. This is a vast field of action that demands an integrated approach. The city should be considered as a space in which environmental and social networks interact most closely, from a perspective in which the sustainability of development initiatives must be tackled by taking into account all aspects, combining the environment, society and the economy.

Being a city built upon water and canals, Venice is known for its charm linked its cultural strong and deeply rooted traditions, such as the Carnival, which is a real expression of the spirit of the city. Venice Carnival is actually a international brand on its own but in 2008 the Carnival was renewed and thus called “Sensation”: it was planned to divide the city in 6 districts each of them referring to a sense (smell, touch, taste, sight, hearing, mind and imagination) just as “a big event involves also symbols and values, transfers messages and political issues […] acts over places, political actors and economy visibility” (Guala 2002). Venice felt the need of renewing a traditional institution as the Carnival by reading it in a different way. Cultural products have to contain elements of attraction able to fascinate and involve any time differently. That’s why the city felt the need to strengthen deep relations with the surrounding contemporary world and with the people who make use of them. Another event conceived by the Venezia Marketing ed Eventi artistic director Marco Balich, who lead the Sensation Carnival was Love 2008, the “collective kiss” on new year eve: without any distinction of age, sex, nationality a lot of people kissed each other to launch and affirm the night and that place as the most romantic city of the world.

Sometimes, as a paradox, a big heritage is a limit to move on and a burden to carry. It’s therefore important to be able to re-invent its own identity, by looking carefully into the city resource to re-new a “stiff” image “only” related to the past, taking advantage of events or situations that may be used as a trigger to start a regeneration process basing on Strategic Plan’s lines and axes. Promotion and tourism attraction has to coincide with improvements of the inhabitants’ living conditions, both on environmental and social levels quality: that’s another factor to compete with other Italian and foreign cities in their ability to attract new businesses, new training centres, or new tourist flows. The type of planning required means simultaneously taking into account different points of view within a global vision. The Strategic Plan attempts to respect these needs and translate them into feasible and coherent proposals, Place Marketing and City Branding cope with identity and image - (re) definition.
2.4. Piacenza: a good case of a small city

In spite of being more marginal and smaller than the other Italian cities taken into consideration, as a “minor” city Piacenza can be a clear evidence of good results obtained by Strategic Planning (now at its second edition) and a targeted communication campaign.

The Piacenza Strategic Plan started up in October 2000 with the convocation of the General States which included all the local actors, according to a bottom-up approach, in order to define program declarations and present projects. The Strategic Committee gathered the material resulting from the General States and organized it in a list of project lines subdivided into four strategic areas (Human Resources and Culture, Infrastructures and Networks, Integrated Development Resources, Collective and Social Services) together with their respective strategic goals. After an intense and enthusiastic one-year working with the different local actors, and once defined the strategic document, the first difficulties occurred in the second phase that provided the single projects to get into the feasibility phase, as well as a stop due also to the administrative elections that changed the political colour of the city government (June 2002), which is often an obstacle to proceed with the implementation of the Plan. The first outcomes from the Piacenza experience show that the Strategic Plan has above all been able to increase Piacenza visibility both in regional and national contexts: in 2003, the Agreement called Patto per Piacenza was awarded with an official acknowledgment as a best practice in the Forum for the Public Administration. In 2004, a similar appreciation was granted to the Territorial Marketing Plan for the provincial territory, which was worked out by one of the working teams.

In May 2005, the new phase started and led to the 2nd edition of the Strategic Plan named "Piacenza 2020." Since May 2005, Province, Commune and Chamber of Commerce together have expressed their will to re-launch the Strategic Plan by overturning the arrangement of the first Plan: the new challenge was to try and imagine the whole provincial territory in a middle-long term perspective, and build a reference framework pointing out the vocations to assign to the territory for the next 20 years. In such a way, decisions would be more coherent and systematic. To this purpose, it was necessary to open another phase in order to listen to and talk with the local community. An investigation, too, on the high school students was carried out in Piacenza in order to point out needs, trends, and ideas for the future of the city. Focus groups with students and teachers were organized so as to give them voice, too.

The vision arising from the Strategic Document undersigned in June of 2006 focuses on two keywords: the former strategic issue results from the territorial choices making Piacenza both a sustainable community (territory of the quality of life) and an open community (territory of
welcoming); the latter results from the strategic goal making Piacenza both a knowledge community (territory of learning) and a competitive production system (territory of enterprise) in a middle-long term view.

The innovations of the Piacenza Strategic Plan, 2nd Edition concern both content and method as it focuses mainly on the experience of Learning by Planning and Learning by Evaluating and on the will of involving youth and schools in such a participative process of decision-making. The Strategic Plan succeeds in changing the social context not only through a fast implementation of the projects and their financing, but also thanks to an precise strategic direction of the plan: in fact the Strategic Plan represents for both private operators and investors, a clear indication of the territorial choices as to the economic priority sectors to be supported and to the initiatives fostering investments and activities. From this point of view, the impact of the strategic plan is not only to be measured by the direct outputs of the projects but it can also influence the long term outcomes as to territorial culture and identity and thus it turns out to be an excellent tool of territorial marketing for also external users.

A natural evolution has consisted in Piacenza’s advertisement campaign which was able to attract tourists, by focusing on precise aspects defining its local products such as food and wine, its good quality and standards of living, its arts and culture heritage. Different pay-offs were therefore chosen and communicated to express and communicate Piacenza’s identity: beautiful Piacenza to taste (Piacenza bella da gustare), beautiful Piacenza to live (Piacenza bella da vivere), beautiful Piacenza to discover (Piacenza bella da scoprire), city of Denomination of Origin (Piacenza città D.O.C.), term usually applied to high quality local food and wine.

Being marginal to Milan, which could have considered as a weakness, turned actually out to be a point of strength and a good alternative to big cities’ traffic and chaos: Piacenza Strategic Plan and Place Marketing action s along with a precise and targeted advertisement and communication campaign good results can be obtained even in minor sites.
CONCLUSION

In order to fight the danger of a copycat reproduction and lacking of identity, Strategic Plans, Place Marketing and City Branding have to deal with projects with a strong identity. The work starts with a diagnosis of the city’s socio-economic, urban and environmental situation. Then, Institutions and Administrations, operators, associations and local population develop hypotheses on medium-term goals and priorities according to its points of strength and weakness. Once the Plan is drawn, it is not ended, rather it requires a steady monitoring and controlling action to be in harmony with an overall vision of the city.

Any city willing to position in such a contemporary world should re-examining its own development policy goals and frameworks in order to make the best choice, solve its problems, at the same time recognizing its own values and enhancing its potentialities. Some places become meaningful sites of social and economic interaction, nodes of creative exchange and dissemination of innovative ideas thanks to the right process of development. In this ever-shifting post-manufacturing era, economies are driven by ideas, information, communication, skilled human capital, creativity, beauty: places are the scenes where all this process can be done and shown. These exchanges go so far that cities have to be able to listen to and look at the rest of the world and especially they need to have the ability to continue to reconfigure and reinvent themselves keeping the best from their past. What resist the passing of time are the intangible and immaterial elements that build an identity and its image.

In Italy, where arts embed and surround everything, city are asked to be constantly able to keep the past heritage and to produce a renewed aesthetic consent. Complex and nuanced symbolic aspects are thus reviewed and re-valued, by generating more and more priceless value, starting idea sharing and establishing interdependent people relationships and collaborations across different disciplines, milieux, fields and subjects as the Strategic Plan initiates. What is extremely important by the strategic planning lesson is the participative approach and the involvement of public and private actors, associations, citizenship and youth to build a shared image of the city they all live in and communicate its outside in the best way for a common and mutual interest.

Yet, this process requires a steady refinement and a further review in order to keep on identifying any best action to make a city a good place to come and live in. In spite of internet and virtual connections, urban spaces remain the best place where people can meet and discuss, share ideas and face opinions: that’s the role of a city since ever.
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