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Ooi, Can-Seng

Working Paper

Tales From Two Countries: The Place Branding of Denmark and Singapore

Copenhagen Discussion Papers, No. 2006-9

Provided in Cooperation with:
Asia Research Community (ARC), Copenhagen Business School (CBS)

Suggested Citation: Ooi, Can-Seng (2006) : Tales From Two Countries: The Place Branding of Denmark and Singapore, Copenhagen Discussion Papers, No. 2006-9, Copenhagen Business School (CBS), Asia Research Centre (ARC), Frederiksberg, https://hdl.handle.net/10398/7393

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Asia Research Centre

Copenhagen Discussion Papers

9 2006 May

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Can-Seng Ooi

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Editor of the Copenhagen Discussion Papers:
Associate Professor Michael Jacobsen
Email: mj.int@cbs.dk

Asia Research Centre
Copenhagen Business School
Porcelaenshaven 24
DK-2000 Frederiksberg
Denmark

Tel.: (+45) 3815 3396
Fax: (+45) 3815 2500
Email: cdp.int@cbs.dk
www.cbs.dk/arc

Tales From Two Countries: The Place Branding of Denmark and Singapore

Can-Seng Ooi, Ph.D.
Asia Research Centre
Copenhagen Business School

ooi@cbs.dk

ABSTRACT

Place branding has become popular. Places brand themselves to attract tourists, talented foreign workers, investments and businesses. The brand accentuates the positive characteristics of the place; it frames the society and sells its cultures. In the context of tourism, this paper examines the branding strategies of two very different countries – Denmark and Singapore. In Singapore, the convergence between the brand message and the place reality is frequently engineered by creating new brand-related products. In Denmark, the brand tries to communicate an existing local reality; it wants to present a prevailing reality. To the Danes, the brand is descriptive and should portray the country in a positive and accurate manner. To the Singaporeans, the brand is normative and a vision of what Singaporean society ought to become. These countries share common goals when branding themselves but their branding strategies are different, why? This paper situates their strategic differences in the local social, cultural and political context. Although country branding is externally directed, domestic politics and mechanisms of local control affect how the country can brand itself.

Keywords: place branding, branding strategies, Denmark, Singapore, tourism, destination

TALES FROM TWO COUNTRIES: THE PLACE BRANDING OF DENMARK AND SINGAPORE

Brands attempt to tell stories, sell emotions and stimulate the imagination. They encapsulate sets of seductive images and associate these images to the products they sell. Sellers attempt to manipulate capricious consumer desires, as product brands are revamped and new imageries are introduced. Besides products, corporations are also branded. Corporate brands have become visions to drive workers and engineer company cultures. The business of branding has also been extended to places. Places brand themselves to attract tourists, talented foreign workers, investments and businesses (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride 2004, Olins 2000). A place brand accentuates the positive characteristics of the place, it packages the society and sell its cultures (e.g. way of life, the arts, museums, and even the creativity of the people). In other words, the branding process is part of the commodification of culture and society.

The branding of places is distinctly different from the branding of consumer products and corporations (Ooi 2004b, Olins 2004). Let's consider that of branding a country. Firstly, unlike a firm where managers can fire workers if workers do not toe the company's line, country branding authorities cannot fire citizens who do not embrace the official branding, nor can the authorities normally sanction against local agencies if these agencies refuse to cooperate with the branding campaign. Secondly, politicians and local residents may not be supportive of changing the image of their country to attract more tourists and businesses. The relationship between a country and its foreign tourists and businesses is not identical to that of a firm and its customers; tourists and businesses may not be welcomed by all in the country, while the aim of a commercial firm is to serve as many customers as possible.

Thirdly, countries cannot use some brand techniques like those found in commercial firms. For example, commercial products have decoupled their brand images with the basic functions of their products (e.g. perfumes and being seductive). Companies, such as Sara Lee, Ford and Coca-cola, have experimented with the idea of just maintaining their brands and selling things through their brands, while the production of their products is outsourced (Dearlove & Crainer, 1999; Olins, 2000). Place-products cannot be outsourced nor changed easily in the way that consumer and fashion products can be; the place is geographically immobile. Fourthly, commercial firms are profit-maximization entities and most do not have direct access to public funds, and they are not expected to carry heavy social and cultural responsibilities in a society. In the branding of countries, however, state-supported authorities and their agendas are explicitly and closely tied to the domestic social, cultural and political issues.

A place brand is often assumed to be the identity of the place, this means that the brand story should accurately reflect the place's culture (see chapters in Mogan et al 2004). On the other hand, brand authorities – agencies that formulate and market the place brand, e.g. VisitDenmark (the Danish tourism promotion board and agency in charge of branding the country) and Singapore Tourism Board (STB, also in charge of branding Singapore) – must also frame, re-package and even invent products that will communicate the brand story. The strategy to present an honest and accurate brand identity of the place is often accompanied by strategies to transform the place according to the image of the brand. As this paper will show, the formulation and implementation of place branding strategies are constrained by local circumstances: locals evaluate and may even challenge the accuracy and honesty of the place brand; and locals may not agree to strategies to develop and engineer the place in the image of the brand. These are the

challenging encounters for the brand authorities; they must keep the integrity of local place cultures and draw economic benefits from place branding.

This paper attempts to examine the branding strategies of two very different countries – Denmark and Singapore – in the context of tourism. By understanding differences between how these two countries are branded, this study accentuates the social, cultural and political contexts embedded in these two countries' branding strategies. The politics of place branding – that is, the dynamic processes of drawing support and cooperation by the brand authorities from different local agencies and local residents, so that the brand will be accepted, communicated and manifested through official and unofficial publicity and products – play an important role in understanding the place branding process.

Study design

The choice to compare Denmark and Singapore stems from three reasons. One, Denmark and Singapore are actively engaged in the process of branding themselves and in promoting tourism. Two, these two countries are very different; comparisons between them offer valuable lessons in understanding their specific branding strategies in the framework of their own social, cultural, economic and political environment. Three, as a Singaporean living in Denmark, I am taking advantage of my own local knowledge of these two countries, and attempt to present the cases of these countries through thick description and understanding; I have been researching on the Danish and Singaporean tourism industries and their place positioning projects since 1996.

This study focuses on the role of the national tourism promotion authorities of Denmark and Singapore. These agencies mediate between local

residents and foreign tourists. They also arbitrate between keeping the integrity of local cultures and commercialising local cultures for tourism consumption (Ooi 2002). In the context of these authorities branding their countries, the questions asked are: How do VisitDenmark and STB brand their respective countries? How do VisitDenmark and STB implement their branding strategies? Why are their branding strategies different? These questions provide the common foci to compare the two destinations and form the basis for us to explain why their branding strategies are different, and how their social, economic and political situations may explain these differences.

Data were collected in both destinations in similar ways. Interviews were conducted with the branding agencies and stakeholders in the tourism industry (e.g. VisitDenmark, STB, tour operators, museum operators and festival organisers, among others). Besides the interviews, official documents, promotion and branding materials were also collected.

PLACE BRANDING IN TOURISM: PURPOSES AND TASKS

A survey of the literature shows that a destination brand serves at least four functions. These functions are situated within the local social and political circumstances. This section's discussion on the four functions of destination branding will be used as the conceptual framework to present the cases of Denmark and Singapore.

Branding and Influencing Public Perception

The first function in branding a destination is to shape public perceptions of the place (McCleary & Whitney, 1994; Ooi, 2004b; B. Richards, 1992). The branding campaign is part of the "image modification process" (Andersen, Prentice, & Guerin, 1997, p. 463). Many people rely heavily on

their own perceptions when they decide where to go for a holiday (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gartner, 1993; Nickerson & Moisey, 1999; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998). These perceptions are based on these people's experiences and what they have learned from different sources, such as news stories, travel programs, movies, geography lessons, stories from friends and relatives, etc. Branding and marketing campaigns aim to become one of these sources that would shape people's perceptions.

The place brand attempts to also focus the public mind by marginalizing bad publicity and ignoring negative aspects of the place, and at the same time, accentuates positive aspects of the destination. For many tourists and even locals, such selective presentation or manipulation is discounted and even frowned upon. As a result, tourism authorities have to creatively find ways to enhance the credibility of their brand messages. One common strategy is to deploy "independent" travel reviewers to present the destination in the desired manner. Brand authorities have also to garner local support towards the local brand identity.

Branding and the Selective Packaging of the Place-Product

Related to the first function, the second function of destination branding is to package the place selectively and aesthetically. As a cohering force, the brand draws people's attention to certain positive attractions and sights. There are many sights, activities and places in the host society but not everything is attractive or interesting for tourists. Through the brand, some sights, events and happenings are accentuated while others marginalized or ignored. Branding inadvertently frames and packages the destination into a relatively well-defined and coherent product, which focuses on attractions and activities that are considered significant and relevant to the brand values. Therefore, the brand offers not just a series of images but also a packaged selection of attractions (Ashworth & Voogd, 1994). The branding authorities may also try to

get different tourism businesses to re-package their products so that more products will reflect the brand values. Products may be invented and created to enhance the brand story. This strategy aims to enact the brand and give more opportunities for tourists to experience the place as it is presented in the brand.

Branding and Asserting Place-Identity

The third related function of branding a destination is to make the destination stand out in the global tourism market, so as to compete with other destinations. Inherently, the brand asserts the place's uniqueness. Destinations are becoming more globalized and alike in their offerings and infrastructure (Boniface & Fowler, 1993; Chang, Milne, Fallon, & Pohlmann, 1996; Morgan & Pritchard, 2004; Ritzer & Liska, 1997; Teo & Li, 2003). The assertion of destination uniqueness has become an institutionalized global practice for celebrating place identity. This uniqueness is communicated in the brand, which often emphasizes the historical, social and cultural values of the host society (Boniface and Fowler, 1993; Chang et al., 1996; Hall, 1999; Lanfant, 1995b; Oakes, 1993; G. Richards, 1996).

This practice suggests that the spread of tourism leads to extroversion and internationalization of the society on the one hand, and works towards the entrenchment of a territorial and societal identity on the other (Lanfant, 1995a). A brand inevitably becomes a visionary exercise for the tourism authorities and the place to imagine and reflect on how different they are from others and to identify the common cohering elements in a heterogeneous host society. The crystallized public image is also often introduced to the native population for it to recognize itself (Lanfant, 1995b; Leonard, 1997; Oakes, 1993; Ooi, 2005b).

Local residents, politicians, journalists, tourism businesses and almost everyone else in the host destination have the right to question and challenge the brand identity. With concerns about the touristification of society, many local stakeholders are resistant to being caricatured for tourists. The branding authorities have to respond to the divergent streams of interests one way or another, and convince people that the identity is quintessentially the society's.

Branding and Place Experiences

The fourth function of a destination brand is to shape tourism experiences. As discussed earlier, a destination brand packages the place-product in terms of images and attractions. The brand package provides a framework for tourists to imagine the destination before they visit the destination. Studies have shown that tourists approach a tourism site with their own pre-visit interpretations, and this process enriches their tourism experiences (Andersen & Prentice, 2003; McIntosh & Prentice, 1999; Moscardo, 1996; Prentice 2004; Waller & Lea, 1999). Accurate or otherwise preconceived ideas and pre-visit images will not only form the bases for tourists to understand the destination but will also form the bases for a more engaged and experiential consumption of tourism products. Therefore, as an image modification process, destination brand images feed into tourists' preconceptions of the place. And tourists who cognize the brand story will eventually interpret the destination in like manner (Ooi, 2005a). The brand offers a story that tourists can build their experiences around. The brand helps tourists develop a coherent, consistent and meaningful sense of place, and offers a "brand experience" (Olins, 2000, p. 56).

These four functions of destination branding are embedded in multiple interests of various tourism stakeholders. Together, they form a framework here for the comparison of Denmark and Singapore.

BRANDING DENMARK

Denmark is situated in northern Europe. It has a population of 5.4 million, with an area of about 43 000 km^2. The climate is often described as coastal temperate. The summer months are most welcoming for tourists. Denmark society is often perceived as a homogeneous society because the population is predominantly ethnic white Danes. The mono-cultural idea of Denmark is frequently anchored in the Danish monarchy. The monarchy is the oldest in Europe and its lineage is traceable to the age of the Vikings, a thousand years ago. In comparison to industries like agricultural and manufacturing, tourism is not regarded as central and dominant by the population. Working in the hospitality industry, for instance, is not considered prestigious because many jobs there are relatively low-paying and are only taken up by students and part-timers. In 2004, the tourism industry generated 47 billion DKK in receipt, 59% (27.6 billion DKK) of which come from international tourists. In the same year, there were 42.2 million bednights (VisitDenmark 2005).

VisitDenmark – the national tourism authority of Denmark, formerly known as Denmark Tourist Board till 2004 – launched Denmark the brand in 2000. It is visually symbolized by a heart (see Figure). This is not the first time that VisitDenmark has tried to modify the world's perception of Denmark (Andersen et al., 1997) but it is the first time it has used a brand. The brand positioning has not changed since its launch. The brand aims to change the world's perception of Denmark, moving the country away from its entrenched Viking, traditional and romantic images, or those images of it being liberal – in the sense of sex and drugs. VisitDenmark wants to promote a more attractive and wholesome image for Denmark. It also wants the brand to describe and reflect the Danes, the Danish way of life and Danish aesthetics.

Essentially, the brand wants to say that Denmark is “a cozy oasis in Europe. The visitor meets free and unpretentious people who possess a special talent in creating a society based on a love of art, culture and social values” (VisitDenmark, 2000, not paginated). To VisitDenmark, this brand is supposed to offer “the golden thread of communication around the various marketing activities that are aimed at attracting tourists and businesses to this country. Branding is the foundation of a clear, concise image abroad.” (VisitDenmark, 2000, not paginated). To help communicate this image, three sets of brand values are constructed: coziness – unpretentious; design – talented; oasis – free (Figure). Each set of values is said to reflect an aspect of Danish society and culture (VisitDenmark, 2000, not paginated):

Each of the three sets has a rational and an emotional side – a counterbalance of fact and feeling. On the one hand, we describe Denmark with three words [coziness, design, oasis] that objectively express our tourism product in terms of fact-based criteria. On the other hand, we describe the country with three words [unpretentious, talented, free] that express Denmark’s character in softer, subjective terms.

Modern Danish design and architecture, such as Bang and Olufsen sound systems, Arne Jacobsen chairs and the Black Diamond (new extension to the Royal Library), are promoted. Images of trendy boutiques and cafes are also accentuated in the branding campaigns. Danes are presented as tolerant and unpretentious. People are always seen to be relaxing and enjoying the cozy atmosphere in the city and the country – they are seen to be enjoying a beer in the café, cheering at an open-air jazz concert, lazing by the beach or strolling unhurriedly in a village. Reflecting that the brand is indeed asserting the self-identity of the country, Danes would largely recognize these images as

themselves. Many Danes, however, still do not know of this brand because it has not been widely promoted to them.

Figure. *The Latest Logo and Brand Values of Denmark the brand.*

Coziness. This refers to the Danish word *hygge*, which can hardly be translated directly into any other language. It is a particular Danish sense of warmth, well-being and togetherness which a visitor is bound to experience soon after he or she enters the country. *Hygge* is found everywhere in Denmark. Any situation where people are enjoying themselves or feeling good, the Danes would define as *hyggelig*.

Free. The value of being free and independent plays an important role in Danish mentality. There is space for the individual, both in democratic and philosophical terms. Fundamental respect for the individual is clear throughout Danish culture and in its social development.

Talented. This describes a society with remarkably artistic, creative and well-educated people. The Danes' basic affection for art and social values has created a welfare society with a high level of educational opportunities and social equality that are unique in most of the world.

Design. The word covers not only the famous examples of Danish furniture, architecture, art and literature. It is also a collective consciousness about form and function that characterises the whole society.

Oasis. Denmark is a "sanctuary" in Europe. A place where a harried traveller can relax – whether in one of the city's parks, squares, or watering holes, out in the countryside or at the seaside, which is always within half-an-hour's drive.

Unpretentious. Denmark is relaxed. Danes have an easy-going – often humorous – attitude towards life and authorities.

To generate publicity for and ensure more credibility in the branding campaign, VisitDenmark seeks good publicity from the international mass media, travel agents and travel reviewers. For example, VisitDenmark supported a lengthy 80-page survey of Denmark in the November 2001 issue of *Wallpaper.* With some minor reservations, the "independent" *Wallpaper* special feature expectedly communicates the brand values of Denmark, particularly those in the design—talented dimensions.

The brand and its values are selected after lengthy meetings and discussions with different regional and local tourism authorities, tourism businesses, tourism attraction managers, and other interested parties. The values are also based on the analysis of a survey on tourists' expectations and their experiences in Denmark. Such a seemingly democratic process in selecting the brand did not however lead to strong support or a unanimous consensus for the brand.

Some tourist attractions, such as certain museums are not committed to tourism because they see their products as local public goods, not commercial goods for foreigners. Many Danes also see the commericalisation of culture as a threat to their cultural life and heritage. Foreign tourists are seen as guests who must not be intrusive and must accept whatever offerings in the country. As a result, many think that Danish society should not spend much resource to cater to the special needs of tourists. Thus, many museums, theatre performances and public signs, for instance, also do not offer non-Danish information for foreign visitors. As the place brand is targeted at foreigners, and as mentioned before, the brand has not been actively promoted to locals; many Danes do not know of the brand. The interests of foreign visitors and local residents are seen as different, and little effort is made to bring their interests together.

Besides these, Denmark has three layers of tourism authorities – national, regional and local – reflecting roughly the way the country is organized administratively. Each layer of tourism authority functions relatively independently of one other, as each is supported by different agencies. These tourism authorities have similar interests in attracting tourists and serving the needs of visitors but they may differ in strategies and attitudes on how they should cater to tourists. Many areas in western Denmark, for instance, offer primarily beaches and country houses to tourists, and they are unsure how the brand is relevant for them. As a "compromise", VisitDenmark ends up trying to assure various sub-national authorities that they should pick out those brand values that are most appropriate for them. They can concentrate on the free and cozy values when promoting their rural and nature attractions, for example.

Besides the various tourism promotion agencies around the country, all tourism businesses are also encouraged to use the brand values in their own marketing, and also to re-package their products and services so as to reflect the values. But some tourism businesses also find the brand uninteresting to them. For example, in Copenhagen, private tour operators are still selling tours that predominantly highlight the historical and romantic sights of Copenhagen because these operators feel that they do not need to change their tested and successful products. Also reflected in many official tourism brochures and information booklets, advertisements by tourism businesses remain old-fashioned. These advertisers dictate how they want themselves to be presented, even though their images are not consistent with the look and feel of the information guide.

In wanting to draw support for the brand, VisitDenmark conducts seminars to persuade businesses to present the same brand image of Denmark. Such a strategy lacks incentives to win cooperation. Although

VisitDenmark is trying to assert leadership and use the brand to drive all future promotional activities, this organization does not have extensive financial and institutional resources to force private tourism and non-tourism businesses to use this brand in their publicity materials. VisitDenmark can only persuade and encourage Danish businesses inside and outside the tourism industry to cooperate. Furthermore, VisitDenmark does not help private tourism businesses to convert and story their products in a way consistent with the brand. The brand concept has become broad and vague, and is subject to many interpretations. But the ambiguity of the brand seems to be needed for VisitDenmark to garner support and include the diversity of products and interests in the tourism industry.

Branding Singapore

Singapore is a tropical island city-state in Southeast Asia. It has no natural resources, and is only 680 square kilometres in size. Its population is made up of three official ethnic groups: Chinese, Malay and Indians. Singapore is also the most economically developed country in Southeast Asia. As a former British colony, English is one of its four official languages, and is frequently used as the nation's *lingua franca*. And since its independence in 1965, Singapore has been offering its oriental and multicultural society for tourist consumption. With a population of four million, this tropical city has managed to attract nearly nine million visitors in 2005. Tourism is one of the island-state's largest foreign exchange earners. The STB – formally the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board till 1997 – estimates that the direct contribution to the Singapore economy is five percent, with 130 000 people employed in the industry (STB, 2005b). In 2005, it generated S$10.8 billion in tourism receipts (STB, 2006). The STB has a target to triple tourism receipt to S$30 billion, increase visitor numbers to 17 million and generate another 100

000 jobs by 2015 (STB, 2005b). The STB receives strong financial support; the government has allocated two billion Singapore dollars (about one billion Euros) to achieve the 2015 goals (STB, 2005a). The STB plays not only a central economic role but also a social and cultural one in Singaporean society. This national tourism promotion agency is in the centre of the web of relationships in the tourism industry.

"Uniquely Singapore", the brand of Singapore, was launched in 2004. It is part of a master plan to meet competition, restructure local tourism businesses, and create new products for the Singapore tourism industry. The brand provides a focused marketing direction for the country ("Brand overview", **emphasis** in original):

Uniquely Singapore - Unique is the word that best captures **Singapore,** a dynamic city rich in contrast and colour where you'll find a harmonious blend of culture, cuisine, arts and architecture. A bridge between the East and the West for centuries, Singapore, located in the heart of fascinating Southeast Asia, continues to embrace tradition and modernity today. Brimming with unbridled energy and bursting with exciting events, the city offers countless unique, memorable experiences waiting to be discovered.

Singapore has changed its tourism positioning four times since 1964, unlike Denmark which has a brand only in 2000 and the brand has not been changed. In the 1960s and 1970s, Singapore was "Instant Asia", where one could find an array of Asian cultures, peoples, festivals, and cuisine conveniently exhibited in a single destination (Chang, 1997). In the 1980s, "Surprising Singapore" positioned Singapore by placing contrasting images of modernity and Asian exoticism together. The co-existence of East and West, old and new were highlighted (Chang, 1997; Leong, 1997). And in the 1990s and early 2000s, Singapore promoted itself as "New Asia — Singapore".

There was a subtle shift in focus from “Surprising Singapore” to "New Asia — Singapore". “Surprising Singapore” promised pockets of unexpected diverse and distinct ethnic cultures in a modern city, "New Asia — Singapore" offered ethnic cultures fused into modern development. Metaphorically, “Surprising Singapore” described a “salad mix” of various ethnic cultures in a modern environment, "New Asia — Singapore" presented Singapore as a “melting pot” of eastern and western cultures (Ooi, 2004a). “Uniquely Singapore” takes yet another subtle shift, in which it plays up the best of Asian exoticism and global modernity – Singapore is Asian but with modern comforts; Singapore is modern but with Asian flavours. The former brand story will please the long-haul western markets, while the latter attracts the nearer markets (such as Indonesia, India and China). For example, the Asian Civilizations Museum in Singapore is uniquely Singapore because it is a world class museum showcasing ancient Asian material cultures. The Esplanade, Theatres on the Bay, on the other hand, offers world class facilities for art performances but visitors can enjoy many Asian performances. Likewise, Singapore is also marketed as world-class medical and educational services hubs within an Asian environment.

Like in its previous branding campaigns, many national and local parties and agencies (including the National Heritage Board, Urban Renewal Authority, Ministry of Defense and the National Art Council) are involved in realizing the new brand (C.B. Chan, 2002; Lee, 2004; Ooi, 2005b; Schein, 1996). New programmes were and are launched to generate a sense of brand ownership in the local tourism industry and among local residents. Uniquely Singapore products are being created and Singaporeans are encouraged to search for things that make their country special. In pursuing the strategy of making Singapore into medical and educational hubs in Southeast Asia, the STB actively engages with other relevant ministries to raise the standard of

medical and educational services in Singapore, so as to attract more foreign customers to the country (Ooi, 2005b).

The STB uses a carrot-and-stick approach to bring the private tourism businesses towards its vision of Singapore. The STB licenses tour guides and travel agencies, thus giving the authorities control over the products and messages that guides and travel agencies send out (STB, 1998). The STB subsidizes the printing of promotional materials by travel agents if they support STB's marketing and product policies. So, the Singaporean tourism promotion agency engages consultants and actively helps in-bound travel agents to develop new products. For the new "Uniquely Singapore" branding campaign, the STB has, for instance, helped in creating new tours for tour agencies (STB, 2004). Other private businesses in Singapore are also encouraged to take initiatives to promote tourism activities. For example, the STB has initiated and continued to support various business groupings like the Orchard Road Business Association, which has not only taken the responsibility to light up Singapore's main shopping street for Christmas, it is also organizing the Singapore Street Festival ("Street Fest – Fun with a purpose," 2003).

The STB also attempts to shape local life. For example, the STB used to be involved only in the marketing of Singapore. In the 1980s, however, it became actively involved in product development and shaping local life (Lee, 2004). As Mrs. Pamelia Lee, who headed the development of tourism products in the STB then, lamented (Lee, 2004, pp.43-44):

Like other developing nations, we also watched the charm of our old city disappear and diminish, bit by bit. […] In recent years, we have often been

described as a city without a soul; modern, efficient and hygienic, but lacking in grace, refinement and charm.

With this realization, the STB "started to enhance areas in Singapore that did not come under the STB's purview. The festive light up of Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam was introduced." (Lee, 2004, p.44). The conservation of ethnic areas around Singapore and the celebration of ethnic festivals in these conserved areas make the destination more Asian, and tourists can observe local ethnic celebrations in designated areas. As many of the newly conserved streets became lifeless, Mrs. Pamelia Lee pointed out that "through software organized by the STB and the stakeholders, we can bring back life so that tourists are not disappointed and to give market forces more time to settle" (Lee, 2004, p.47). This is a proud claim of not only how the STB has shaped the physical landscape but also how it is deliberately shaping human activities in Singapore.

Unlike the Danes, effectively and rather pragmatically, the Singaporean government has married the interests of their social engineering programmes and tourism (Ooi, 2005b). The tourism authorities have claimed, asserted and established a symbiotic relationship between local and tourist needs. It is believed that attractions that are meant for tourists are also appreciated by local residents (National Tourism Plan Committees, 1996). Not only that, messages meant for locals are packaged for tourists and vice versa. In a pragmatic manner, tourism products are consumed and messages are sent out singularly to both foreigners and tourists; through the "Uniquely Singapore" vision, both locals and tourists are made to recognize Singapore as a place blending the best of the East and the West.

Discussion

The “Uniquely Singapore” brand offers a vision of Singapore as a society with the best of both worlds – ultra-modern and yet Asian. It is a description of how Singapore has evolved, it is also a vision of how Singapore should become. “Uniquely Singapore” is normative. This contrasts to Denmark the brand, which is primarily descriptive, and used mainly for market communication; it does not offer a vision for Danish society. There are a number of social and political differences in these two countries, which explain their contrasting branding strategies (see also Table).

Firstly, STB attempts to ignore the *contextual boundaries* of tourism and local cultural activities. By doing so, it is suggesting that tourists and locals can speak the same language and share common interests. The economic context of tourism can contribute to the making of local cultural life. Apparently, STB gives primacy to economic interests over cultural interests, like in other spheres of social life in Singapore (Clammer, 1985; Haley & Low, 1998; Kwok, 1999; Leong, 1997). Thus, the Singaporean authorities are not only selectively packaging the city-state, it is also asserting and inventing a new place identity. This contrasts to the Danish experience, where cultural and economic interests are deliberately kept apart. Danish society is more sensitive to the commercialisation of the arts and culture; the separation between local cultures and business interests are kept alive. The promotion of culture for tourism is secondary to serving local audiences. VisitDenmark selectively packages Denmark, assert a more modern place identity for the country but it does not attempt to create new cultural products to enhance the asserted place identity. Inventing new products to fit the brand would be considered inappropriate.

Table: *Comparisons between Denmark the brand and Uniquely Singapore*

	Denmark	Uniquely Singapore
The branding goals	• To change the world's perception of Denmark • Selectively packages Denmark, positive stories of Danish society and culture presented • Asserts a modern and trendy Denmark • Wants visitors to experience the new Denmark	• To change the world's perception of Singapore • Selectively packages Singapore, positive stories of Singaporean society and culture presented • Asserts a modern and yet traditional Singapore • Wants visitors to experience a unique Singapore
The branding strategy	• No resources to create new products to support the brand • Industry persuaded to cooperate and promote the brand • Limited local support, many locals do not know of the brand	• Resources used to create new products to support the brand • Industry given strong incentives (or else punished) to cooperate and promote the brand • Strong local support through marketing
Brand management style	Bottom-up approach reflecting Danish society: • Democratic regime • Many dissenting public voices in the mass media • Subtle social engineering programmes • Romantic views on separating culture and business, public and private interests.	Top-down approach reflecting Singaporean society: • Soft authoritarian regime • Mostly consenting voices in the mass media • Forceful social engineering programmes • Pragmatic views that culture and business benefits can converge, and public and private interests are intertwined.

Secondly, the Danish tourism authorities *do not have the resources* or the forceful institutional mechanisms to ensure that private tourism businesses follow their lead. The tourism industry is seen as profit-oriented and the state

should not support the industry directly. The various tourism industry players are left to coordinate (and compete) amongst themselves. With their diverse interests, their cooperative efforts are not necessarily efficient or effective in realizing Denmark the brand. Changing the world's perception of Denmark is made more difficult by the different stakeholders sending out diverse messages. Singapore could not be more different. Economic and institutional resources are mobilized to achieve and maintain the goals and visions of STB. Generally, the Singaporean government constructs policies, institutions and mechanisms that encourage private businesses, unions and other relevant partners to follow or obey official orders, visions and strategies (H.C. Chan, 1975; Deyo, 1981; Haley et al., 1998; Heyzer, 1983). Private tourism businesses are encouraged to produce "Uniquely Singapore" products through incentive schemes. These private tourism operators would find it beneficial, or even necessary, to tap into the resources made available to them by the government. Inevitably, this top-down governmental approach has partly resulted in private businesses becoming dependent on the leadership and support from the authorities. But as a result, most tourism products communicate the same brand messages, and thus the world is presented with a relatively coherent image of Singapore.

Thirdly, although STB does not have an explicit *social engineering* agenda, it works closely with other state institutions, such as the local mass media, Urban Development Board, the National Heritage Board, the National Art Council and the police, to allow or promote certain tourism activities. The separation between state agencies in Singapore is difficult to make (Leong, 1997; Ooi, 2005b; Schein, 1996). With the support of the top leadership in the country, STB's tourism strategies are achieved when different state agencies and departments are made to co-ordinate their activities and help realize their agreed-to visions. In contrast, VisitDenmark, the Danish Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Industry and Business have different agendas and goals, and

they do not have a comprehensive joint platform for the tourism industry. They each has their own vision of how Denmark should be branded and packaged – there is no agreed-to vision. Within the democratic structure of Denmark, these agencies want to assert their own vision and asserting their leadership within their own sphere of influence.

Fourthly, Denmark has a minority government. Policy formulations and implementations are subjected to extensive negotiation between many political parties. The mass media and the public interrogate governmental policies and views. The different administrative layers of the country are controlled by different political parties. The divergence of interests and policies among political parties often result in the *inconveniences of democracy*, which may delay efforts in bringing about intended change to Danish society. VisitDenmark, for instance, could not assert forceful authority over the different sub-national tourism agencies because it has to garner support across communes and please different political interests. The branding of Denmark has now become just a communication project, aiming to change the world's perception of Denmark. In contrast, Singapore is governed by a soft authoritarian regime (Chua, 1995). Singapore has evolved into a one-dominant-party political system. The ruling party, People's Action Party, has been in power since 1959. State policies and social engineering programs, popular or unpopular, can be implemented quickly because of the overwhelming majority of the ruling party in Parliament. The authority of the Singapore government has penetrated all levels of social life in Singapore. This is seen in tourism; tourism businesses have developed a dependency on the initiatives of the STB, as it is much easier to follow and receive the incentives than to innovate and face possible obstacles. Uniquely Singapore is able to become more than just a communication project because of the Singapore government is able to assert almost absolute authority.

Finally, closely related to earlier points, under the strong and forceful leadership of the ruling party, Singapore has evolved into a *pragmatic* society (Chua, 1995). Singaporeans have come to accept a strong state role in promoting profit-driven culture, art, environmentalism and public programs (Chua, 1995). Unlike in Denmark, the compartmentalization of economics from other aspects of social and cultural life is blurred in Singapore. The touristification of society is not necessarily an issue for many Singaporeans. Subsequently, STB has the largely uncontested hegemony to re-define and blend tourism and local societal interests. Denmark is a democracy that considers attempts at social engineering highly intrusive; the touristification of society is seen as a serious issue among many Danes and Danish politicians. As mentioned earlier, proposals for almost any new policy and legislation face public criticisms from the opposition and different interest groups. Dissenting views are freely expressed in the mass media. Touristification is not publicly expressed as negative in Singapore but it is in Denmark. The Danes remain rather romantic about keeping business out of culture and the arts.

The place branding strategy of Singapore contrasts against that of Denmark's. The differences must be understood within the local social, cultural and political context. The Danish authorities wish that they could assert more leadership but their attempts are constantly challenged by societal circumstances. The forcefulness of the Singaporean authorities has brought about a widely-accepted brand for the country but tourism businesses have formed a dependency on the STB, threatening the innovativeness and entrepreneurial spirit of the industry.

CONCLUSION

Place brands are able to stimulate the imagination, draw out emotions and create interesting stories. Brands however must also be realized. As all societies are inevitably heterogeneous, and the brand essentially communicates a simple message to capture the identity of the place, the effectiveness of convergence between the brand message and the place reality has to be managed. In Singapore, the convergence between the brand message and the place reality is frequently engineered by creating new brand-related products. In Denmark, the brand tries to merely communicate an existing local reality. These countries share common goals of wanting to brand themselves but their branding strategies are different because of their local social, cultural and political circumstances. This means that a successful place branding strategy cannot be easily copied from one country to another. Using the Singaporean approach in Denmark would be politically untenable. And using the Danish approach in Singapore would be disastrous as the tourism businesses would be paralyzed by the lack of clear leadership.

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