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PLB4000 Key Theories and Concepts in Place Branding

2023/2024

CASE STUDY

NAPLES, ITALY

1. INTRODUCTION

Naples is one of the oldest cities in the world inhabited by citizens to this day (ESA, ND); however, despite its rich history and culture, it is often overlooked due to its problematic reputation. Visitors pass through the airport to nearby destinations such as Pompeii or Amalfi Coast without discovering one of Italy's most "chaotic" and vibrant cities (Farley, 2023).

This case study examines Naples as a "place brand" and its communication strategies to attract investors, residents, tourists, students, businesses, and migrants. City branding is a strategy that identifies assets offered by a city that are valuable for the further development of the place and delivers those values to target audiences to attract investors, visitors, or potential residents (Dinnie, Warren, 2017). The rapid growth of competition within cities worldwide caused by globalisation is one of the key factors places are shifting their focus to creating "brands" for their sites to distinguish themselves and create competitive advantage (Dastergi, De Luca, 2019). Branding is predominantly used for commercial purposes; however, cities are multidimensional concepts and need to be treated accordingly. To discuss the place brand of Naples, I will apply the ICON model, introduced by Keith Dinnie, throughout the case study (Dinnie, 2016).

2. METHODOLOGY

This case study uncovers and discusses the multidimensional brand of Naples, including analysing its challenges and strengths, brand image, reputation, brand identity, country of origin, and brand positioning. To ensure broad research based on academic knowledge and the general public's opinions, the information was gathered from academic literature, tabloid magazine articles, social media, online discussion forums, travel blogs, news articles, interviews, and face-to-face conversations with native Neapolitans. Moreover, I will include my own experience of Naples in the past when I observed the image-identity gap while shaping my perceptions of the city and its reputation during my visit.

Furthermore, as a part of the research, I conducted two semi-structured interviews with professionals invested in Place Branding who are connected to Naples. However, I had yet to communicate with any professional working directly for the city or any organisation, such as a destination marketing organisation (DMO). The first interviewed professional was a Content Writer at Visit Italy, also a Naples citizen.

The second interview was conducted with an Associate Professor of Management at the University of Naples' Parthenope', who is actively researching the field of Place Branding. Both interviews provided extensive insight into the city's run and will be cited throughout the case study.

3. NAPLES
3.1. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF NAPLES AND ITALY

Naples was founded by the Ancient Greeks in 326 BC and quickly became a critical and busy port. Naples managed its significant position and dominance throughout history, especially as part of the Kingdom of Sicily. However, after the struggles Naples experienced due to significant events such as the French Revolution or the plague pandemic, in 1860, the people of Naples voted to join the new united Italy. They lost most of the importance they once used to have (Lambert, ND).

Moreover, after being the first Italian city to revolt against Nazi military occupation during the Second World War, the city was significantly destroyed by bombing and later experienced high unemployment in the late 20th century, together with deep-rooted organised crime. Further destruction was caused by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 1944 and a massive earthquake in 1980 (Civitatis Naples, ND).

Nowadays, the city is slowly recovering from its negative reputation and thriving as a hub of history and culture (Lambert, ND). Naples is becoming more attractive and is experiencing a high number of tourists lately, maybe more than the city can handle (Cirino, 2023).

3.2. NAPLES IN CONTEXT

Naples is the regional capital of the Campania region in southern Italy. The city sits on the Bay of Naples and is surrounded by significant historical sites, such as the still-active volcano Mount Vesuvius, which destroyed the nearby town of Pompeii in Roman times (Found In Italy, ND). Naples is a vibrant city that is always awake, loud, and with streets full of people. Due to its extraordinary nature and history, Naples is often referred to as a "beautiful mess" or as the "soul of Italy" (Petite Suitcase, 2022).

The population of Naples in 2017 was 967,069 within the city's administrative limits. The metropolitan area of Naples is the third largest within the country and among the most densely populated cities in Europe (CitiesABC, ND). By purchasing power, Naples is the world's 91st most prosperous city, with a GDP of $43 billion (DBpedia, ND) and a major touristic destination in Italy. The economy of Naples experienced significant growth since the Second World War, with the most prominent sectors in tourism, commerce, industry, and agriculture. In recent years, Naples shifted from a traditional agriculture-based economy to service-based industries, with most of the population working in the service sector (TravelTill, ND).

Moreover, Naples is home to one of the biggest and most important ports in the Mediterranean (DBpedia, ND). It offers a vibrant student life with four universities in the metropolitan area. The University of Naples Federico II ranked fifth best university

in Italy and 185th best worldwide in the Best Global Universities Ranking in 2022 (U.S.News, ND).

Despite being the biggest city in the South and third in Italy, Naples cannot be considered a global city. Unlike Barcelona (Olympics in 1992) or Milan (EXPO, 2015), Naples has not hosted a major international event that would influence its urban space and further promote the city (Esposito, ND). Furthermore, Naples needs more overall recognition in Italy and abroad and should be more noticed and remembered in major rankings beneficial for place positioning. Usually, available rankings of Naples are contradictory for its image, such as Naples being ranked 223 worst out of 266 Teleport Cities for the safest city (Teleport, ND).

4. CURRENT CHALLENGES OF NAPLES

Naples faces many challenges that harm the city's brand and its development. Based on in-depth research, literature, and interviews with locals and professionals from Naples, I have determined a few of the major issues affecting Naples's livability, visitability, and investability. Failing to resolve those challenges leads to losing countless opportunities to strengthen the economy and attract investment, businesses, talent, tourists, and students.

4.1. POOR QUALITY OF LIFE (UNEMPLOYMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE)

According to Il Sole 24 Ore newspaper's annual ranking, Naples was voted the city with the worst quality of life in Italy in 2012 based on factors such as health, services, or public order. It is believed that the reason behind Naples' poor infrastructure, insufficient waste management, and high crime rate is the local Camorra mafia (The Local, 2013).

The unemployment rate in Naples is the highest in Italy: the ages between 14 and 29 reach 78% for females and 57.3% for males (Scaramella, ND). Job salaries for most occupations are low and below the national average in Naples. For instance, teacher salaries rank 217th out of 265 cities, and software engineer salaries 222nd out of 265 municipalities (Teleport, ND).

The whole South of Italy is known for its lack of infrastructure and poor transport connections, and unfortunately, Naples is not an exception. Moreover, Naples struggles with traffic congestion, subsequent air pollution, lack of active modes of transport (walking/cycling), and lack of shared mobility services such as Bolt, Uber, or taxis (Figg, 2023). Local public transport is extensive; however, there is a need to boost the existing public transport lines and create new ones. According to Pasquinelli (2023), there is a need for further development of public transport as it is nice to have a beautiful underground. Still, there must be trains to run to provide adequate public transport to meet the needs of locals and tourists.

4.2. LACK OF STRONG ORGANISATION FOCUSED ON DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY

There is no active destination marketing organisation (DMO) that would focus on the promotion of Naples to manage its reputation and monitor its promotion strategies to attract visitors and strengthen the positioning of Naples in the minds of target audiences. Moreover, there needs to be a solid plan to attract investment, visitors, or talent from the municipality. For instance, Visitnaples.eu is a private business created to market attractions in the city; however, there needs to be direct communication between the company and the municipality (Pasquinelli, 2023).

According to Lucherini (ND) (managing director at Convention Bureau Napoli), it is crucial to target international markets, especially those with air connections to Naples and those who emigrated from Naples and, therefore, can act as ambassadors for their native country. Moreover, Lucherini (ND) argues that their organisation needs the support of all the stakeholders, especially public institutions, to work with the vision of Naples as a business hub for the future and distance itself from the present lack of integrity.

Moreover, in recent years, Naples has been facing increasing interest in the city and its attractions, with the high number of tourists causing overcrowding in the historic centre of Naples. However, there are no limitations when it comes to crowd control or tourism management, and the unevenly distributed flow of tourists contributes to unhappiness among the residents (Pollice, 2023). The city needs to develop a strategy to improve its infrastructure and crowd control to sustain its liveability (Pasquinelli, 2023).

4.3. REPUTATION AS A CITY OF MAFIA, CRIME, AND WASTE ISSUES

"See Naples and die." This is a common expression within Italy; however, the meaning of experiencing the beauty of Naples and its history is very often swapped with the notion of Naples as a dangerous city full of crime that would lead you to lose your life in the streets (Margie in Italy, ND). The negative perception of Naples is significantly shaped by the long-lived presence of the Camorra mafia, which impacts the economic sphere of Naples. However, Naples is no more dangerous for tourists than any other big city such as Milan or Barcelona. As of 2020, Naples ranks #95 on Numbeo's World Crime Index by City, not far from Rome at #110 (Kovick, 2021). Moreover, Naples is often seen as unwelcoming and unfriendly due to its "strictly Neapolitan manners" that are not changing in the foreseen future. However, despite the challenges, such as language barriers, Neapolitan people are friendly and happy to share their culture with visitors (Kovick, 2021).

Naples is often described as a dirty and smelling city with an unhealthy impact on humans (Road to 197, 2020). The Camorra mafia is contributing to the issue of garbage flooding in Naples. Despite waste management being a nationwide issue, Naples and the rest of South Italy have been a hotspot for illegal waste dumping of dangerous materials and illegal trash fires, mainly due to mafia and illegal businesses (The San Diego Union-Tribune, 2023). Such conditions have a negative impact on the health of residents. According to research, in 2012, women living in the Naples area were more likely to develop breast cancer by over 50 percent than in other Italian

cities (Day, 2012). The atmosphere and cleanliness in Naples slowly improved in 2012, when the government took a stand against the Camorra mafia, and despite the mafia still being active behind the scenes, the city is steadily transforming (Kovick, 2021).

5. THE ICON MODEL APPLIED TO NAPLES

Based on the ICON model, the proposed "good practice" of branding a place is an approach that is integrated, contextualised, organic, and new (Dinnie, 2016). Despite the model being developed for nation branding, it is highly recommended that practitioners in cities use the model to guide their thinking behind developing branding efforts and strategies (Dinnie & Warren, 2017).

Each section of the ICON model will be introduced and applied to Naples to examine the approaches of the model in context with the city.

5.1. INTEGRATED

The integrated dimension of the ICON model is determined by a wide range of stakeholders across various industries and sectors within the city, collaboratively contributing to the place branding efforts and development of the public-private sector (Dinnie & Warren, 2017).

Naples' economy predominantly depends on its service industry as the service sector overpowered industrial employment and manufacturing industries during the '90s. However, the growth is concentrated in less advanced services such as retail, traditional professional occupations, and public administration. Moreover, Naples has the highest unemployment rate in Italy (Scaramella, ND).

Leading up to 1993, Naples experienced 26 different City Councils (Scaramella, ND). According to Cirino (2023), the '80s were the lowest point for Naples and its image, with predominantly morbid and negative presentation of Naples on the news. The mafia was booming, and the government failed to manage the safety, cleanliness, and overall well-being of residents, creating a particularly negative perception of themselves. The city has since reached a more stable government pattern; however, there is still a lack of stability in managing the city and creating strong narratives for its brand (Scaramella, ND). Moreover, the presence of the mafia in Naples is still invasive, and they misuse public spaces to demonstrate their power or do illegal business, including drug dealing or wasting illegal and dangerous waste (The Local, 2019).

Despite its unpleasant past, Naples has experienced a tourism boom recently. The room occupancy rate was 78% in the first half of 2023, 10% higher than in the same period in 2022. In June, the rate reached as high as 90% (Agedi, 2023). However, increased tourism creates many challenges. Naples' infrastructure is unsuitable for crowds of people, and with the local authorities' lack of management of tourism, such over-tourism could lead to a risk of gentrification of Naples (Pasquinelli, 2023). Certain parts of the city turn into Airbnb quarters (Kaval, 2023), while locals in other

parts of the city fight to remain true to their Neapolitan roots in the hands of Neapolitan families (D'Addetta, 2023).

Local authorities recognised the lack of organisations within the city's government that would manage the city's development (tourism, investment, place-making, etc.). However, little to no action has been taken to provide solutions (Pasquinelli, 2023). The city has not coordinated any promotion initiatives; VisitNaples.eu is a website promoting Naples and its attractions, including a "Naples City Pass" in cooperation with many historical sites and attractions within the city and its surroundings, including Pompeii. However, it is not an organisation managed by local authorities (Pasquinelli, 2023). In 2016, Convention Bureau Napoli introduced the Tourism Strategic Plan for the next triennium, "Destination Naples 2020". However, as stated by Giovanna Lucherini, their private institution is the only representative on this topic in the city, and true success can be reached only by uniting all stakeholders, including the government in the city (Italia Convention, 2017). The institution aims to promote Naples' business and venues to attract MICE tourism, which brings economic benefits such as supporting local businesses or defeating seasonal limitations of tourism (Micers, ND).

Naples has many qualities to be a thriving, well-recognised city with many opportunities that still have to be explored by many. However, there is an urgent need for local authorities to cooperate and create organisations such as DMO to manage the city more sustainably and profitably. For instance, the city could collaborate with the existing VisitNaples.eu and relaunch a DMO that would be supported by the local government and would "be" more than just a website. With such initiatives, the city could work on a tourist management strategy or campaign to tackle over-tourism in certain parts of Naples. Furthermore, the city would benefit from further communication between the city and organisations such as the Convention Bureau Napoli to create a strong place branding narratives for tourism, investment, talent attraction, or residential satisfaction.

5.2.   CONTEXTUALISED

The contextualised dimension of the ICON model is determined by the communication between the place and its stakeholders. It is crucial for a city to remain relevant to stakeholders and match the values of different target audiences important for the development of the city (Dinnie & Warren, 2017).

As previously mentioned, the reputation of Naples as a dangerous and dirty place full of mafia and drugs robbed the city of many opportunities. However, the view of Naples differs depending on the demographics of individuals. Many perceive Naples as the worst place on Earth while passing the city to see more prominent destinations such as Amalfi Coast or Pompeii. Travellers often comment on Naples as "ugly and hard to love among other Italian cities" (Flitter Fever, 2019). However, others seem to celebrate its rich culture and history and view the city as vibrant, lively, authentic, rare, and lovable (Redisch, ND).

The city needs better official communication with the target audiences and needs initiations that would shape the perception of the city to position itself higher in the

minds of people (Pasquinelli, 2023). However, despite lacking official branding tendencies, in recent years, Naples has been experiencing many different branding forces shaping the perception of the city nationally and internationally, such as bottom-up initiatives by locals, the cinematographic industry embracing Naples in movies, TV shows, or documentaries, or the unprecedented football success in 2023. Those contributions to the branding of Naples will be further explained in the organic section of the ICON model.

Despite Naples not being the first choice for most companies, Apple has recognised the city's potential and founded Apple Academy at the University of Naples. The business benefits from a lower cost of labour than in North Italy, universities with a high level of education quality, and the fact that Naples is the youngest city in Italy in terms of age. Apple's presence shifted investors' attention to Naples, and this effect could be explained as "where Apple goes, others follow" (Pasquinelli, 2023). In 2021, Apple announced a new investment in the academy, which will ensure new learning and career opportunities for aspiring creators, coders, and entrepreneurs not only in Naples but within the whole of Europe. The academy brings together students from more than 20 countries and becomes an ambassador of innovation and education in Naples, promoting the city worldwide as an educational and technology hub (Newsroom, 2021).

The collaboration of ports in Salerno and Naples is also contributing to economic development and further tourism promotion. Cruise tourism is bringing a high number of visitors sailing to Naples from other ports or departing from Naples to other destinations (Cruise.co.uk, ND). Such cruises are individually promoted by DMOs of other cities and independent tourism organisations focused on experiences (Celebrity Cruises, ND). However, cruise tourism also brings negative impacts on cities. Communities are struggling with air and water pollution, economic leakage, and tax avoidance, as well as over-tourism. Tourists often spend little to no money while visiting cities during their cruise experience and, therefore, have a more negative impact than positive on cities, mainly locals and their businesses (Human Rights In Tourism, ND).

5.3. ORGANIC

The organic dimension of the ICON can be described as a blend of unplanned and planned activities contributing to place branding efforts. All those activities need to be based on the identity or "DNA" of the place to ensure the authenticity of emerging activities (Dinnie & Warren, 2017).

Despite the lack of official branding initiatives that would positively impact the city, Naples is significantly richer in terms of bottom-up branding efforts unknowingly initiated by locals. Naples hosts many cultural events (art, gastronomy, music, theatre, opera) organised by cultural establishments or citizens. Passer-byes visit such events and further spread over social media and through word of mouth, creating a notion of a "happy, vibrant city with engaged people". On the other hand, Naples lacks the infrastructure and space for major international events such as festivals, EXPO, or Olympics and, therefore, cannot compete with cities such as Milan.

(Pasquinelli, 2023). However, Neapolitan people protect their unique culture and, therefore, do not desire to become the "Milan of the South" (Cirino, 2023).

Another example of the "Neapolitan" and the promotion of local uniqueness and pride by locals was endured by the SSC Napoli when the team won its first A series title in 33 years since Diego Maradona led the club. The whole city united to transform the city into a "huge fan club", including flags and murals of the local hero Maradona (Amante, 2023). Tourists from all parts of the world travelled to Naples to experience the raw atmosphere in the narrow streets of Naples during the finals (Pasquinelli, 2023) The bond between Naples, Maradona, and football is what means to be Neapolitan and the honest excitement and joy of locals helped to spread awareness of the city abroad (VisitNaples.eu, ND) and therefore create a positive perception of Neapolitans in the minds of people. According to Cattaneo (2023), the championship exceeded tourism and commercial return by €3 million each weekend in May and June 2023. Moreover, the city experienced a new record in occupancy of accommodations with a number of foreign tourists of +60% over 2022 and an increase in the average number of overnight stays, from two to 4.5 nights (Cattaneo, 2023).

A significant unexpected branding force of Naples is also the cinematography industry, with many TV shows, movies, and documentaries set in Naples in recent years. Movies such as Eat, Pray, Love, Gomorrah, The Lying Life of Adults, or Oscar-nominated It Was the Hand of God shape the perceptions of Naples of a broad audience (Bianchi, ND). Moreover, the famous wife of Sting, Trudie Styler, has significantly increased international interest in Naples with her documentary "Posso entrare? An ode to Naples", where she defeats the misconceptions about Neapolitans and their lifestyles (Giuffrida, 2023). The Netflix and HBO adaptations of well-liked novels written by Elena Ferrante (the Neapolitan novels and The Lying Life of Adults), Maradona murals, sparkling sea, narrow streets, laundry-decorated streets, and momentous volcano, are undergoing a renaissance (Maiorana, 2023).

If the local authorities managed an official organisation, such natural branding forces could be further promoted and used to communicate the DNA of Naples to target audiences and improve the brand positioning of the city. All those raw and honest bottom-up initiatives provide an opportunity for the government to showcase the positive side of Naples and defeat the label of "unsafe mafia city".

5.4.   NEW

The new dimension of the ICON focuses on the need for constant innovation of products, experiences, and services to remain relevant to target audiences. Such innovations lead to the creation of new place-related narratives shaping the brand of the place (Dinnia & Warren, 2017).

Despite Naples fighting the stereotypes and lacking an organisation managing the place brand of the city, the involvement of residents and local establishments provides a dynamic and fluid environment in the streets of Naples. The cultural scene of Naples is extraordinary: from small resident-led exhibitions in the streets,

concerts, local artists performing their art live, wine tastings, and plays, to planned events by establishments, including theatre plays, festivals, or football games.

For example, there was a significant discovery in a poor area of Naples, where the mafia operates, and locals have no money for self-development; the local church supported the creation and restoration of just-found catacombs as a historical site that was, later on, turned into tourist attraction (Catacombe di Napoli, ND) Such initiative improved the overall quality of life in the area (Pasquinelli, 2023).

An essential innovation in cities is understanding the idea of a "place brand" and how to treat a city as a multidimensional concept that cannot be sold with a logo and a tagline but managed every day as the city is continuously developing and changing. It is crucial to educate young people on the problem and train a new generation of young professionals with a strong understanding of place branding. #CUOREDINAPOLI is a bottom-up initiative developed by students of the faculty of fine arts in Naples, contributing to branding Naples. However, as with most of the initiatives mentioned earlier, #CUOREDINAPOLI is not supported by the local government by any means. The whole concept, including the logo and hashtag, was created to provide Naples with a coherent and consistent brand that could be used in the city but also abroad by anyone discussing Naples. Moreover, the students created a set of art pieces as a campaign to promote Naples as a city of art and culture where the heart represents the strong and honest love Neapolitans hold for the city (Pasquinelli, 2013).

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Naples lacks official initiatives of place branding that would manage the city's image and its further development. Therefore, the city needs to build an organisation responsible for developing strong strategies to position the city within the country and abroad. However, the city's uniqueness and rich culture contribute to the organic approach of place branding. Resident-led events and initiatives strengthen the pride of locals who act as ambassadors for Naples in many creative and organic ways. Moreover, the city experiences increased interest from artists and creators who are choosing to set their movies or novels in Naples for its authenticity and raw beauty.

Despite the poor quality of life in Naples, locals take pride in being Neapolitan and continue to spread good word of mouth about the city abroad. "There is no better city in the world than Napoli, amore" (Salza, 2023), says a native Neapolitan living in London. Many residents are emigrating to Western countries to get a better quality of life; however, it is hardly typical to hear Neapolitans talk badly about their home city (Matthews, ND).

To flourish, Naples needs to focus on improving itself and the communication between stakeholders within the city. The city needs to overcome the challenges of negative perception by many foreigners and actively communicate with its stakeholders who are contributing towards building a brand of Naples. A clear and strong strategy with an "umbrella branding" needs to be applied to Naples to cover the multidimensional needs of a city. It is crucial to send messages based on the

same values but tailored to different audiences to attract tourism, investment, talent, and potential residents. Many stakeholders in Naples could contribute to the overall improvement and development of the city into a technological, creative, and tourism hub in the South of Italy.

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