

# **Branding as Coproduction in Public Management**

**Dr Jasper Eshuis**

Erasmus University Rotterdam  
P O Box 1738  
Room M8-43  
3000 DR Rotterdam  
The Netherlands

Tel: +31 10 408 2167  
Email: [eshuis@fsw.eur.nl](mailto:eshuis@fsw.eur.nl)

Co-Authors: Dr E-H Klijn and Professor dr G.R. Teisman (Erasmus University Rotterdam)

## **ABSTRACT**

In city management location branding has become an important subject, especially with regard to urban renewal. Renewed city zones need to attract new investors and inhabitants. Location branding plays a role in creating not only a positive image of the location but also of the process of urban renewal.

The role of public managers is no longer limited to regulating development, but widened to also stimulating and promoting it. Public managers have taken up an entrepreneurial role as 'urban sales agents' using business methods such as branding. However, location branding in networks like urban renewal networks differs from branding traditional products, due to the public character of these processes, the strong influence of government institutions and permeable boundaries between the public and the private sphere. Branding in urban renewal processes is a matter of co-production between stakeholders, and the role of process managers seems an important one.

Marketing sciences have seen important theoretical developments regarding brands. Where brands used to be seen as a public image perceived by consumers, scholars have recently conceptualised brands as relationships. Brands have a personality and form relationships with consumers. Value is created through relationships with multiple stakeholders such as employees and government agencies. Theoretically the idea of branding can also be connected to the wide range of literature on frames and framing in public administration. In this paper we connect these two streams of literature to improve our understanding of branding as a phenomenon.

We apply our theoretical framework in a qualitative case-study to analyze concrete branding processes and refine our theoretical ideas. We have studied two cases of city renewal in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The study is mainly based on in-depth interviews, but also on observations and documents. The cases show how branding is a matter of co-production unfolding in networks of public and private managers, as well as citizens. Branding in practice differs from theoretical models of brand-management. Firstly, branding theory tends to present branding as a consciously arranged process, while branding in practice happens largely unconsciously. Secondly, storytelling (about micro-scale events) plays an important role in the mix of

branding-practices. This finding adds to branding theory which tends to stress the importance of architecture and large festivals.

**Key Words:** location branding, coproduction, governance