

# **From Identity Building to Branding: the Case of the City of Helsinki**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Selling, and branding, a place is not a new phenomenon either for cities (Rome, the eternal city; Paris, the City of Lights) or for tourist destinations. However, during the end of the 19th century the promotion of cities has increased. Special offices have been established to attract the potential tourist by enticing on what is laying ahead of them, just waiting to be explored. Today this promotion of the city is entering a new phase. No longer is it just the tourist who has to be informed and no longer is it just about telling a wider world what is on offer. City-marketing and city branding are the new catch words. Branding has become a powerful tool of place-marketing.

A much wider circle of potential targets is involved; from the potential tourists to residents, new companies and even the inhabitants of cities themselves. Involved are also difficult and complex questions about what a city wants to be. Cities are no longer “natural or authentic”; they have become an object of a conscious cultural positioning strategy, aimed at selected markets.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the image and brand construction of the City of Helsinki and of the larger region including cities of Espoo and Vantaa. How is Helsinki marketed for different, especially international audiences? How has Helsinki been imagined by marketing strategists and how does it relate to the local residents understanding?

What kind of a city does Helsinki want to be? Can forms of city-branding not only sell the city but, in addition, deliver a positive contribution to the social and cultural fabric of cities? The project is part of a Nordic study “The Image of the City: Urban Branding as Constructed Capabilities in Nordic City Regions”, funded by Nordic innovation Centre.

**Key Words: city competition, branding, cultural positioning**