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**The Relationship of City Branding and  
Tourist Promotion: The Case of  
Plymouth (UK) and Malaga (Spain)**

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## **The Relationship of City Branding and Tourist Promotion: The Case of Plymouth (UK) and Malaga (Spain)**

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### **Abstract**

In the global market cities compete in the brand image they create, this message has to be convincing and precise. In order to build - images just a few urban features are chosen, which can be material such as built heritage, infrastructure or iconic architecture. However, non-material aspects like historic references, an attractive way of life and cultural values are becoming crucial when trying to link local economic strategies and tourist promotion, particularly when specializing in urban tourism segments such as history and culture, meetings, incentives, conferences and events.

To create this symbolic world, guidebooks, marketing material and tourism planning documents play a key role. We have analyzed this process in the cities of Plymouth and Malaga Plymouth concentrates on presenting itself as a city of discovery, while Malaga focuses on showing its relationship with the locally-born painter Pablo Picasso.

In both cases there has been a shift from totally different aspects depending on the period. We have analyzed the symbolic identity of both cities throughout guidebooks starting from mid-19th century, and we have compared these messages with the one included in current information given to visitors and tourist plans.

### **Keywords:**

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## **Introduction and Theoretical Background**

The economic change motivated by globalization has forced cities to reimage themselves in order to be competitive. According to Willey (1998), the shift from modernity to postmodernity has given way to a more sociologically ambivalent world of mass circulation of signs. In this context, cities are seen as a site of play rather than power or production.

The city becomes an image transmitted at the same time to locals, tourists and potential investors. Marchena Gómez (1998) and Van der Borg, Costa and Gotti (1996) have analyzed how a city attractive to visitors has advantage in the face of attracting inward investment. Urry (2002) and Judd and Fainstein (1999) also reflect the importance of branding for residents, since tourism and touristic behavior is coming to be seen as an integral part of daily life, meaning that residents consume the city in ways that are similar to tourists. According to Law, developing an attractive image is also a form of confidence boosting for local business and residents.

As Richards and Wilson (2007) point out, cities seek to achieve competitive advantage through differentiation, but achieve standardization since all of them follow familiar strategies, which finally lead to similar urban projects such as regenerated waterfronts, creative quarters and gentrified historic cores.

In order to be successful, the image sought has to combine singularity and connection to global values, its difficulty lies in competing with other hundreds of cities immerse in a similar process. Culture plays a key role in the messages selected by cities since according to Zukin (1995), culture suggests the coherence and consistency of a brand name product. Florida (2005) points out the review of history and heritage, and the promotion of urban cultures and entertainments, as competitive advantages in drawing in tourists and mobile investment or mobile professionals. Law (1996) emphasises the importance of high-profile cultural amenities, sporting activities, festivals and special events in bringing prestige to a city and raising its profile.

## **Selected Cases and Methodology**

In this research the city branding process in the cities of Plymouth (England, UK) and Malaga (Andalusia, Spain) has been analyzed. Both of them are coastal medium-size cities, which have experienced a decline in port and industrial activities. The two cities are increasing their tourist attractiveness with a focus on culture, heritage and leisure activities.

Plymouth concentrates nowadays on presenting itself as a city of discovery. Some of the most prominent British voyages of exploration departed from Plymouth, including Sir Francis Drake's circumnavigation, Captain James Cook's passages to Australia and the Pacific, Charles Darwin's scientific mission on the Beagle and Robert Falcon Scott's expedition to the South Pole. Moreover, the city was the last English port visited by the Pilgrim Fathers on

board the Mayflower before crossing the Atlantic and settling in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, in 1620. Not only was Plymouth recognised as a departure point for Puritan emigration to New England, but it also had a relevant role in emigration to Australia, New Zealand and South Africa as well.

Port activity is still significant in the city with Devonport dockyard, Millbay ferry terminal and Cattewater commercial port. A number of marinas are also located in central Plymouth, such as Queen Anne's Battery, Sutton Harbour, Royal William Yard and Mayflower Marina. The connection of Plymouth with the sea is not limited to port activity, the city is base of a number of renowned institutions related to marine life, such as Plymouth Marine Laboratory, National Marine Aquarium, Marine Biological Laboratory of the United Kingdom and Marine Institute of the University, with a new building opened in September 2012.

Malaga focuses on showing its relationship with the locally-born painter Pablo Picasso. The painter lived in the city until he was ten years old. The main buildings related to the biography and work of the artist are the Picasso Museum located in Buenavista palace, Picasso's birthplace in La Merced square, Santiago church where he was christened and Santo Cristo de la Salud church, close to San Telmo art school where his father was a teacher.

The research has been divided in two parts. Firstly, we have studied how both cities were presented to visitors through a selection of guidebooks from 1828 to 1990. The focus has been on the front covers and first pages, where the cities are introduced to readers. In order to establish comparison among different periods, the guidebooks have been grouped as follows: 1828-1843, 1844-1888, 1889-1928, 1929-1939, 1940-1978 and 1979-1990. Differences of what is marketed are substantial, reflecting the changing interests of visitors over time. Thus, references have been divided into the following topics: the cities in general, religious, sea related, civic related, cultural, transports, bathing, social, hotels, leisure, historic references, monuments, military, designers and particular areas.

In the second part we have analyzed the same references in current information given to visitors and tourism related policy documents. The following sources have been taken into account:

- Field work. Undertaken in Plymouth on 2011 September 10, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23 and 25, coinciding with the celebration of the America's Cup. In Malaga it was undertaken on 2013 April 23, 24 and 25, coinciding with the celebration of the Spanish Film Festival.
- Current guidebooks. Three guidebooks have been considered in Plymouth and six in Malaga.
- Leaflets offered to visitors. 22 leaflets have been considered in the case of Plymouth and 17 in the case of Malaga.
- Pedestrian trails. Six trails have been considered in Plymouth and nine in Malaga.
- Administrative documents. Four sources have been considered in

Plymouth and two in Malaga.

- Information from the City Council. Three sources have been considered both in Plymouth and in Malaga.
- Webpages offering tourist information about the city. Four webpages have been considered both in Plymouth and in Malaga.
- Street signage, panels and plaques. In the case of Plymouth 47 street signs, 19 city plans and 22 explanations have been considered. In the case of Malaga 27 street signs, 17 city plans and 25 explanations have been taken into account.

### **The Image of the Cities in Historic Guidebooks**

In both cases, subjects of interest in guidebooks have changed substantially between 1828 and 1990. In the case of Plymouth, from aspects related to public facilities, trade or hygienic measures there was a shift to heritage assets and historic links and finally to leisure and shopping. The change of foci is registered in the titles given to Plymouth, normally in the cover or first page. In the 19th century the traditional title of 'The Three Towns'<sup>1</sup> joined the new one of 'Metropolis of the West' to emphasize its importance in overseas trade, communications and institutions of every kind. The city was also commonly known as 'The centre of a hundred tours' as Plymouth was the starting point to enjoy the beautiful scenery of the Sound, Dartmoor and Cornwall. In the first half of the 20th century and during the post-war period the city started to be advertised as a symbol of British imperial history, it was called 'The mother of full forty Plymouths' or 'The historic city of the West', this is the time when the link of Plymouth with Sir Francis Drake and the Mayflower achieved a prominent role. After the Second World War many of the city's assets had been destroyed and social interests changed dramatically, the focus was on showing a successful reconstructed city and the city was labelled 'The modern city of the West' as at that time the City Centre and new department stores were something Plymouth was proud of. Attempts of marketing other resources followed one another and Plymouth was called 'Delightful centre for holidays' and 'The Centre for West Country Holidays' to emphasize seabathing, yachting and sailing, 'A city worth sharing' focusing on leisure for everyone and 'The going is easy' to insist in the good communications of a city traditionally perceived as peripheral by road and train.

In the case of Malaga, first guidebooks were interested in churches, seminars and hygienic measures such as water supply. Afterwards, attention was given to climate, sea bathing and monuments. In the last decades of the 20th century the focus was on gastronomy and sports. The aspects of interest also varied depending on the nationality of potential visitors. In the 1928

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<sup>1</sup>Plymouth was once composed of three separate towns: Plymouth, Stonehouse and Devonport, These were merged to become the City of Plymouth in the early 20th C.

guidebook written in German, the number of churches mentioned is significantly lower than in other guidebooks of the same period. On the other hand, baths and hotels became more relevant and Pablo Picasso was cited for the first time. The guidebooks written in English in 1936, 1970 and 1978 emphasize Malaga's historical connections with the United Kingdom and the topics of special interest for the British traveler. In 1936 the British Club and Baños del Carmen seaside resort were cited as some of the best entertainment venues, and among the main monuments the English cemetery was mentioned.

The evolution of interests is also reflected in the titles given to Malaga. During the 19th century and the first third of the 20th century Malaga was known as 'The first in danger of freedom', a title that appears on the city's shield and refers to the landing and subsequent shooting of Jose Maria de Torrijos along 48 men to defend the Constitution. The title is quoted even in the 1928 guide in German. Since the 1920s the aim was to promote Malaga as a winter resort thanks to its mild climate, selected slogans were 'The first winter season in Europe. The most beautiful beach in Spain', 'Malaga, city of Winter' and 'The sun-lounge of Europe'. Since the 1950s Malaga was promoted as 'Paradise City', as the poet Vicente Aleixandre called it. The slogan was modified in 1970 as 'Malaga, paradise and after ...' and again in 1990 as 'Málaga, paradise on earth ...'. Since 1970 the name of Malaga is accompanied by that of the Costa del Sol and the city becomes a part of the increasingly popular tourist region, the 1989 guide refers to the city as 'Capital of the Costa del Sol'.

### **The Image of the Cities in Current Sources**

Current information given to visitors and tourism related policy documents keep some of the references used to attract visitors in the past, while others have been created or given renovated attention for new branding purposes. Visit Plymouth has rebranded the city as 'Britain's Ocean City', the slogan is built on its superb location facing the Sound, its maritime heritage and history, waterfront leisure facilities, restaurants and marinas. The Visitor Plan (2011) includes the following vision of the city:

*'By 2020, Plymouth will be the UK's premier marine city and famous for its waterfront. It will be recognised as unique among UK cities for its natural drama and for its 500-year old history as a place of embarkation and exploration. Plymouth's continuing journey towards a world-leading marine city will support the cultural experiences it offers to visitors who are looking for authenticity and character'.*

The advertisement of Plymouth as a marine city of discovery can be seen in monuments and areas promoted, historic references and events developed in recent years. Built heritage references concentrate on three patrimonial areas,

each of them with a very different relative weight, namely Mount Wise, Royal William Yard and the central areas covering the Hoe, Barbican and parts of the City Centre.

Historic references can be divided in four categories, namely seafarers, war, Royal Navy and marine and maritime references. Guidebooks dedicate an extensive attention to these topics and the most cited historic characters or events are Sir Francis Drake, the Pilgrim Fathers who set sail on board the Mayflower, the defeat of the Spanish Armada, Charles Darwin or the Beagle and Captain Robert Falcon Scott. Leaflets are not focused on history and only a few references to Captain Robert Falcon Scott and the Pilgrim Fathers have been found. Tourism related webpages scarcely refer to Sir Francis Drake, the Mayflower and the Spanish Armada. Finally, street signage dedicates more attention to historic events although no one is particularly stressed.

References to seafarers can be found in the whole city in diverse forms, proof of the general identification of Plymouth with these renowned historic characters. References to wars are also quite extended, in particular the concentration of memorials on the Hoe stands out. References to the Royal Navy are located on the Hoe, in Stonehouse including the Royal Marine Barracks and the former Royal Naval Hospital, and in Devonport including the Dockyards. Finally, more general naval references can be found in all neighbourhoods of Plymouth.

Plymouth offers a variety of competitions and festivals related to the sea all year round, some of the most relevant recent events of the kind are the Tall Ships Race, Sail Fest, Port of Plymouth Regatta, Plymouth Classic Boat Rally, Two Handed Transatlantic Race, International Powerboats Formula 1 Championship, National Powerboats, National Water Skiing Championships, Rolex Fastnet Race, Artemis Transat, Route des Princes, Plymouth Race Week, Class 40 World Championships and Plymouth Ocean City Festival.

The most far reaching event that has taken place recently in the city in terms of economic impact was the America's Cup World Series Yacht Racing 2011. This regatta was seen as a way to extend Plymouth's share among national and overseas tourist market and it is wanted to be the first of a new generation of events and marketing campaigns designed to increase the number of visitor arrivals and expenditure.

In 2012 one of the most significant exhibitions was 'From Plymouth to Pole: Scott, Science and the Men who Sailed South', celebrating the expedition of Plymouth-born Robert Falcon Scott to the Antarctic. Other major cultural event held in 2012 was 'World at Your Feet', a celebration of the richness and variety of Plymouth's history and its role in relation to migration to other parts of the world.

In Summer 2012 a new annual event was launched, the Marine City Festival. It consists of a nine-day festival of seafood, live music, entertainment, aquatic leisure and cultural events. The objective of the festival is to attract thousands of visitors to Plymouth historic quayside areas and to highlight nationally and internationally the city's standing as a leading European marine city for research, leisure, heritage and food.

In recent years the city has progressively increased the number and scope of events, as well as their promotion. It will continue to do so with the focus on the celebration in 2020 of the Mayflower 400 Anniversary, work has already begun to use this event for attracting a higher number of foreign visitors, especially from the US East Coast.

In the case of Malaga, the promotion of Picasso plays a key role in the information presented to visitors and policy strategies of every kind. As López Cuenca (2011) points out, the cobranding Malaga-Picasso is an ideal study case when analyzing how the Picasso brand proves its ability to be linked to every type of product, from perfumes to cars.

Regarding economic policies, the local strategy which encourages investment in advanced economy has produced a series of documents presenting the assets that make Malaga competitive, six components of excellence are cited with Picasso Museum as one of them.

The local Strategic Plan (2006) includes the following vision of the city:

*'A metropolis overlooking the sea, Picasso's Malaga, cultural and attractive at the forefront of the new knowledge society, in short, a town renowned for its citizens and visitors'.*

This plan includes the proposal of creating a 'open museum or megamuseum' in part of the historic city, where the Picasso Museum would be at the heart of the intervention.

References to Picasso can be seen in all kinds of events in the city. The International Cultural Tourism and City Break Fair adopted the painter's image in its 2008 edition. The Spanish Film Festival did the same in 2009. In the Carnival contest 2013 costumes were inspired in Picasso's style. Every October the anniversary of the birth of the painter is celebrated with workshops, visits and roundtables.

The Urban and Cultural Tourism Plan (2008) cites four specific areas in need of improvement. The surroundings of the Picasso Museum is one of them and the proposal includes the artistic theming of the streets in this environment with allegorical figures of the painter's work. The plan also suggests the creation of pathways linked to the painter and the promotion of food, crafts, trades and culture related to Picasso. Furthermore, the plan proposes the theming of hotels, restaurants and shops with references to the painter, and the creation of the Picasso Award for innovation in Mediterranean cuisine.

The promotion of the connection of the city with Picasso can also be seen in the most cited monuments and references to historic figures and artists. The Picasso Museum and Picasso's birthplace stand among the six most cited monuments, being the museum the most visited cultural attraction in the city. Among the artists linked to Malaga, Pablo Picasso is the most cited in guidebooks. Leaflets only refer to Pablo Picasso and Federico García Lorca and websites only cite Pablo Picasso. References to artists are mostly located in the old arab walled city and the Park, only references to Picasso exhibit a clear concentration around the two main resources related to the painter: the Picasso

Museum and his birthplace.

## Results and Discussion

In the two cities analyzed there has been a change of foci in the image promoted to potential visitors, investors and residents coinciding with the obsolescence of traditional urban activities and the raise of urban tourism and globalization. In both cases a local feature has been marketed to promote internationally accepted values such as innovation and receptivity.

In the case of Plymouth references to war and the Empire have given way to that of a maritime city. This label embodies ideas of freedom, discovery, tolerance and enterprise. Plymouth takes advantage of the ideas of embarkation and arrival to offer itself as a city that embraces radical ideas, liberty and innovation, reflected in its historic figures, religious connections, artistic associations, engineering and architecture. In the case of Malaga, the promotion of a colourful city with a mild weather has been replaced by the prominence of Picasso. Reinforcing the connection with the painter means embracing values of culture, creativity and avant-garde.

In the case of Plymouth the connection to marine and maritime life exists in many neighbourhoods and it is visible in daily life, for example in economic activities, research centres and leisure facilities and events. It can be concluded that there has been an intensification of an identity generally accepted by the residents. In the case of Malaga almost all references to Picasso are related to a function of attracting visitors, contrasting with the absence of signals in spaces frequented mostly by locals.

When messages selected for branding differ significantly from those commonly accepted by the local population there is a risk of putting marketing interests over residents' concerns. A gap is created between the artificial, simple and forceful image promoted in tourist leaflets and the real cultural identity, much more varied and contradictory. This trend can lead to a concentration of investment in tourist areas, attractions, infrastructures, iconic architecture and special events, which is usually to the detriment of social and cohesion policies. As a result, there is a reinforcement of the role of key urban spaces as entertainment centres.

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