

Social Place Branding

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Hypothesis

Residents' engagement in collaborative activity on a local level is the main tool shaping place identity and thus creating a strong and sustainable brand.

The topic of city and territory branding is a current trend on everyone's lips. At the same time, the majority of existing cases is not successful enough or can even be considered a failure because of a complete "top-downness" of branding strategies. This work aims to identify an alternative method and answer the following questions: what is the resident's role in a territory branding system; could joint resident activity become the main instrument of brand formation? This project proposes a method for organizing local residents' involvement in one Moscow district using social activity in order to reinforce the identity and brand of a place.

In times of globalization, there is demand and even need to have something to offer, to be “for something” and to take up a distinct position, which is expressed in a short, succinct message that is easy to comprehend and human-friendly. This trend applies to everything: individuals, commercial organizations, political movements and cities. The issue of city branding will be discussed in this project. Attempting to develop a method of place branding that is not top-down as usual, this project takes a bottom-up approach, based on social engagement, actual benefits and advantages - not the imaginary. This is the way to celebrate local identity,

and thereby build a real, “honest” image and brand. This project endeavors to prove that these are the real criteria of place branding despite everything that has been said so many times before.

Place branding is the representation of identity, building favorable internal and external images that lead to brand satisfaction and loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality and other proprietary brand assets. Internal images concern those who deliver the experience while external image is related to visitors’ experiences.¹ In his book “Cultuur in de Citymarketing”, T.B.J Noorrdman of Erasmus

University in Rotterdam writes about city branding: “Place identity. We shall often refer to the “true identity of a place”, by which we mean the full set of unique characteristics or set of meanings that exist in a place and its culture at a given point in time, nevertheless realizing that this identity is subject to change and might include various fragmented identities.” Some practical moorings are provided by Noordman in his listing of structural (location and history), semi-static (size, physical appearance and inner mentality) and coloring (symbolism, communication and behavior) elements of place identity.²

Logos, created on common principles:



Equality and inorganic approach in branding strategy

The city brand is an element of identity, forcing to value on a human living in a place, and forcing the human to value the place he lives in. It is a significant element, helping to preserve the culture, history and identity of a certain place. More and more, organizations are becoming the initiators of a branding process. In addition to tourism departments, these organizations include departments of culture (in this way solving their own problems), consulting companies, schools and others. This topic is also frequently highlighted in the media. Currently, the territory-branding instrument is frequently used for

marketing or as a means to sell an artificially-created image to tourists in order to raise sales and/or fuel investments. Political issues are also important. I, therefore, believe that the main driver in territory branding is simply a fear of failing to follow the trend. Undoubtedly, not all the motives behind this approach are that obvious. Sometimes, city, country or regional brand creation becomes merely an excuse for the abuse of state or local budget. In other cases, branding is a matter of self-affirmation for local elites. This formation is true not only for world-known cases of territory

branding but for Moscow also. Usually, a team of creators (not necessarily professionals) is formed and given strict deadlines and a very precise mandate: at a minimum create a logo, slogan, web-site and advertising campaign. As incredible as it may seem, in a competitive battle for uniqueness, the only thing we really get is standardization. Advertising campaigns and flagship projects, upon which millions and sometimes billions are spent from the city budget, are frequently inorganic, causing disagreement and protests and are rejected by residents.

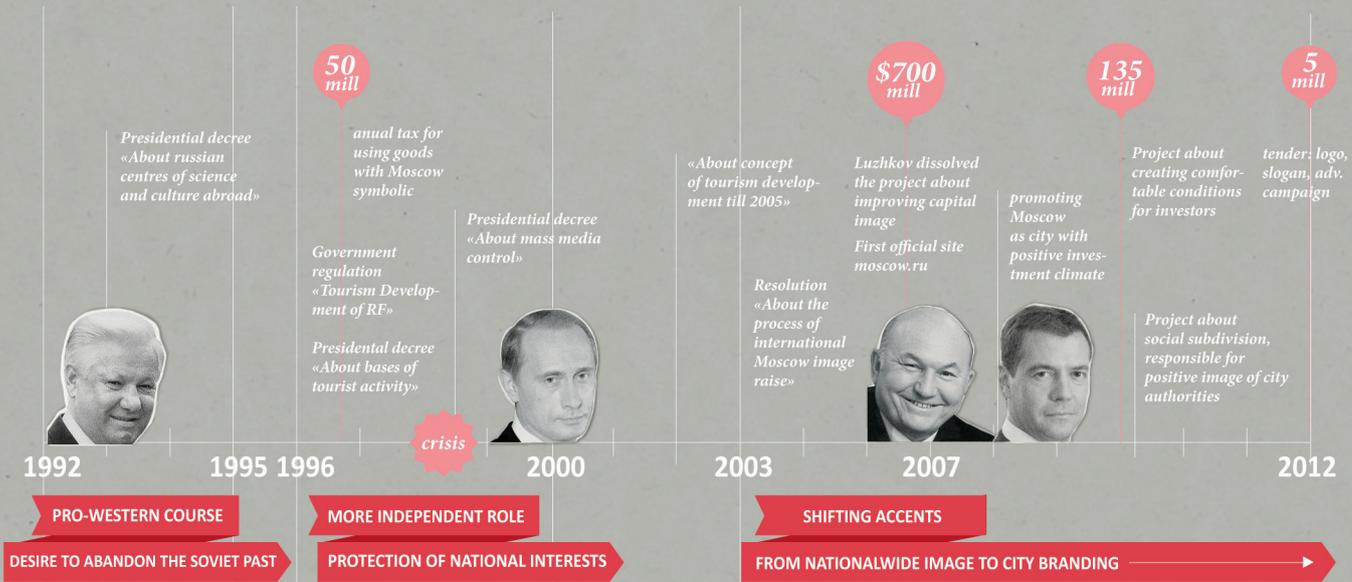
Examples of unaccepted branding by residents and equality in slogans



“Opportunities without borders”
Ekaterinburg
“Small town, big heart”
Burton
“Donetsk loves you”
Donetsk
“The city that loves you”
Tbilisi

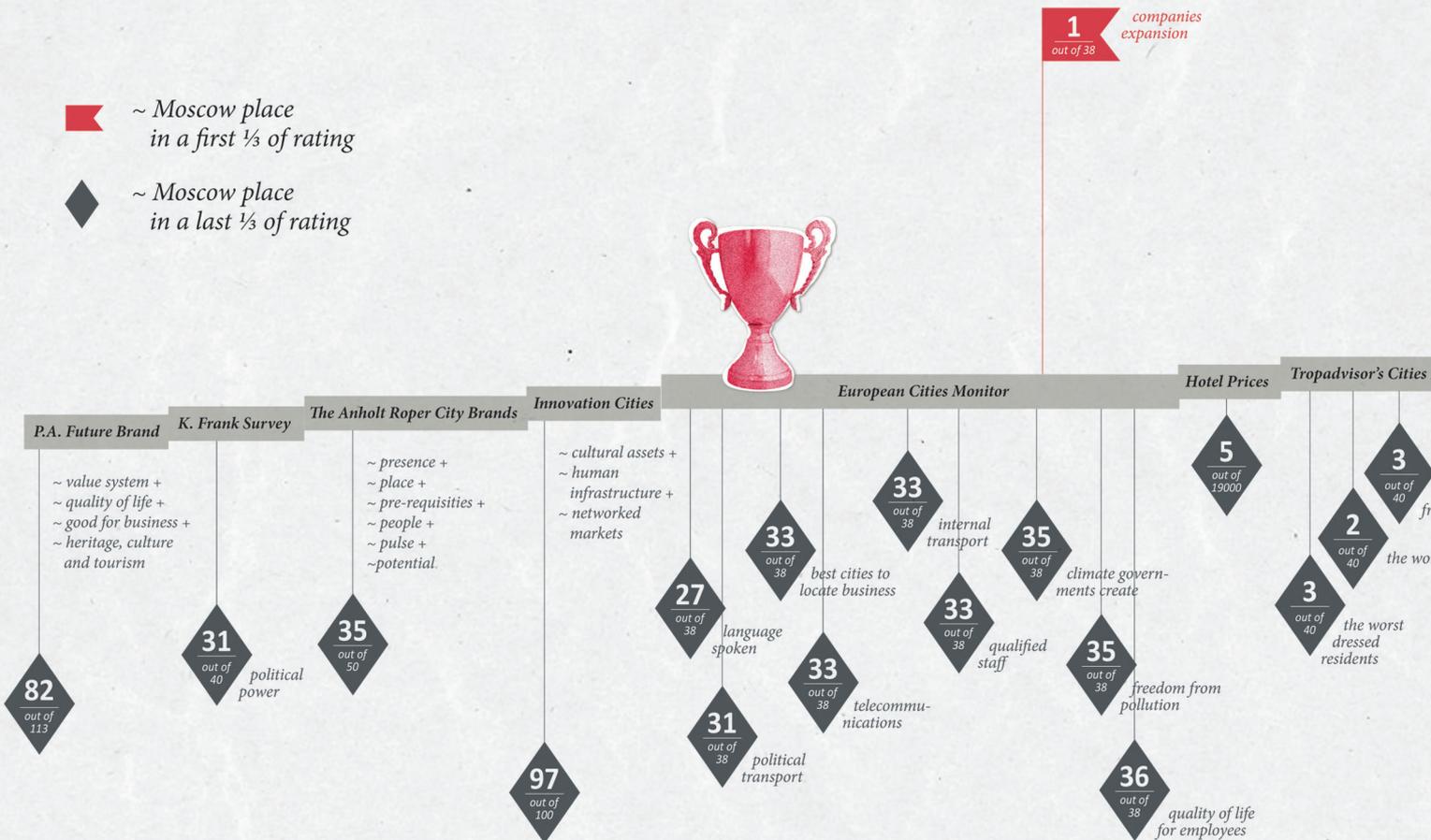
“City of opportunities”
Dnepropetrovsk
“Many stories, one heart”
Thessaloniki
“With loves and care”
Saki
etc.

Moscow level



Moscow in ratings

In the case of Moscow's branding, there was no integrated or complex approach. It is useful to review the international ratings for Moscow in order to see how Russia's capital is seen from the outside. In my opinion, these ratings are mostly unreliable and often based on strange and not-so-evident assumptions. More importantly, they are not diagnostic instruments, but media phenomena that influence perception of the city.



For now, let's "zoom in" to take a look at Moscow's position in the discussion on territory branding. It is useful to use a timeline to demonstrate the evolution of the authorities' relation to the subject. In creating the image of Russia in the 1990s, government agencies led by the President were involved as well as representatives of businesses and NGOs. Trends of democratization, developing civil society, market economy, etc influenced Russia's image at the time. The process of modernization that started in Russia at that time led to the formation of a positive image (a multi-party system, free elections, rights and freedoms, freedom of speech). Internal processes (political and economic instability, the war in Chechnya, corruption, lack of effective social protection) did damage to the country's image. During the early 90s, a pro-Western

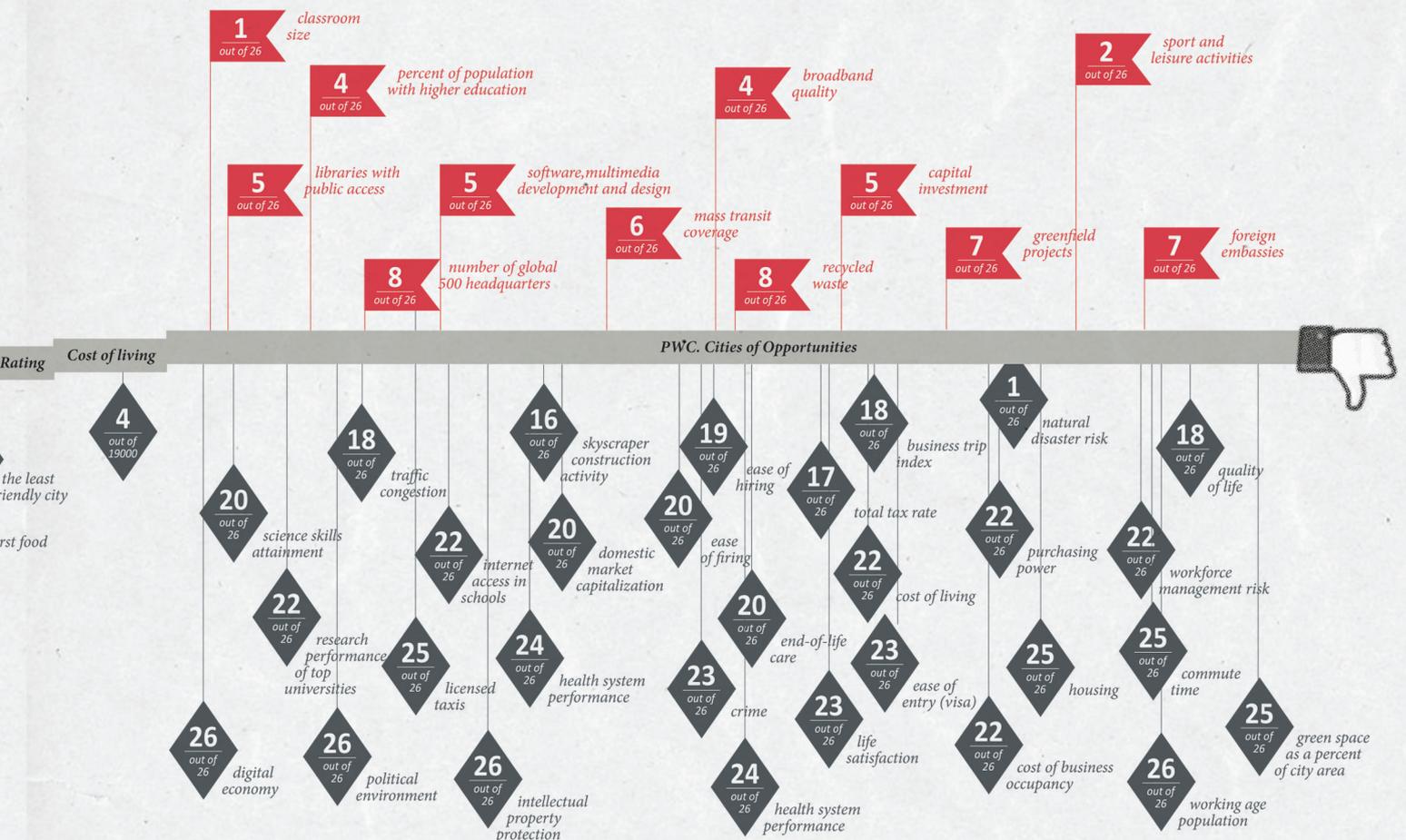
course was charted. A desire to abandon the Soviet past and take up the path of democratic reforms can be seen in official statements and speeches by political leaders of our country as well as foreign leaders and in media reports. From 1996, the strategy was not as effective as in the early 90s. Russia's desire to play a more independent role and protect national interests was not enthusiastically received by foreign audiences.

In 2003, the growing globalization wave resulted in a shift from the tendency to form territory images to territory marketing and branding. The subject of this process becomes the city, and the city becomes a product with competitive advantages that could be sold. Moscow starts to think this way, developing new projects for city brand development. Actions have

become more concrete and for now there are a lot of ambitious, precise plans.

Certainly, the failure of attempts to build a sustainable and solid image of the country/city was due to failure of the self-identification process or, looking at the situation from a very broad perspective, failure of the nation-building process. It is not possible to transmit an image of something when that image does not even exist in the minds of the nation or the city's inhabitants. In my opinion, all attempts by advertising firms or PR agencies to create an image from thin air only lead to nothing. Real, effective and sustainable branding originates from being, not seeming. This is true not only for Russia, but for any country and any place in the world.

The strongest points are mostly seen in education, culture, leisure and business, but it is interesting to note that Moscow ranks in the last place for protection of intellectual property. The city's weakest positions are rather varied, but it is possible to group them in several categories: conditions for employees, transport, health care and international openness.



Moscow in the first lines of other ratings

unemployment <1%
 10% of world's billionaires live here
 bodyguards are cheaper than in other megacities
 assassins are more cheaper than in over European capitals
 "Moscow City" - the most expensive construction in a current world
 spaces rental on Tverskaya Street is more expensive than on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées
 75% of Russian financial flows intersection

Moscow is pursuing status. It tries to be "the most": the most expensive and luxurious, the biggest in square, building construction. These characteristics are what is known about Moscow around the world.

As we can see, Moscow's image leaves much to be desired. The city's weakest points are pointed out by ratings but cannot be resolved in a minute. These issues require a complex approach, but some of them can be improved on a local level: language capability, employees' quality of life, crime, end-of-life care and green space as a percentage of total area. The rankings are not ultimate indicators, but they are just one more argument in favor of starting to change the image at a local level, tackling one issue at a time.

Attempts to brand Moscow



Here are examples that were widely discussed. In sum, around 77 million rubles were invested in these branding campaigns. There were a lot of critical comments on these products, stemming from mistakes in translation, outdated design and badly-composed suggestions for tourist routes, and inability to appeal to different audiences. Also, there were some bottom-up initiatives that were considered unsuccessful and were never used. These examples show that the city lacked a complex approach to building the city brand and that there is no authority responsible for it. The results of these attempts were once again derived from branding system and were not all encompassing. They also demonstrate a stereotypical and superficial way of thinking about what the city brand means.

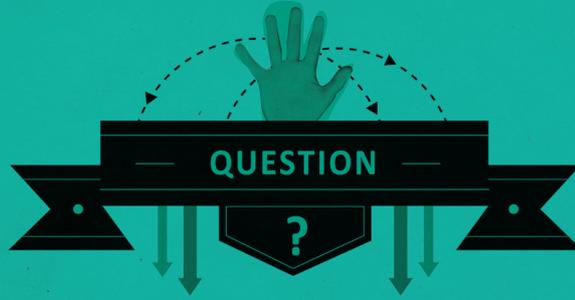
Microlevel of Moscow districts

I propose to start with the micro-level of Moscow districts as

- ~ The citizen has an immediate close connection to the place
- ~ Citizens are emotionally immersed in the area
- ~ Sense of neighborhood is decreasing on such a scale
- ~ Original "senses" and values are not sufficiently highlighted and open

Actions on a local level are about being, not seeming. The local level allows us to address real life concepts. Moreover, action at the local level allows us to build the brand from the "grassroots" level, simultaneously engaging citizens and making sure that the final result will not be rejected by the people. This approach insures that residents will advocate for the results on a deeper level, thereby creating a real, long-lasting brand that

never falls short of expectations. As an illustrative example, the Izmailovo district was chosen. It is well suited to a pilot version and to checking model-scheme because of the district's various cultural and historical layers, its diversity of natural resources (parks, gardens, basins, etc.), differentiated social structure, availability of information and accessibility to people (authorities, locals, experts)



— *what is the place of* —
RESIDENT

IN PLACE
BRANDING
SCHEME?

A decision about place identity usually comes from the top, almost completely ignoring locals' interests and opinions. But what is the place if not the people living there? What is the main source of identity if not life itself?

Thus, the following main questions are posed by this project: what is the resident's role in a territory branding system? Could joint resident activity become the main instrument in brand formation?

There are few examples of projects that successfully work with residents and produce an image that appeals to both residents and outsiders.

The Neukölln district in Berlin has a reputation for its numerous migrants from Turkey and India, and the level of unemployment in the district exceeds the city average. German agency "In:polis" discovered the migrant women's needlework talent, and

it has organized a creative platform to connect these women with Berlin's young fashion designers. Together, they have begun to produce a fashion line, and fashion shows, workshops and show rooms were organized in the district. In this way, an innovative integration model for migrants has been shaped, and the unemployment problem has been resolved to a certain degree. Public events have attracted the attention of media, bloggers, the creative class and locals, changing the place's reputation with outside viewers. Now, the district attracts creative industry workers and has a reputation for being a place that is friendly and tolerant to migrants, who in turn feel as though they have a significant role to play in the community. The traditional branding process for a place is "overturned" when locals are not merely presented with the opportunity to participate in an activity whose importance is determined from the top-down with the aim of building status or improving tourism and employee appeal, but when locals are connected to an idea that is of interest to them.

Place branding is a system of actions and instruments for territory image change through the translation of ideas and the formation of place identity.

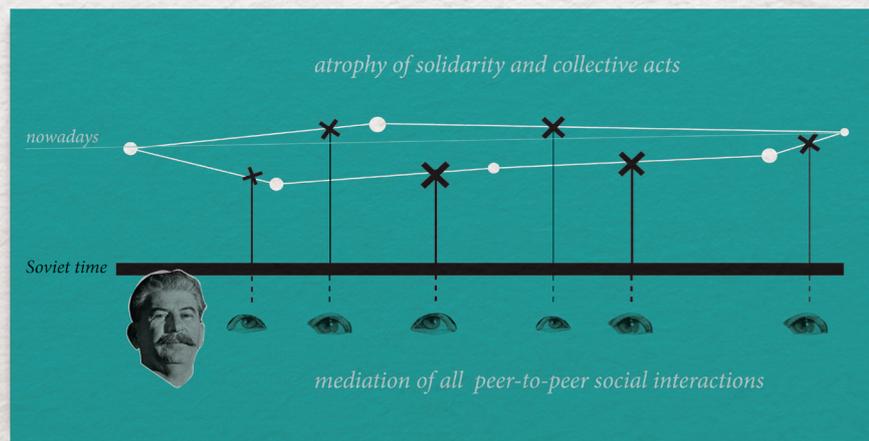
Social territory branding is a branding type. In this type of branding, identity is formed by working with residents on an idea that they are initially interested in and that is also culturally and historically connected to the place. As a result of social place branding, residents benefit from each other, celebrating a common idea that eventually leads to changes in the place's reputation and image and increased attractiveness to an outside observer

Social engagement

Contemporary Russian society is absolutely atomized and incapable of joint action in “non-extreme” situations. Horizontal connections are almost absent here, and the tendency for group self-organization has been forced out historically. This situation is rather specific to Russia, and it is deeply rooted in the very nature of the Soviet regime and its attempt to be a really total space, outside of which nothing else really exists. This led to the degradation of the society’s ability to create horizontal links. As Lev Gudkov, Boris Dubin and Nataya Zorkaya put it in “The Post-Soviet Person and Civil Society”³, the “correct” Soviet citizen could not imagine anything outside the state. Non-governmental medicine, education, science, literature, economy, industry are either impossible or as it turned out later during the post-Soviet period are non-legitimate, defective institutions. He belongs to the state entirely and depends on it. State forms of reward and social control are his only reference points. The state here

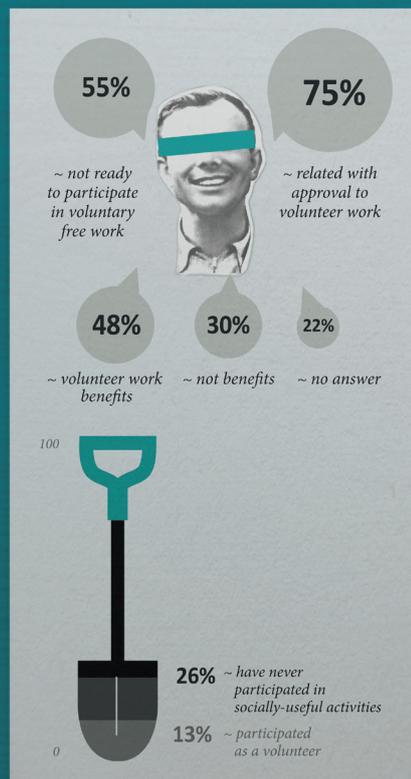
means not an institution separated from the society but an entity tending to embrace all the aspects of a human life”. The Soviet state tended to mediate all peer-to-peer social interactions in order to control them and this (though not only this) led to the atrophy of solidarity and ability to perform collective acts. For example, according to the Caux Round Table 2009 Social Capital Achievement Rankings⁴, the Russian Federation holds the hundredth position in the

overall rating. Boris Dubin of the Levada Center noted in a comment for Ria Novosti that today “a person in Russia is either not linked to other human beings or these links are extremely weak or he/she does not rely on these links, does not value them and has no intent to develop solidarity or integrity with anyone except family members”⁵.



All these complications make it difficult to use the kind of motivations seen in the aforementioned Berlin project for Neukölln. The circle of common activities that inhabitants are interested in participating in is very limited. Therefore, we can find topics that allow us to organize social activity almost from scratch.

According to the paper on a survey conducted by FOM, only 26% of respondents have ever participated in socially-useful activities for free during last ten years, and only half of this 26% has participated as a volunteer (that is, not as a member) in the activities of a non-governmental organization (NGO). A majority of residents approve of volunteer work although they are uncertain about its potency (48% believe NGO work holds benefits, 22% – does not hold benefits, 30% – difficult to answer). The majority is not ready to participate in volunteer work).



Criteria for choosing the topic for residents' consociation

As residents are more likely to be united not around a place, but around an idea⁶, it is necessary to formulate this idea and to inspire people to participate in related activities. So what are the criteria for choosing a topic that could unite residents and subsequently produce a topic that would lend itself to brand formation and a new image for the place?

1. *Start with the roots! (ease of implementation, topic of interest)*

It is useless to try initially to inspire people to fix a closed road on their own, for example, or to resolve an issue with parking near a house. In the current situation and on the existing level of social interaction, it is more reasonable to propose participation in solving some small problem with simple actions that are available to everyone. Also, it is necessary to understand which particular joint activity could provide motivation and genuine interest for participants.

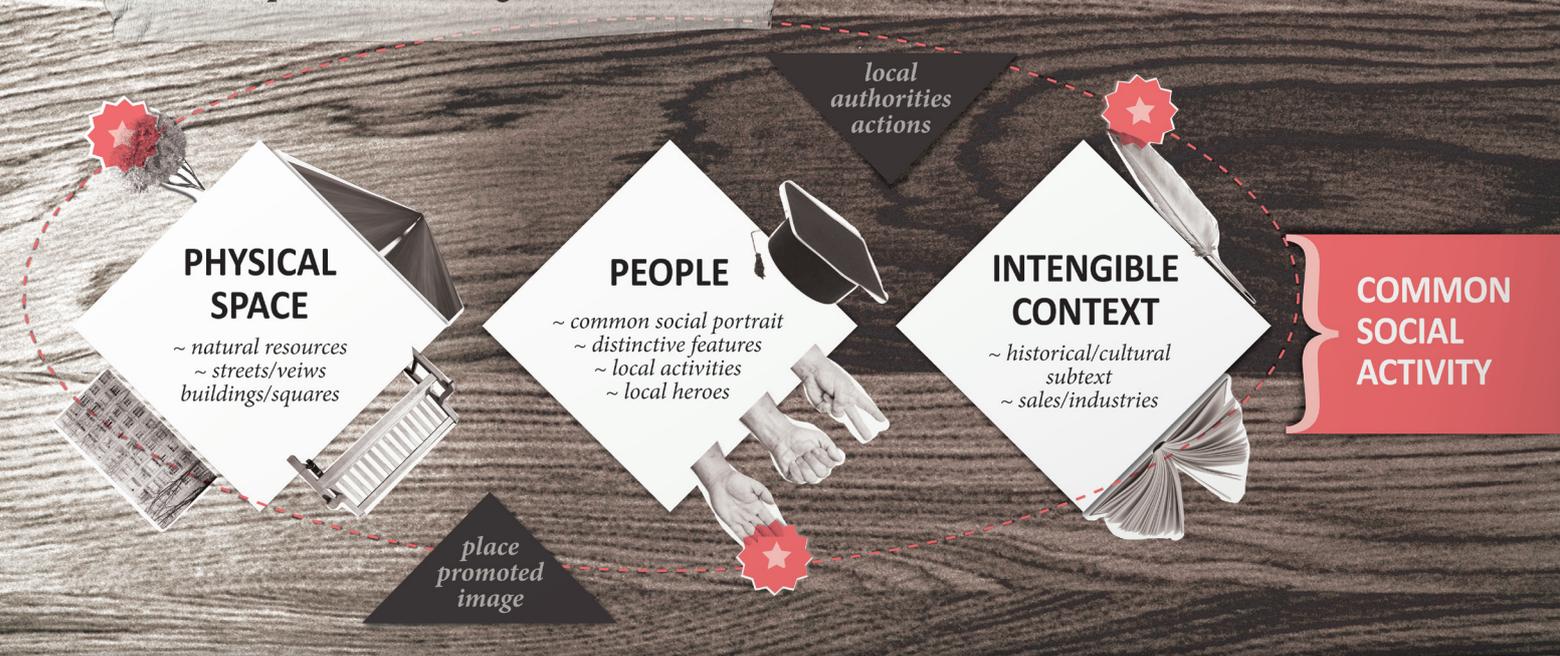
2. *Place (a shared, public space near private space)*

We can assume that the platform for this type of activity should be some common, shared public space that is an important component of the area's infrastructure and is noticeable and significant in its general image. At the same time, this space should be included in the circle of emotional engagement of every resident.

3. *The topic should be historically and culturally connected to the place, highlighting and formulating its identity*

A scheme to collect data for this point is presented below.

Social place branding model



To define the topic around which it is possible to organize activity, participants and context, the following scheme-model was composed. The main components of the scheme:

1. *The physical components of the territory (streets, avenues, buildings, natural resources, views, landscape, area plan)* it is important to understand these elements as a platform for activities

2. *Intangible context (historical/cultural subtext)*

it is important to understand the various levels of historical narrative that is related to the territory and familiar to locals or, conversely, hidden from them.

3. *Social component (social groups, local heroes and activities of interest, educational institutions, organizations and enterprises):*

this component serves as an index of common interests and defines participants

4. *Also, in order to have the complete picture, it is useful to study the already promoted and formed images for the place and the stereotypes surrounding it*

As a result of this complex analysis, points that are capable of being connected in each of the components are emphasized. They become the apexes of triangle, which in turn form the platform for activity. Presumably, the model is universal and applicable for different districts, places, and territories.

Izmailovo case



Dating back to imperial times, experiments in cultivating exotic varieties of plants, vegetables, fruits, flowers and trees were held at the artificial island in Izmailovo Park. We can point to a trend of developing horticulture in the area as there are several narratives related to this activity specifically. Of note, there is the Landscape Design College in Izmailovo. The only school for landscape design in Moscow, the



Landscape Design College in Izmailovo graduates about 300 technicians every year. The State Farm of Decorative Gardening also resonates with this theme. Specifically, this institution's Lilac Boulevard and gardens are connected to the story of Kolesnikov, the breeder who cultivated more than 300 varieties of lilacs. During the Khrushchev administration, Kolesnikov was asked to transfer his garden to Lilac



Boulevard in Izmailovo; many of the seedlings were lost. According to information from blogs, Lilac Boulevard and other places with lilac trees throughout the area are residents' favorite places. Until recently, greenhouses were located on the territory of Izmailovo Park, and college students conducted workshops there. These greenhouses have since been demolished.

Correspondence to criteria

1. To start with the roots! (ease of implementation, topic of interest)

«Unified action to care for and recover urban public spaces, such as subbotniki, involve the participation of a large number of people. Subbotniki started as an act of voluntary non-binding work but quickly became compulsory in the USSR. But in recent years, people have begun to organize in large numbers in voluntarily efforts to clean up public city spaces.»⁷

In April 2012, 2,2 million Moscow residents participated in subbotniki, or roughly 18% of the entire city population. In comparison, around 100,000 people participated in opposition rallies, 15,000 people attend lectures per year and 5,000 Muscovites run marathons in May). Recently, volunteer organizations for territory improvement have appeared in parks for example.

2,2
mln

participants of
"subbotniks"
in april 2012

0,015
mln

public lectures
visitors in
2011

0,25
mln

participants of
all opposition
rallies 2012

2. "Place"

To increase the degree of responsibility for common, shared space, it is necessary to start with the area that is adjacent to private living space: the yard. Currently, the yard territory has an uncertain status. It seems to be common, but at the same time it belongs to no one. Based on results of the FOM study, a majority of respondents are satisfied with their yard conditions, 61% once a year participate in its improvement and repair. An overwhelming majority, 77%, are ready to participate in subbotniki and actions directed at improving the surrounding areas if they were organized.



~ 61% once a year
participate in yard's
improvement

**YARD - PUBLIC
SPACE, CLOSE TO
THE PRIVATE ONE**

3. The topic, historically and culturally connected to the place, highlighting and formulating its identity

Thus, the topic of breeding and gardening here is rather pronounced on different historical levels. For this reason, it seems suitable for uniting residents around it and for identification with participants

**TOPIC OF BREEDING
AND GARDENING**

*is pronounced on different
historical levels*





The Izmailovo lilac

The aim of a project: to organize conditions that will inspire local residents to take on yard improvements and lilac planting, thereby combining their efforts and creating a purpose for communication, that subsequently could lead to changes to and modification of the district's image.

To create a reason for residents to communicate about the lilac stories in the early stages, I think an intriguing point and precondition for myth formation would be to send lilac seeds (the closest analog here is Kateřina Šedá's project «For Every Dog a Different Master»⁸).

Then, instructions for planting the seeds would be sent.

Later, college students studying landscape design could be asked to choose one of the district's courts and to suggest a draft plan for landscaping with lilac bushes (as part of their course work). The resulting landscaping plan with a recognizable view could

be compiled into a small album that could be sent to the residents of the yard - to paint a picture with recognizable view that shows potential and is attractive. It is also possible to post the pictures an open area for participants to make proposals.

Communication: during the final stage, close to the time of planting, participants will receive a game plan/instructions. All necessary elements are distributed to the participants (instruments are held by one, fertilizer by another, a detailed plan for planting - by the third and so on). Thus, participants will need to collect all the necessary components: making exchanges, going to each other's homes or making preliminary arrangements. In this way, we obtain an excellent opportunity for communication. For a proper fit in the end, college students, gardeners and scholars will also be involved.

Motivation: At the conclusion of the project, a small yard festival with mov-

ies about the lilacs could be staged, workshops (various lilac products could be prepared, such as jam, liqueurs and perfume), food kiosks, photo exhibitions and stories about Kolesnikov.

These are options in the case of success and residents' responsiveness. Moreover, there is a reward: resolution of one of the existing problems in the yard.

In condominiums ("cooperativny dom"), it is possible to organize gardens on rooftops. Alternatively, in the same way we can green balconies.

Instead of mailing materials to participants, it is maybe worthwhile to use a website as a communication platform. After registration, the visitor becomes a participant and receives all the necessary information and materials. The advantage gained from this approach is the ability to download various formats of content.



Other potential combinations for social branding projects (according to the scheme)

Peter the Great's botik + ponds system + boating (little paper ships) + legend of Bauman bridge

The story of Young Peter the Great, who invented the botik, or small boat, and is also known as the grandfather of the Russian fleet, is related to Izmailovo. According to blogs, boating with children is one of locals' favorite activities. The festival of water lanterns is a good example of how a family-activity oriented event could be created (including family team competition in ship modeling and restoration and redesign of old boats). There is also a legend for lovers connected to the Bauman Bridge (an echo under the bridge predicts the lovers' future together). Living this legend on a self-made boat could become a beautiful tradition as part of the festival.

Izmailovo Park + first big dipper in Russia + second stage of bulldozer exhibition of avant-garde artists in the 60's + Mime and Gesture Theater + Outsiders' Museum + local band "Natoptishi"

The area could gain the status of a free art territory, following from the story of the bulldozer exhibition in 1974. Actors from the Theater of Mime and Gesture could be engaged, and artwork from the Outsiders' Museum could be exhibited on trees (like artists did in 1974). The story of first big dipper could also become the subject for artwork, or part of them, or even a site for an exhibition.

Wild beast shew in imperial past on the territory of Izmailovo Park + many dovecotes + first in Russia experimental apiary + otters that have been living there at one time + the biggest Zoo in the country planned in Soviet times but never built

Conclusion

Following the scheme of the identity formulation and social engagement, we arrive at a social place brand. Organized conditions allow people to build the premises for forming a brand and highlighting a place identity themselves, thereby improving the environment through concrete steps and actions that they take together. With the help of this approach, it is possible to kill two birds with one stone. First, this approach leads people to take more responsibility for something shared by taking care of it together, thereby improving quality of life and becoming a bit more independent from top-down decisions. Second, this approach creates an honest brand, representing the unique identity of a place. Eventually, locals will become a source of information provision, preserving and adapting the brand.

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