The image as a determinant factor of local development: lies and contributions

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Abstract

One of the stages of any strategy of local development is to attract interesting people that can make it stronger. Appointed as a basic determinant of the people and business reaction and as a factor of attraction, the image appears an important point of analysis. It can be a competitive differential, but in the long run an image incoherent with reality can cause disillusionment and transform itself into an irreversible question to the public. Belo Horizonte city is in the process of implanting a strategy that aims to place itself as an attractive city to a specific target: the business tourist. This work intends to verify if the image divulged in the promotional material of the city is coherent with the image of the city for a public that can be seen as an opinion former. In order to achieve this objective people that occupy positions of prominence in the city such as municipal secretaries, artists, entrepreneurs, journalist and professors were interviewed. The results demonstrate that the city has to do much work in important areas such as the basic structure and learn to value its own culture and history working hard to show itself a little different from others, creating an image more coherent and suitable.

Introduction

The contemporary society presents many transformations. Among these, it is possible to distinguish the influence of the enterprise thought in people’s life. In fact, this kind of thought is “invading” spaces that previously could be considered almost inaccessible to concepts such as: effectiveness, productivity, customers, among others. Recently, one of the possible examples that can be observed is the transposition of the strategic development concept from the organizations to locals. In this perspective places are feeling the impact of the revolution in technology and communication. Consequently, they have to
generate their own resources and plans to enhancing their relative competitive positions. (Kotler [1]) defends that:

“If places compete with every other place, than places that want to win must think more like business, with specific products and specific customers for those products (...) must be excellent or superior in some way (...)”

This paper intends to verify the strategy of a city that are looking for becomes better in something and improve its development. First planned city of Brazil, Belo Horizonte city was inaugurated in 1897. Initially Planned to be a “metropolis" of two hundred thousand inhabitants, today there are about 2.2 million inhabitants. It has presented the majority of the existing problems of great cities. Although the difficulties that has been facing, it is trying to insert itself in the current trend establishing a development strategy - positioning it self as an attractive city to business tourist. In order to reach this objective the local government direct its marketing efforts to design a suitable image to the city. This is the reason that makes Belo Horizonte city being considered interesting as study’s object of this research.

The research was done through interviewers with inhabits of Belo Horizonte city that could attend criterias like:

- Can be considered as an opinion former.
- To live or to work in the city for the past ten years.
- To have strong affective laces with the city.

Ten people that occupy position of prominence in the city were interviewed. In exactly numbers: one journalist, two municipal secretaries, one assistant municipal secretary, one town councillor, one commercial association representative, one industrial association representative, one professor, one writer and one compositor. Despite being not considered a big number it was considered suitable once the research had qualitative characteristics.

The table below shows that all the interviewed people have lived in the city about twenty years. This attend the second criteria established.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Came to the city in the following year:</th>
<th>Number of interviewed people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950-1959</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1979</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was born in Belo Horizonte</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The strong affection feeling of the interviewed people can be confirmed by declarations below:

“I like Belo Horizonte very much (...) I can not imagine myself in another place, neither in Minas Gerais, neither Brasil. Here I have my relationship, my familiars circle. All my relations like person are here”. (industrial association representative)

“My life’s references are all most here...at least the most important such as: family, friends, and geography too. This means that wherever I go, I know that I will arrive and meet someone that I know. (compositor)

“My ties of friendship was all built here in Belp Horizonte city. It is where I intend to live intensively. So I think that here is my distinguished space of human realizations”. (town councillor)

It is necessary emphasize that in order to guarantee the veracity and reliability of the declarations the interviews had been recorded and transcribed.

The city strategy

As said, Belo Horizonte city is positioning itself as an attractive city to the business tourist. The positioning strategy is frequently defended supported in the argument that people have an limited capacity to hold back information. In this perspective, the current society, characterized for the great amount of similar products offers, demands, each more time, to distinguish itself from others through an efficient strategy of communication. Once our society is characterized by the big number of disseminated information, the mentioned limitation, does not permit that the majority of these messages can be efficiently assimilated. The positioning theory defenders, say that the form to facilitate the absorption of the information is to create a defined position in the potential customer’s mind . The position created must be coherent with the perspectives and with the previous knowledge of the individual, once it is more easy to remind a message when it is not incoherent with the preexisting values (Ryes & Trout [2]).

In Belo Horizonte city some acts of the local government can demonstrate that the city is trying to position itself. Some examples are easy to be foud. They are:

- Belo Horizonte Convention e Visitors Bureau Creation
- COMTUR – Municipal Council for Tourist creation
- Promotional material specially prepared to attend this objective

Among these material that divulges the city, it is possible to find affirmatives such as “Belo Horizonte has a privileged location with an infrastructure for quality tourism (...) The elevated number of events made in the city shows the potential of Belo Horizonte in the specialized tourism’s sector (...)”.
The analysis of this Belo Horizonte strategical positioning was done through the limits established by TAVARES [3]. This author defends that the positioning strategy is not suitable in three cases:

- Competitors in a big number and the product type does not bring the expected to the investments in communication in order to obtain a good positioning.
- Competitors are very strong in term of market participation forming an enter barrier.
- Competitors have a good positioning and the organization – in this case the locality – does not have a big difference in its suitable characteristics.

The first limit factor does not seem to be a problem to Belo Horizonte strategy. Nowadays, the image appears as an important point of analysis once it is appointed as a basic determinant of the people and business reaction and as a factor of attraction. Consequently, more and more politicians and development agents noticed that the promotion is a way to turn better the local’s attributes transforming it in an attractive city. Many examples can be found in the American and European literature. Authors like KOTLER [4], NASAR[5], and SMIRNOFF[6] are some examples. Barcelona is the practice case more commented and known.

One of the arguments that justifies the tourism like a good future option is its grown. This sector represents 81,5% of the municipal GPD and grew 25,5% in the period of 1993 to 1996. The municipal GPD grew 22,5 while the state GPD grew 14,7% and the national GPD grew 13,7%” (VIEIRA, [7]).

In the second limit factor Belo Horizonte city seems to be in a less suitable position. The analysis of the interviews demonstrates that people recognize other cities that are adopting the same strategy of Belo Horizonte and that can be considered its competitors. Although none got the position of “excellent” to the business tourist” in a definitively form, Curitiba city seems to be in a better situation than all the others.

“I don’t know....maybe Curitiba. It is funny but Bahia has done an amazing work in business and international tourism. Bahia is changing. It is adding the traditional tourism to the business tourism. It’s amazing what these people has done in the last years...agility. You can have another examples like Florianópolis in Santa Catarina: this city has a recreation tourism and it is trying to change. But the two more important cities are Curitiba and Salvador.” (commercial federation representative)

“Curitiba is working in a systematic way, Fortaleza and Salvador” (secretary assistant)

Curitiba is the best Brazilian example (...). In part Salvador is doing this strategy. I don’t Know if I agree or not with the
polices that they have adopted there. São Luiz is doing this in a very interesting way. In part, Fortaleza too. So you can see that there are many cities. The principal city that is not a capital city adopting this strategy is Ribeirão Preto. (professor)

The third limit factor, like the first one, doesn’t seem to be opposite to the strategy. In fact, analysis of some dates shows that Belo Horizonte city has some characteristics that incentive the investment in the sector. Among others, it is possible to distinguish:

- Strategically positioned in the southeast of the country, reasonable near to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Belo Horizonte has proximity with the biggest consumer market polarizing 100 Km of extension, 6 millions people and about 80 cities.
- The capital has tourist attraction and can be considered relatively safe.
- In terms of quality life it was indicated by the committee of Washington as the best city to live in Latin America.
- It has the third consumer potential in the country. It lost just to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in terms of foods, thing and services buys. Per inhabitant, in Belo Horizonte city the consumer is 52% bigger than the Brazilian average.

In the interviewed opinions the chosen focus – attracting the business tourist - seems to be coherent chosen:

“I think that it is correct. First, because Belo Horizonte is in the center of a region that has historical cities. For example...Diamantina is a little far....but there are Ouro Preto, Congonhas, Sabará, São João Del Rey, Tiradentes. Besides the region is really beautiful, and it is a good city”. (Compositor)

“The business tourism is fundamental because it is really the vocation of Belo Horizonte... for at least two reasons. At first because of its vocation to the service (...) it has expanded so fast , hasn’t it? Belo Horizonte installed itself as a service city in a so expressive way because it has in this sector of services particularities so big that can project it into the big cities in the world. (Professor)

“The business tourist is important because many times he doesn’t come here just to sell but normally he comes here with the objective of buying too(...) Many times he has the objective of establish here So its necessary to have a program to attract the business tourist. Belo Horizonte doesn’t have another activity. It is not a touristy city, It is not a historical city (industrial association representative)

Even the strategy apparently has a good acceptance and the limiting factors do not define it as an impossible plan, its simple adoption not guarantee that it has a
successfully development. It is necessary to work in it, defining the way that the positioning will be done.

Promotional strategy

One way that it tries to position itself is through the promotional material to promote the city and construct a positive image. In fact, some authors like KOTLER [4] defends that even the local has a good infrastructure and many attractions it can not be well succeed once the image that it has is not suitable to the target public. The target public has a tendency to adopt suitable factors to his necessities and exactly this can be not in accordance with his exigency.

BARICH e KOTLER[8] put the promotion among the factors that can be considered determinant in the formation of the corporate image. Once there aren’t studies to a local perspective the figure was adapted to this paper. It could be delineated such as:

Figure 1: Image factors and their attributes

However, the criticisms about the way that Belo Horizonte city has been promoted was very strong. The majority of the interviewed people considered the actions very light. Some of them have said that they didn’t know the divulged
material; others didn’t know even the sectors created with this responsibility like the Belo Horizonte Convention and Visitors Bureau and the COMTUR – Municipal Council Tourist.

“No, I do not know. Maybe Belotur has something ....but I thing that it is very few. (..) I think that it is little divulged”. (compositor)

“It is very few.... very, very few. We don’t have a minimum of aggressively. (Assistant secretary).

“No, I don’t know. Maybe there is something...but I don’t know”. (writer)

“I don’t know ” (association representative)

Some of them have done critics even stronger about the divulged material. Maybe this can be justified by the opinion of the interviewed people. Despite of the relative recently formation, they see Belo Horizonte like a rich city in culture and historicity;

“Belo Horizonte has to promote Belo Horizonte”. (writter)

“Belo Horizonte needs to “baianizar”. We have to learn with Bahia how to divulge a city that has this potential (...).” (writer)

“Belo Horizonte has a strong potential artistic”.

“Belo Horizonte doesn’t know to commercialize its image (...) concentrates everything in Pampulha doesn’t solve. Pampulha is dated by 1942, and after this?? don’t we have existence? Haven’t we done history? Where is this history and this culture? And where is the history that tell us this”? (Professor)

However, big events that have been placed in the city seems to stimulated a better and bigger promotion of the city.

‘Since AICA we noticed that there is a stronger compromise of the government in doing folders. Before this, I didn’t know anything. You had that material of Belo Horizonte but nothing about the business tourist. This material began to appear...today you have folders...It is something that in 1993 you couldn’t find...In that time you had nothing (Federation representative)

“I know the material done in Célio de Castro administration. Both “Forum da Americas and mercocidades” (...) (Municipal secretary)

Even thought, the comment below shows shows the opinion of just one interviewed, the importance that it had is enormous. In fact, NASAR [5] emphasize that even some aspects of the city can suggest a masked reality, a positive but unreal image communication without an efficient project can be a killer of all the possibilities of local development. It means that if presented an
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incoherent image with the reality is presented in the long term it can be turn in a irreversible cause. This means to justify the importance of the declaration below:

“Unfortunately, some publishers that works by order, divulge the city in an ideology form to attend necessities and to get benefit. We want to say this because and another for that(...)”.

Finally the research showed that the interviewed people has a good notion of the image’s importance opposite what could be thought

“The tourist image of the city can be a determinat factor of investment” (professor)
“I Think that is necessary to divulge Minas in other countries and it is necessary to divulge Belo Horizonte in others countries”. (Writer)

Conclusion

The adoption of business concepts to a local development strategy is something very complex. Mainly the promotion can cause much resistance. But if it is done in an ethical way respecting limits of the reality promotion can attract investments and interesting people to the local.

The research shows that the promotion can be seen in a positive way by the population when it is done in a correct form. It Shows also that Belo Horizonte seems to have the focus in an interesting strategy to its reality – the business tourist attraction, but it needs, among other things to be aggressive in its promotional and try to work better in the image that it is trying to transmit. The valorization of the historical and cultural aspects can be a good way to defer it from others in the same time that can turn bigger the citizen feeling of the inhabits. Once this is a qualitative research the opinions can not be generalized to all the population

The suggestion to future works is to concentrate in studies about tourists way of life and in things that he valorize. This is a study of a case, so it is possible to study other places adopting this perspective. It is also possible to do a quantitative research, studying the general population.

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