

The Control of Tourism Destination Image: From Bureaucracy to Adhocracy

Donna Sears
Terrance Weatherbee
F.C. Manning School of Business
Acadia University
Wolfville, NS Canada

Background

Traditionally, various government agencies were tasked with – and resourced for – the development and promotion of their regions, including the crafting of the destination/regional brand(s). Governments, as the sole custodians of the tourist brand, were also responsible for projecting the image to potential visitors. This typically included activities such as: advertising campaigns (print media and sometimes television/radio), trade shows, and familiarization (FAM) tours. However, a new paradigm for tourism branding which emerged in Western democracies in the 1970s, has changed the roles and ‘balance of power’ between public and private actors in tourism development and branding. The New Public Management Model (Hood, 1991) had far-reaching – if sometimes unintended – effects that have shifted the way destination brands are now managed. Principally, we have seen a movement which shifts the primary control away from government institutions and agencies; first, to public-private partnerships; and then to a place where private organizations in the marketplace have an even greater voice.

Aims

The aim of this paper is to describe the historical evolution of destination/regional brand management in Nova Scotia (NS) - and to surface the changes of the actors, their relations, and how this has impacted the Province’s tourist brand.

Method

This paper is based on data that were purposively sampled (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) from a larger collection of material concerning the development of the NS grape and wine sector. This material was collected through a series of studies conducted by the authors over the last eight (8) years. Sources of publicly available data included: grape and wine sector websites; government publications (e.g., Doers & Dreamers Guide, government websites); local, national, and international news media; and press releases. These data have been supplemented by vineyard and winery site visits, informal conversations with industry stakeholders, and participant observations made whilst working in the NS wine and tourism sectors.²

Case Analysis

The NS Public Archives asserts that “Tourism has always been an identifiable industry in Nova Scotia since the 1870s, built consistently on strength, adaptability, versatility and collaboration. From the earliest days right up to the present, visitors have been tempted with marketing, tourist literature, places to go and things to do ...” (Canada’s Ocean Playground). Since the 1920s, custody of the NS brand was the purview of various government departments, most recently the Department of Economic Development and Tourism (Canada’s Ocean Playground). These departments were tasked with the crafting of the modern provincial tourism brand. One which was memorialized in the enduring provincial license-plate slogan: *Canada’s Ocean Playground*. Thus, the brand was firmly rooted in Nova Scotia’s Atlantic coastal geography. A maritime theme that would form the core of the brand and which would be expressed through the development of coastal routes, shipbuilding and the Bluenose, and the historical traditions of the sea embedded in local culture!

In Nova Scotia’s case, the first step in the paradigm shift for tourism brand responsibility was when the NS Government created the Nova Scotia Tourism Agency (NSTA), as an arm’s length Special Operating Agency, in 2011 (Delaney, 2012). This transition was intended to separate the politics of tourism from policy development for tourism. The next transformation came when the NSTA was

² One of the authors has consulted for several NS wineries and has worked with Tourism Nova Scotia.

transformed to Tourism Nova Scotia (TNS), a Crown Corporation, in 2015. This change was intended to further shift the responsibility for the NS brand away from political control. Following in the footsteps of New Public Management principles (Walsh, 1995), the mandate of TNS is "... to grow Nova Scotia's tourism industry and to maximize the value of tourism to Nova Scotia's economy" (Corporate Overview). As such, TNS sees itself as the primary steward of the NS brand.

Concurrent with the structural and institutional changes to how tourism development and brand management occurred within the province, three other factors contributed directly to the change in how tourism brand management was enacted. First, the rapid growth in the grape and wine sector in the first two decades of the 21st century introduced strong new market-based players with a vested interest in expanding tourism. Second, the government's growing focus and emphasis on rural economic development amplified the voices of these new players and reinforced their presence in the tourism economy. Third, the shift of tourism branding to multi-media platforms which undercut NPM principals and created a concomitant diffusion of brand presence (Dinnie, 2015).

Burgeoning Grape and Wine Sector

Nova Scotia has seen rapid expansion in the grape and wine sector, growing from a small handful of wineries to a couple of dozen in a mere decade. This growth has been welcomed as a rural development success story, heralded by government and media alike. These emerging wineries are firmly rooted in NS due to both the prominence of terroir in the traditions of fine winemaking and the legislative and market pressures to produce wine made solely from Nova Scotia-grown grapes. Moreover, the *Nova Scotia Farm Winery Policy* implores the Province's wineries to position themselves within the tourism sector while legislation dictates that direct-to-consumer sales are more lucrative than selling through the Province's monopoly alcohol retailer, the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation (NSLC). Thus, individual wineries and co-operative initiatives (such as the Wolfville Magic Winery Bus) expend a good deal of effort to promote the notion of wine tourism to (and within) the province. The widespread celebration of wine industry success – and its inevitably rural location – have encouraged the Provincial Government and TNS to consistently feature grape and wine in provincial branding activities. For example, wine tourism was celebrated with the photo of an iconic NS vineyard on the cover of the widely-distributed *Doers & Dreamers Guide* in 2013. Both government and NSTA/TNS recognized the opportunity – created by the province's wine entrepreneurs – to encourage the development of 'wine region' as an important component of the regional brand.

Praising of Rural Economic Development

While celebrating the grape and wine sector's potential to encourage tourism, government also recognized that this success story was an important opportunity to highlight its record on rural economic development. Given the province's rural nature (about ½ the population lives outside the Halifax Regional Municipality, the main urban centre) there has long been pressure to provide economic opportunities in the often economically less-fortunate rural areas. The grape and wine sector success story has provided significant opportunity for government to bandwagon. For instance, the government-created incentives: such as the Vineyard Development and Expansion Program used to encourage further development in the sector, and the Lieutenant Governor's Award for Excellence in Nova Scotia Wines to highlight the sector's wine quality.

Technology-Enabled Disintermediation

In the past, government tourism agencies were the only bodies that applied resources to brand development. In parallel with the instability created by changes in the structure of tourism oversight in the province (from government department to NSTA to TNS), disintermediation/fragmentation due to technology have given every organization a virtual megaphone and decoupled the custody of the brand from the policy/planning process (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow & Tinkler, 2006). Moreover, advances in technology have been so swift that governments – not known for their nimbleness – have found it very difficult to keep up. Furthermore, existing businesses – and their industry associations – have often lobbied to maintain the status quo, despite facing down the 'oncoming train' of technological advancement. One high profile example – across many jurisdictions – is the attempt to rein in Airbnb, Uber, and other sharing economy platforms. It is fair to say that governments, in general, have failed to keep pace with the impact of these new realities. These new platforms have thus facilitated a shift in brand control from government actors serving public interests to private actors serving market interests. It is not always the case that these two interests are aligned.

Conclusion

In the NS context, the confluence of these three factors means that the Nova Scotia brand is now being shaped and promoted more by actors in the market than by government policy. Representations of the NS tourism brand are increasingly more diffuse, and potentially more diverse, than they once were. In a climate of lean government budgets, this could provide an advantage as there is potential to stretch branding dollars. Thus, perhaps, the time is ripe for government tourism agencies (such as TNS) to acknowledge this change and shift focus from attempts to control the brand to working to coordinate the brand, providing appropriate resources to those who – on this new ‘level playing field’ – undertake to promote it. To do otherwise risks even more destination confusion in the marketplace.

Contribution

This work adds to the ongoing discussion of destination/regional tourist brands, highlighting how there has been a shift in control of the brand from public actors to private actors. Mapping the diffusion of the destination branding process across stakeholders will allow government agencies (such as TNS) to develop a coordination strategy specific to the public interest in a specific context.

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