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The interplay between urban policies and grassroots city brand co-creation and co-destruction during the refugee crisis: Insights from the city brand Munich (Germany)

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ABSTRACT

Up till now, only few researchers have looked at the dynamics that develop when citizens' collective actions co-create and eventually co-destruct a city brand. This research paper analyzes the interplay between urban policies and grassroots city brand development during the refugee crisis that had its peak in autumn 2015 in Germany. We chose the city of Munich (Germany) as the case, because the city has managed to communicate itself as an open and tolerant place. However currently, this city has increasingly been jeopardized by the refugee crisis and thus constitutes an extreme case illustrating city brand co-creation and potential co-destruction dynamics. Based on our qualitative research, we derive three propositions about city brand co-creation and co-destruction which aim to stimulate future research. In doing so, this research is a highly relevant example for cities in crisis, where collective action is supporting as well as challenging the co-created meaning of a place (brand).

1. Introduction and context

Cities are complex systems and this is reflected in the way their brand needs to be managed (Florek, Insch, & Gnoth, 2006; Zenker & Braun, 2017). A city brand is largely formed through a network of stakeholders and its management requires a collective approach involving the public and private sector (Braun, Kavaratzis, & Zenker, 2013; Klijn, Eshuis, & Braun, 2012; Merrilees, Miller, & Herington, 2012). Also urban policies, politics and legislation are developed and implemented in cooperation with a diverse network of actors (e.g., companies, tourism or political actors) and have a certain influence on the way a city brand develops (Klijn et al., 2012; Merrilees et al., 2012). The residents' attitude and loyalty towards the city in which they live, work and spend their free time must be reconciled with expectations of other stakeholders and predefined urban policies (Hanna & Rowley, 2011; Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015). In doing so, city brands are per definition co-constructed by their stakeholders (Braun et al., 2013; Klijn et al., 2012).

While researchers have looked into co-creational activities of brands in different contexts – such as business to consumer (e.g., Payne, Storbacka, Frow, & Knox, 2009; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013), business to business (e.g., Vargo & Lusch, 2011) or non-profit organizations (e.g., Juntunen, Juntunen, & Autere, 2013) – only few research has

taken up the challenge to analyze residents' collective actions and their co-construction and eventual co-destruction of city brands (e.g., Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015; Warnaby, 2009). These actions signify something about both the people and the place, and that signification renders a place with meaning (Braun et al., 2013; Freire, 2009).

This research is a highly relevant example for cities in crisis, where collective actions are supporting as well as challenging the dynamic social construction of a city brand (cf. Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). This article aims to explore the issue of co-creation and eventual co-destruction of city brands within the interplay between urban policies and residents' collective actions. We rely on the city of Munich case (Germany) which constitutes an extreme case illustrating city brand co-creation and co-destruction dynamics during the recent refugee crisis. Based on our qualitative research, we derive three propositions about place brand co-creation and co-destruction which aim to stimulate future research.

2. Urban policies and grassroots city brand co-creation and co-destruction during the refugee crisis

In recent years, social migration flows from refugees from all over the world have presented EU legislators as well as those responsible for city marketing and branding with great challenges. Amongst other

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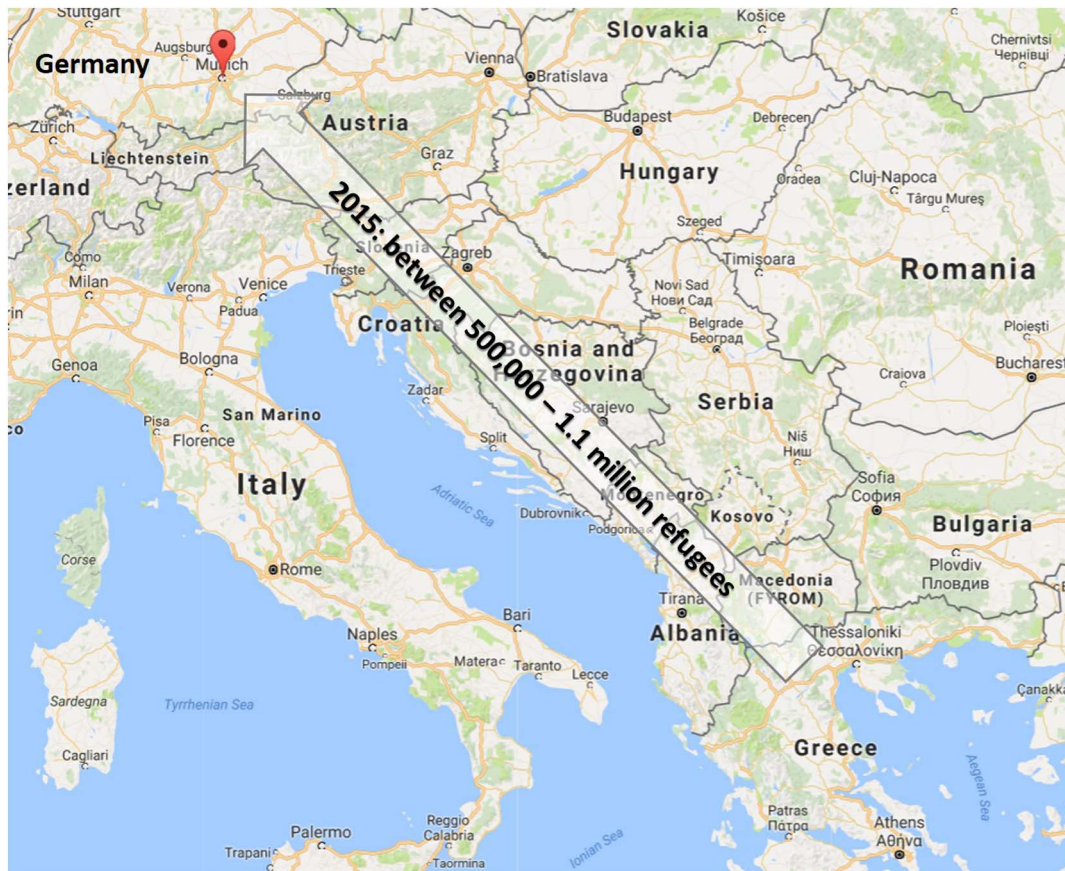


Fig. 1. The Balkan route.
(Source: Google Maps and own adaptation)

European countries, Germany faced the situation of about 1.1 million refugees entering the country in 2015. Such social developments influence city brand management and urban brand co-creation (Sevin, 2014).

2.1. Refugee movements

According to the statistics of the UN refugee agency UNHCR (2016), worldwide more than 60 million people have to flee from civil wars or expulsions, or leave their country to escape poverty. In the year 2015, Germany accepted 476,649 initial applications for asylum (BAMF, 2016a), while the German IT program “Easy” (used for the initial distribution of asylum seekers), registered between 890,000 and 1.1 million asylum seekers across Germany. In that year, Germany reached the so far highest number of asylum seekers ever registered (BMI, 2016). Fig. 1 shows the so-called “Balkan route”, with Munich as gateway to Germany.

Increasingly, German policy distinguishes between *civilian war refugees* (especially Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan) on the one hand, and *poverty refugees* (especially from the countries of the Western Balkans, i.e., Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia) on the other hand. While civilian war refugees are currently able to count on recognition in Germany, the poverty refugees are to be sent back to their home country as quickly as possible (BMI, 2015).

In Bavaria, the absolute figure of asylum seekers registered in 2015 was 67,639. With this number, the federal state ranked first, followed by North Rhine-Westphalia (66,758) and Baden-Wuerttemberg (57,578). A year later, in 2016, Bavaria witnessed an increase of 21.23% in registrations – in absolute figures 82,003 (bpb, 2017). At the end of September 2016, data on a total of 9352 refugees were available

in Munich: 1782 were counted in the Munich initial reception centers, 2914 in state refugee shelters and 4656 in the municipal refugee shelter. As a result, the number of people in Munich's refugee shelter has increased by 2049 since December 2015. The number of refugees in Munich's first-time admissions declined slightly, while the accommodation capacities in public and municipal community accommodation rose significantly (City of Munich, 2016b). Fig. 2 indicates in which countries Munich's asylum seekers originate.

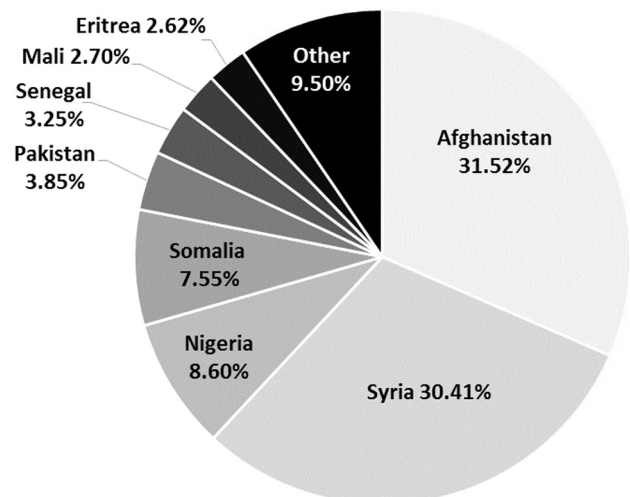


Fig. 2. Principal home countries of the refugees in Munich's refugee center, stock 29.02.2016.
(Source: City of Munich, 2016b)

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