



City / Nation / Place

COLLABORATION IS KING

**IDENTIFYING THE KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR
COLLABORATION IN PLACE BRANDING**

August 2021



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ABOUT CITY NATION PLACE

City Nation Place provides a forum for cities, nations, and places to collaborate and share best practice on place branding and place marketing strategies in order to generate sustainable tourism and economic development, build cohesive communities, and encourage global cooperation.

Alongside the City Nation Place Global conference which was first launched in London in 2015, City Nation Place has established a number of must attend events for engaged decision-makers around the world who are actively involved in developing and implementing place brand strategies. Citynationplace.com provides a hub of place brand and marketing knowledge and insights, discussing key trends, providing strategic insights, and sharing case studies of best practice through articles and webinars.

In January 2021, City Nation Place Connections was launched, a new membership initiative to foster greater collaboration and knowledge sharing.

THANK YOU!

A huge thank you to everyone who contributed to this report by reviewing content, sharing their experience, and providing a listening ear when needed.

Particular thanks go to Stewart Colovin, Esra Calvert, Chris Fair, & Konrad Jagodzinski, for contributing their knowledge to the report and for being so generous with their time.

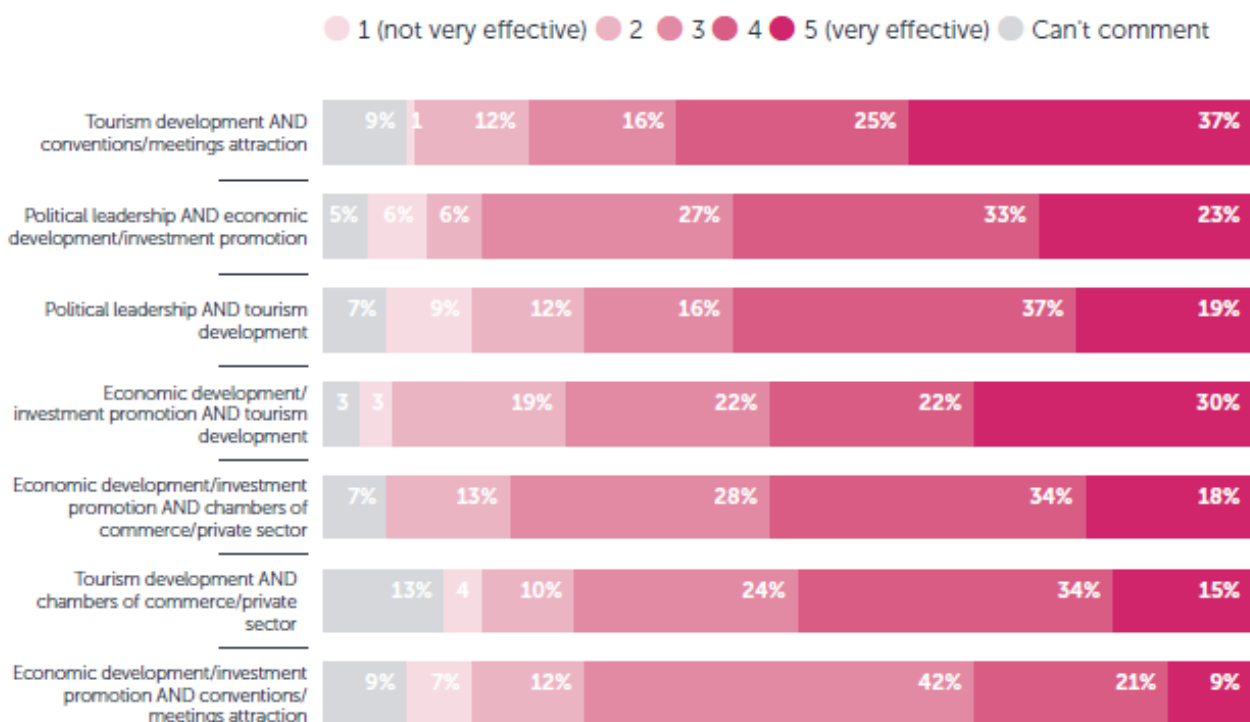
INTRODUCTION

City Nation Place was founded on a belief that effective collaboration between key stakeholders was the key to successfully promoting and managing the reputation of a city, region, or country. When tourism and economic development organisations pool their resources - and when your private sector and citizens are telling the same narrative - you can deliver truly positive change within your place. And it's a better use of resources – there's no need to repeat mistakes or reinvent the wheel if you're already integrating your learnings and strategies with your key stakeholders.

Within place branding, 'collaboration' could broadly encompass anything from working more effectively between your tourism and economic development partners, to engaging your private sector or local government, or even to initiating strategic partnerships with places halfway around the world. Each presents its own challenges and opportunities, and of course, it's rarely as easy as simply saying "let's work together!" and watching the pieces fall into place. Organisations within a place often have conflicting hierarchies, incompatible funding streams, and even incongruous ideals and objectives. However, if you're able to find a common ground and a common way of working, you can increase the impact of your strategies significantly.

In our 2021 research report, we asked our participants to rate the effectiveness of their collaboration with different entities in order to understand where collaboration was working best – and where the most common gaps are.

How effective are "internal" collaborations on a scale of one to five, where one is not very effective and five is very effective



Unsurprisingly, the best collaboration was seen between tourism development and MICE attraction organisations - perhaps because historically the success of a conference has often been measured in bed nights. The research does also highlight some of the weaker areas of cooperation within place promotion; for example, collaboration between MICE attraction and investment promotion organisations were ranked least effective. However, when places *are* able to join the dots between these organisations, the potential impacts of hosting an event increase exponentially - more on this in chapter 3!

Even where collaboration was rated highly between teams, there's still a lot of scope for improvement. 52% of respondents ranked the effectiveness of collaboration between their tourism and economic development teams at 'good' or 'very good' - but that still leaves 48% whose answers ranged from 'average' to 'not very effective'.

So what can places do to foster better collaborative relationships - both internally and with like-minded places around the world?

In order to understand how better partnerships between key stakeholders could provide a long-term benefits, we identified five major challenges facing places where collaboration could be the key ingredient to success:

- Creating a single unified story across all your place stakeholders
- Working with your partners to share data and insights to build an accurate picture of your place
- How business events, economic development, and tourism promotion can work in tandem to deliver more sustainable, resilient returns
- Developing a regional approach that allows you to collaborate with your neighbours instead of competing
- Understanding the soft power impact when we collaborate together on global issues

Working in tandem with a select group of experts (because we believe in living our ideals of collaboration!), we've collated thought leadership, innovative case studies and inspiration to help you address the challenges you're facing and to promote better collaborative partnerships within your city, nation, or place.

FINDING YOUR GUIDING STAR: CREATING A UNIFIED STORY ACROSS YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

STEWART COLOVIN, EVP, GLOBAL BRAND STRATEGY, MMGY



An effective place brand can build bridges between residents and visitors as well as unite the tourism, economic development and private and public sectors. It can help transform your organisation from being perceived as “that’s not who we are, that’s what they say to get tourists here” to one that embodies the true voice and soul of your destination. So how do you create your story? You must start by listening.

For a brand to be embraced as the essence of your community, it must be diverse and inclusive of all its voices, and most importantly, it must be accepted by those who call that place home. This not only appeals to residents but presents a level of authenticity that travellers are looking for.

Taking the time needed to listen and build consensus is invaluable in creating a sense of urgency, activating the community and developing brand advocates. In almost every instance, when a new place brand introduction goes badly or isn’t well-received by the community, it can be traced back to lack of community engagement and the perception that the new brand was conceived “behind closed doors.”

That’s why we recommend embarking on a series of listening sessions with a wide variety of stakeholders throughout your community. The purpose of these sessions is twofold: first, to understand their perspectives, and second, to build consensus. The simple act of listening to people’s opinions has the power to mend adversarial relationships, create unity within communities and demonstrate the value and importance of your organisation. And, when you introduce the new brand, it already has buy-in from your most important audiences.

Then, and only then, is it time to create your brand story. People tend to ask, “what’s our one thing?” The truth is, with places, it’s rarely just one thing that attracts travellers, meetings, businesses and new residents. But that’s okay, not every destination falls into a neat little box. It’s how all those things uniquely come together that will ultimately help create a brand that helps you stand apart from other places to tell your story.

In trying to show how they’re unique, places often use criteria that make them all the same. They talk about things like their friendly people, their great restaurants, their amazing weather, their storied past, their local craft brew scene, their emerging tech community or all there is to see and do as what sets them apart – and they might be right. They probably do have all those things and could arguably be the best at any of them. The problem is, if every other place is saying the same thing, who should people believe?

Creating a brand is all about being able to tell people who you are, what you stand for and why they should want to be involved. By identifying your community’s shared values, you can embrace who you are and celebrate what makes your community different.

Of course, once you’ve created your brand, your work has only just begun. Now it’s time to go back to your stakeholders and activate them as brand ambassadors. Building alignment and buy-in within the community is key to successfully introducing the new brand. This is why listening

and engagement at the beginning of the process are so crucial. Creating those relationships and building collaboration in advance makes brand deployment that much easier.

When done effectively, your place brand should be a platform the entire community can rally around. It should resonate with each of your audiences equally without presenting the destination as “something for everyone.” In a time when teams and resources are limited, it can also lessen the burden on your organisation to be the single source of all content.

Having a well-differentiated brand that resonates with residents and local stakeholders is more important to your destination than ever before. Not only will it help identify and define what you stand for but also how you and your partners can consistently deliver your brand promise every day. It will help guide decision-making in all your future endeavours.

FURTHER THINKING: IDENTIFYING YOUR PLACE DNA

Weaving a single narrative that works across your entire place is one of the most common challenges we see at City Nation Place. But this isn't to say that there aren't numerous case studies of places who have been hugely successful in identifying the values that unite their stakeholders. The path to success is different for every place, but here are some ideas that could inspire your thinking.

[Tasmania](#) and [Lithuania](#) both took a bottom-up approach to building their place narratives. Through a comprehensive series of interviews with citizens and other stakeholders, they distilled the core tenets that made up their place DNA. By beginning with the citizen perspective, the two places each created a place brand platform which was reflective of the everyday realities of the place, and could be used by all stakeholders.

[Auckland Unlimited](#), winner of our 2020 Place Brand of the Year award, united a broad array of stakeholders across the city by developing a series of

pillars within their place brand strategy that encompassed the spectrum of activity within the city. And by adjusting their messaging to incorporate Māori terminology, the team was able to meet both their own objectives and the desires of their residents. By shining a light on the continuing impact that Māori culture has had on the city, they created a brand narrative that resonated with local communities and also highlighted the vibrancy within the city that would attract tourism and investment.

Conversely, [Costa Rica's](#) nation brand success was driven from the top-down. United by a set of shared values, and inspired by a joint vision of de-carbonisation, the five key institutions within the Costa Rican government aligned under a single, ideological framework for the entire country. This has led to a number of coordinated actions implemented across multiple organisations, all working to position Costa Rica as a leader in sustainability - and to actualise their vision.

THE ART OF COLLABORATION AND DATA LIBERATION

ESRA CALVERT, CHIEF DATA ADVISOR, ZARTICO



Traditionally, destinations think of competitive advantage as activities related to their competition. In contrast, today competitiveness has a deeper meaning as it focuses on the core functions of an organisation. One elusive formula for competitiveness is data liberation as a strategic collaboration activity.

You may ask, WTF is Data Liberation? **Well, That's Fantastic!** Managing data is a tall order. According to a recent International Data Corporation (IDC) report, nearly 60 zettabytes of data were created in 2020. It is massive. Yet, our observations at destinations indicate that at least two-thirds of data goes unused. It is a brutal reality. Not only is data unused, but it also tends to live in silos. As a result, insights are hidden, fluid decision-making is handicapped, and trust is at risk among employees and stakeholders. Data Liberation is about unleashing data across departments by building a connective tissue across the destination to transform data into strategic insights and intelligence.

Using data to drive collaboration and demonstrate the impact

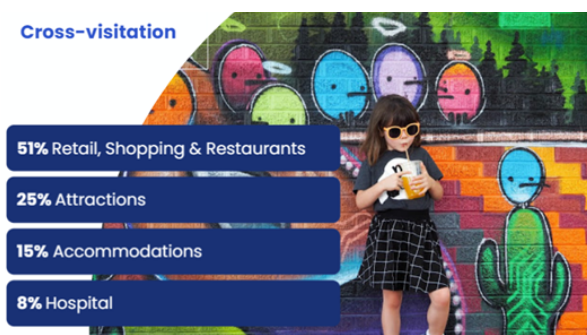
Many destinations' challenges are complex, but destination leaders know the DNA of their communities inside-out. The big unknowns are today's volatile shocks and the amount of data in the destination's hands. Here are three recommendations that innovative destinations are using to liberate insights effectively to build collaboration – and demonstrate its impact.

1 CASE STUDY: Transformative collaboration through shared insights

[Visit Aurora](#) (VA) is a small city nestled on the outskirts of Denver, Colorado. Traditionally, the destination has conducted the core business functions of meetings and conventions. However, when business travel was at a halt due to the pandemic, Bruce Dalton, CEO of VA, challenged his team to focus on what matters to their community and how they could work with local businesses and city offices to provide value. The tourism office pivoted immediately. They have always worked with minority-owned, small businesses, however, regeneration of neighbourhoods was a priority this time. Their collaborative work with VA, City of Aurora and Aurora Cultural Arts District resulted in the creation of Colfax Canvas, and outdoor mural festival in August 2020.



Cross-visitation

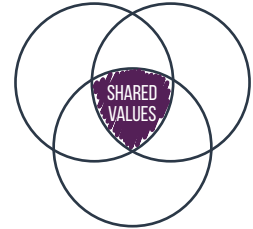


The outdoor mural festival, a walking and driving tour around Colfax Avenue, celebrates cultural diversity. The results were terrific: foot traffic to empty streets, beautification efforts (the murals are just stunning), visibility to local businesses, and contribution to an area's regeneration efforts. The destination accomplished this by showcasing shared success through place-based insights immediately. Approximately 3,700 attended

the event on its first weekend, and visitation was dispersed to a variety of businesses in the community.

The DMO is even evaluating crime data with the City to measure future efforts. It is an example of collaboration, culture, and creative use of intelligence. The festival returns on September 3, 2021.

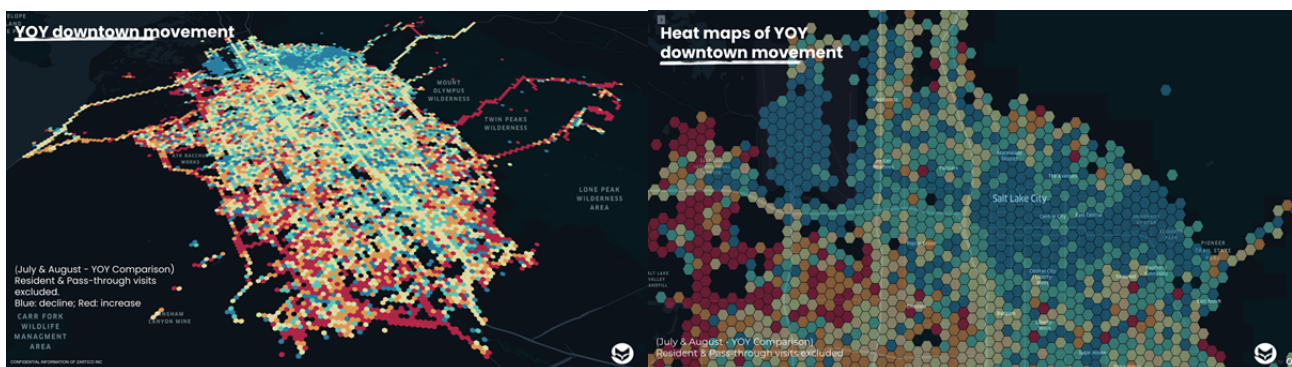
Takeaway: "As a trusted source and leaders in our community, having on-demand data is crucial to our success as a destination," says Bruce Dalton.



Build your narrative of insights within your community to show success through shared values. Aurora accomplished this by measuring visitor flow to local businesses in neighbourhoods going through transformative regeneration.

2 CASE STUDY: Sharing data to promote collaboration around a common challenge Utah is known for its breath-taking beauty of the outdoors. However, Salt Lake City is an urban city with diversified economies in technology, healthcare, banking, and tourism. [Visit Salt Lake](#) (VSL) has always had a routine cadence of reporting data for their community to make sure everyone operates from the same dictionary. During the early summer of 2020, while the outdoor destinations were doing well given the notion of safety, the pandemic devastated the urban areas. Cashflow was a challenge for many businesses, especially in the downtown area. Some 20% occupancy was a good day for hoteliers by the convention centre. VSL was concerned about the vitality of the downtown area so they illuminated key insights when working with their legislators and economic developers. Their intelligence was honed in the decline of business in the convention centre area:

- Visitor flow change
- Proof of origin market change
- Visitor economy value of convention centre visitors
- Convention centre visitors' movement pattern around the valley
- Competitive set comparison

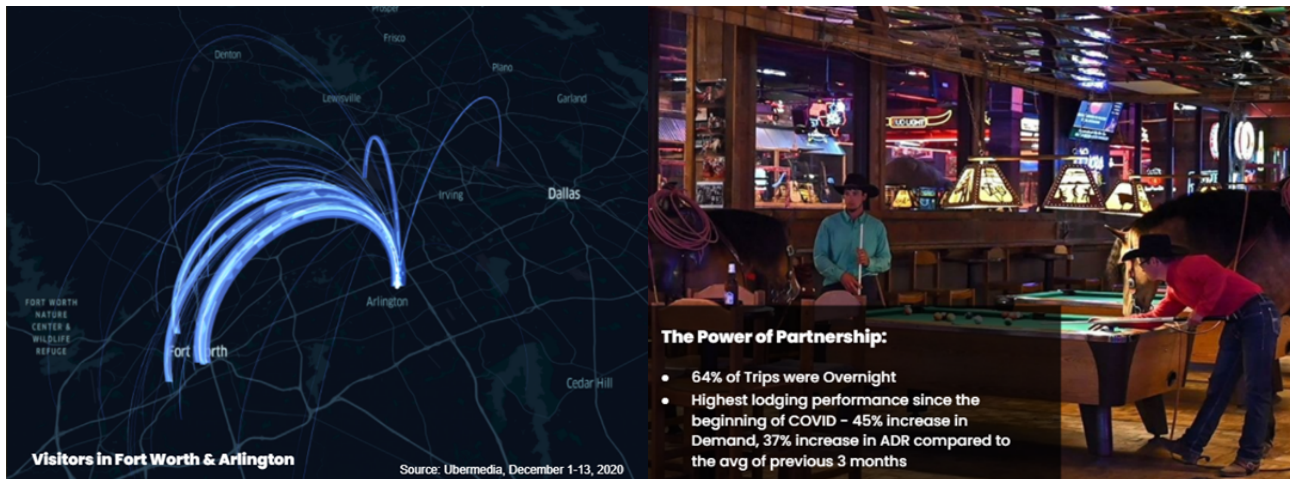


If their legislators did not act, the destination was running the risk of losing all of the key businesses around the convention center. By showcasing key data points of view, the [Meet in Utah](#) program was established with dedicated funding of \$1.2 million.

Takeaway: "If you make the case, you get the money," says Kaitlin Eskelson.

Don't bug your partners with pages of reports; make your point.

3 CASE STUDY: Using data to highlight the impact of place to place collaboration
During December 2021, two Texas communities - [Visit Fort Worth](#) and [Arlington CVB](#) - partnered to host a large event, National Finals Rodeo (NFR), in the midst of the pandemic. At normal times, these two destinations would have competed against each other. Instead, they realized that they had to place their individual goals aside and prioritize winning together. The results were astonishing: two-thirds of the visitors were overnight travellers dispersed around the region with safety in mind and the highest lodging performance since the beginning of the pandemic.



Takeaway: The two destinations were able to show NFR, local businesses, hoteliers, future event planners, stakeholders, and residents that it could host a major event safely and effectively.

The visitor economy encompasses many sectors as well as providing a quality of life for residents and visitors and supporting the livelihood of people. One key synergy is building unusual collaborative efforts through data intelligence in a transparent manner. Tech-driven data intelligence is the perfect hub for such growth initiatives to build transparency, trust, and shared values therefore collaboration. We call this phenomenon “the glass house.”

Data liberation starts with technology and data but ends with the **community**.

Ultimately, data can be a huge enabler for collaboration – to showcase the impact of your collaborative efforts, and when pooling together data and insights from across multiple organisations to create a holistic picture of your destination.

CREATING A COLLABORATIVE EVENTS PROPOSITION TO DELIVER LONGER-TERM POSITIVE RETURNS

KATIE PARKER, HEAD OF CONTENT, CITY NATION PLACE



The past year has seen business events shifting to virtual as international – and domestic – travel ground to a halt, but what does the future look like for the MICE sector? And how can aligning the values between your tourism development, investment promotion and conference attraction teams lead to a more collaborative and resilient proposition for your place?

The future of events is still very much in flux - while virtual events can't fully recreate the experience and connectivity of a physical event, they can certainly be more cost-effective for attendees and more climate-crisis friendly. While event organisations are working to understand what their conferences will look like in the near-future, there's an opportunity for destinations to work their MICE, investment, and tourism attraction teams to ensure they're offering the best proposition - and ensuring that every event leaves a positive legacy. But first, how can event organisers and destinations work in tandem to ensure that physical attendance at events is not only safe, but also offers real value and justifies both the budget and the carbon footprint? And what challenges will we likely be facing following the turmoil of the last eighteen months?

Competition will increase.

With people travelling to fewer conferences, the competition to attract the major business events will increase. Being able to clearly differentiate your proposition and your unique selling points will be key to winning bids.

Companies are increasingly looking to their Corporate Social Responsibility strategies.

The last year has re-emphasised the importance of addressing the social and environmental challenges we're facing, and both businesses and individuals are more aware of the impact their actions have on others. Part of the solution will be in addressing the carbon footprint that events carry, but also in understanding how you can deliver broader impact to the communities your conference organisers interact with.

The metrics we use to track success need updating.

Destinations attracting events need to re-think their strategies and understand how business events fit within the broader economic development picture to create an end-to-end experience that delivers for all. And that means that KPIs need to be evolved beyond heads-in-beds to understand the long-term impact that business events have on a place.

"What this means for DMOs is having a structure and staff on your team that have a strong understanding of government systems and networks to identify the local bid participants and hosts, while having citywide engagement at the highest levels prior to, during and after the bid," suggested Karen Bolinger, Strategic Advisor at BestCities Global Alliance and APAC Managing Director for PCMA. "This is no longer a business development activity – it's a complete engagement piece."

How can you identify your real unique selling points?

If you're seriously competing to attract events, the expectation is that you already have a convention centre and an array of nice hotels. It's a given – and it certainly doesn't make your proposition stand out from the crowd. Being able to support conference and event organisers

while they transition to a hybrid model will be a definite plus in the short-term, but looking to the future, what is that really makes your place stand out?

There are a few key areas that can help you identify your points of differentiation...

- The cultural opportunities available outside your convention centre
- The sectors and talent that you're investing in
- The connections and conversations you can facilitate between interested parties

PCMA's President & CEO, Sherrif Karamat, neatly summarised this for us: "You must ask yourself what else you can bring to the table. And if your government is investing in a key sector, then you can elevate that. Highlight the expertise you uniquely have access to and put it onto the global stage; it will allow you to truly differentiate your place."

This is really where improved collaboration between the key stakeholders in your place comes into play. Say you were trying to attract a large medical convention. Yes, it's important to know that you have the spaces that can accommodate the event, but imagine if you could also highlight that you had a world-class university specialising in medical research. Suddenly you're able to make connections between the convention organisers and the talent that is already in your backyard. You could suggest keynotes that you could help secure, provide opportunities for your students to showcase their own research, and demonstrate an incomparable expertise that associations will be interested in aligning themselves with. "Your business development team needs to be knowledgeable of the sectors that your client event organisers are working in – they're not just selling the convention centre, they're selling the connections they can bring to the event in terms of potential speakers and sponsors," explained Julie Coker, President & CEO at San Diego Tourism Authority.

Be more purposeful about the events that you attract

Once you understand your unique selling points, take the time to really understand which conventions will help you to further your own goals. Where's the overlap in the ambitions of the associations you're attracting and those of your own DMO & EDO?

"There are advantages to marrying the objectives of these global associations with your comparative advantage, because they want to go to where the best content and the best people in the world are," shared Lyn Lewis-Smith. "Work collaboratively with your economic development unit to work out what events you're going after, what's the impact that you're looking to leave – is it putting your soft power or your infrastructure assets on the world stage?"

Karen echoed this, stating that "A business event strategy aligned to economic development allows cities and nations to build their profile and reputation by attracting the world's best talent, trade, investment and job creation as well as developing a living city for its community. That's a win all round."

Help conference directors to deliver longer-term impact

At the moment, many of the metrics around success in MICE attraction are geared towards short-term gains, but leveraged correctly, events can have a hugely positive legacy that last well-beyond the close of the conference.

"I think that legacy is the new bottom line. We can't continue to talk about room nights when the added benefits of congresses are potentially enormous on so many metrics," shared Kit Lykketoft, Director of Conventions at Wonderful Copenhagen, as she outlined the ways Copenhagen are working with congresses to align vision and mission of all the key players at CNP Global 2020. "It's not only a shift towards a new way of working in the industry, but it also contributes to academic, to business, to societal recovery by using Congresses as a lever to inward investment, collaboration, fostering new research studies... All of these are paramount to

the recovery of the world.”

So how are places working to create legacy for their events?

Melbourne: International AIDS Conference

Beginning with an earlier example, Melbourne hosted the 2014 XX International AIDS conference. The City took an Australia wide approach, by bringing together AIDS patients, researchers, activists, and the government together under a single vision. And it created real change within the Australian approach to AIDS – right down to the fact that they had to overhaul government policy to allow people with AIDS into the country before they were able to bid for the event. It allowed them to foster a much broader conversation that aligned approaches to AIDS care across Australia and also engaged the community with a series of scheduled marches throughout the conference programme.

“It’s not about heads in beds – this is about life-saving and life-changing events that deliver back to destinations,” enthused Karen Bolinger.

Copenhagen: International Water Association

In 2022, Copenhagen will be hosting the IWA’s World Water Congress & Exhibition, and the team at Copenhagen’s Legacy Lab have been working closely with the event organisers to establish a clear legacy programme. The IWA’s own goals of being a catalyst for innovation, knowledge, and support for those pursuing ambitions around the water-related SDGs align nicely with Denmark’s own Water Vision 2025 which aims to increase people’s opportunities to access water, protect populations against floods and storm surges, and develop a carbon neutral water sector by 2030.

As well as being able to tap into the hub of expertise and innovation that already exists within Denmark, the IWA has worked with Copenhagen to develop an outreach programme that will spread the learnings beyond the conference attendees. From a week-long course aimed at Bachelor and Master students to developing recommendations on how to secure a zero-footprint in all types of production and distribution, the event will continue to contribute to water-related sustainable development goals for years to come.

Glasgow: COP 26

Glasgow’s successful bid to host COP 26 is a testament to a long-track record of hosting international events, but also to their commitment to their own sustainable credentials. It’s also providing the city with a platform to promote and accelerate their own carbon-neutral ambitions. However, one of the key ambitions for Glasgow’s Council Leader, Susan Aitken, is that Glaswegians understand that this event is happening with Glasgow – because of Glasgow – and not an inconvenience that is being inflicted upon them.

Glaswegians are also being encouraged to put forward their own schemes such as pop-up bike lanes or an urban forest on previously derelict land. “We decided early on we would connect with communities and ensure there was a two-way engagement between the event and the city,” explained Susan Aitken. “That is the Glasgow way.”

Rebuilding business events for a more prosperous future

Like many sectors, the MICE industry is in a state of flux – but this means its up to us to determine right now what the future of business events will look like. Will we slip back into old habits, or will we take this opportunity to rebuild in ways that deliver more positive, longer-term impacts for both destinations and event organisers?

“It’s not easy,” BeSydney’s Lyn Lewis-Smith asserted, “but if not now, when? We’re part of the recovery strategy. Marry up [your ambitions] now, and re-imagine what the future looks like in a collaborative approach to growing the industry in your own backyard.”

COLLABORATING ACROSS A REGION TO DELIVER REAL IMPACT

CHRIS FAIR, PRESIDENT, RESONANCE CONSULTANCY



Collaboration between stakeholders within a region makes perfect sense. But it's a lot easier to agree on in principle than to execute in practise.

For starters, our perception of most places is generally regional in nature. If you aren't from a place, the borders within a metropolitan area, county or region are largely invisible, or don't even exist. But for those that live within a city or region, it's quite the opposite – as granular as having perceptions of one side of an individual street being a more favourable place than the other. And that, in essence, is the greatest challenge we have to overcome in taking a regional approach to the branding or marketing of a city, county or region. To succeed, stakeholders have to be willing to let go of their own perceptions and understanding of the place in which they live and view the region as an outsider in order to create an effective regional strategy. Without that willingness, it's impossible to develop an effective strategy or brand.

The second and most difficult challenge to overcome in developing a successful regional strategy is structural. For the most part, the funding of destination marketing and economic development organisations is tied to very specific geographic areas based on where hotels are located or property taxes generated – and those geographic areas rarely align with how talent, companies or tourists perceive a place. In our experience, this can be overcome in one of three ways.

1 Top-down regional branding

The first, and easiest, way to develop and implement a regional branding or marketing strategy is for a state or national level entity with the authority and funding to lead it. For example, Fáilte Ireland, the country's national tourism development authority, has been very successful in developing regional brands like the Wild Atlantic Way to market the country to international visitors. Resonance's work with Fáilte Ireland to create the Ireland's Ancient East strategy brought stakeholders in eight different counties together. But one of the lessons learned in creating the Wild Atlantic Way was that a brand proposition built on a very specific route can be successful, but it can also be exclusionary for many stakeholders in a region who are not directly connected to that route. As such, the strategy for Ireland's Ancient East was to let the brand be defined by a collection of experiences, rather than a specific geographic area. And while the brand itself is "geographic" in its name, that strategy is not based on or defined by any specific borders.



2 Creating a regional alliance

The second, and most common, approach to developing a regional strategy starts with creating a formal regional alliance or organisation to develop, drive and manage the implementation of the strategy on a regional basis. In this case, stakeholders understand that the sum is more than the parts when it comes to place branding and marketing. A great example of this is the South-Bend Elkhart Regional Partnership that was established to bring 47 different communities in two different U.S. states together in order to take a cooperative, rather than competitive, approach to economic development. Our team at Resonance recently created a talent attraction strategy, brand and marketing campaign to raise awareness of opportunities in the region not only for those that live outside it, but within it as well, which the partnership successfully deployed to local audiences throughout the pandemic.

3 Collaboration at an organisational level

The last approach to creating a regional place brand or marketing strategy also starts at the organisational level. It is more complicated though as it involves merging existing organisations together. While mergers and acquisitions are commonplace in the business world, they are relatively rare in the public sector. In the first two approaches to creating a regional strategy, organisations at the local level continue to operate, and market, and eventually they often lose their alignment with the regional strategy. Unless strong regional leadership is maintained over time, the regional strategy often erodes as local level organisations pursue and develop their own strategies and messaging (after all they usually have people on their staff whose job is to do just that.)

The truest, and potentially most effective, form of regional place branding and marketing then involves merging local level organisations into a single regional organisation that operates under one regional brand. For example, the Mississippi Gulf Coast in the U.S. used to be marketed by three separate (and competing) destination marketing organisations in three different counties. A regional entity was created in 2011 to market the region and manage the compensation received from the British Petroleum for the damages caused by a major oil spill in the area. A few years later, Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast would go on to absorb those three local entities and Resonance then helped them and their stakeholders develop a regional strategy that led to the creation of a new regional brand and name for the organisation called "Coastal Mississippi." By combining their efforts (and funds) together, the organisation had the ability to tell a larger story to a larger audience than any one of the county level organisations could ever hope to achieve.



Whatever approach a region chooses to take, it's key that local level organisations subordinate their marketing efforts to the regional organisation and limit their marketing and communications to targeting people once they are within the region. Doing otherwise will undermine the regional strategy by potentially creating confusion in the marketplace.

In any case, it seems likely that we will see more regional collaboration in the future. With international tourism and investment largely at a standstill for more than a year as a result of the pandemic, local organisations have not only had more time to talk with each other, they've also been more focused on communicating and marketing to the audiences that were available to them, which have mostly been local. Ironically, this year long focus on connecting with local stakeholders and audiences may have just laid the groundwork for building better regional organisations, strategies and brands that will, hopefully, soon be shared with the world.

GLOBAL COLLABORATION AND THE IMPACT ON YOUR SOFT POWER

KONRAD JAGODZINSKI, COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR, BRAND FINANCE



Collaboration in the international arena enhances positive perceptions of your place brand and builds up your soft power, which in turn is the key to implementing your strategic agenda. Reluctance to collaborate undermines your soft power and can set you back relative to your peers.

The more you are seen to be positively interacting with others and – importantly – the more change you manage to effect, the greater the benefits to your brand perceptions and the greater your soft power, which you can then use to collaborate with others more effectively in an ever-expanding virtuous circle. Consequently, the more you collaborate and the more soft power you wield, the greater your influence on others and the easier it is for you to promote your strategic interests and achieve your strategic goals. Collaboration pays off. Soft power is essential. This is something that most place brands understand intuitively, but there is also academic and research evidence to support this assertion.

In theory...

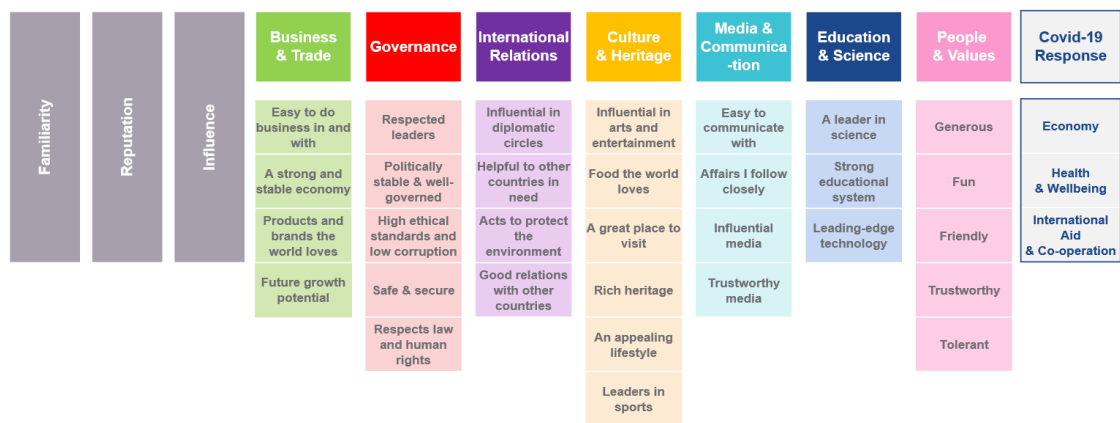
Soft power is a term coined by Harvard professor Joseph Nye in the late 1980s. It is the ability to influence other actors in the international arena through attraction or persuasion rather than coercion. The concept fits in with the neoliberal view of international relations which claims that complex interdependence between actors reduces the need for the deployment of hard power and encourages the use of soft power instead. In addition, neoliberals see the competition between international actors as a non-zero-sum game – a system which allows multiple actors to benefit at the same time without necessarily having their way at the expense of others.



Sounds familiar? Indeed, collaboration is the accepted modus operandi in our multilateral international order that in its very setup rests mostly on neoliberal principles. The rules are clear: to attract or persuade others to collaborate – you need soft power; and soft power can in turn be built up further through successful collaboration. This makes collaboration and soft power – to paraphrase the title of Nye's seminal publication – 'the means to success in world politics' as well as business, trade, investment, tourism, and any other field with an international dimension.

...and practice

There is also research-based evidence that collaboration can benefit your place brand. With a 75,000-respondent strong survey conducted in over 100 countries worldwide, Brand Finance's Global Soft Power Index is the world's most comprehensive research study on perceptions of nation brands, but lessons from it are applicable to place brands of all kinds. The Index covers a number of survey statements that help assess the perceptions of a nation brand's collaborative disposition – across different soft power pillars, such as easy to do business with, helpful to countries in need, and easy to communicate with. However, the perception boost is not limited to the particular policy areas where collaboration is taking place, and is usually more far-reaching through a general enhancement of the building blocks of soft power – Familiarity, Reputation, and Influence of the collaborating nation brands. The key pillar that collaboration also has a particular impact on is People & Values, which captures the perceptions of a nation's general attitude to others.



What illustrates best the importance of collaboration for soft power is perhaps a case study of a nation that recently saw its soft power significantly undermined by its reluctance to collaborate with others. United States recorded a steep decline in the [Global Soft Power Index 2021](#) compared to the previous year's results, making it the ranking's fastest-falling nation. Alongside a haphazard COVID-19 response, President Trump's unilateralist and combative international policy guided by the 'America First' slogan, cost the US its position as the world's soft power superpower, and a fall from 1st to 6th position in the Index. To name just a few decisions that went against the spirit of international collaboration, the Trump administration withdrew from WHO, UNESCO, the Paris Agreement, and important security treaties with Russia and Iran, as well as stopped paying its UN contributions and steered the nation on a crash course with traditional allies.



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America's fall from soft power grace was most visible in the Reputation metric where it dropped from 13th to 21st, and across the People & Values pillar where it saw lower ranks for all statements, with the slide from 5th to 50th for friendly probably the most shocking. Following Trump's hesitance to acknowledge the scale and severity of the coronavirus crisis and failure to act accordingly, the US also found itself at the very bottom of the COVID-19 Response metric. However, the general public ranked the nation 105th - not just for its efforts to protect the health and

wellbeing of its citizens, but also for its failure to offer international aid and co-operation. In the face of these wide-ranging reputational challenges, the Biden administration has an important task to rebuild America's international credibility. Interestingly, some of President Biden's first decisions have been to re-join the international organisations and agreements which his predecessor had left and to offer gestures of good will towards America's traditional allies in Europe and beyond. As our data shows, the US is still perceived as highly influential in international relations, which should help its reputation to recover under President Biden's new 'America is Back' policy.

What now?

The example of the United States shows that collaboration is absolutely essential not even for place brands to succeed in the soft power game, but to make sure they stay in that game in the first place. The single most serious global crisis since World War II – the COVID-19 pandemic – will be the biggest test for international collaboration in a long time. Will the developed nations share their vaccine supplies with the developing world? Will WHO and other multilateral organisations stand up to the challenge? Will the global fight against climate change suffer at the expense of the focus shifting to the health crisis at hand? Time will tell, but those that fail to engage with the international community, should probably start planning their image-saving campaigns already today.



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