



Dr Nadia Kaneva

Critical Reflections on Nation Branding as Discourse and Practice

Abstract

In the past ten years, the term *nation branding* has gained significant attention in business, policy, and intellectual circles. Faced with the pressures of globalization, numerous countries around the world have invested in various branding efforts in the hopes that by managing their national images better would allow them to gain economic and political capital in the global marketplace. The practices of nation branding are perhaps most visible in the form of promotional campaigns within the fast growing sector of international tourism. However, proponents of nation branding argue that its scope extends beyond mere advertising but, rather, must underlie all aspects of national governance and policy. This view is consistent with a neo-liberal capitalist agenda that, as Armand Mattelart has argued, presents the market and technology as irresistible forces of nature.

This paper approaches the discourses and practices of nation branding through a critical lens, rooted in the traditions of political economy and field theory. From this vantage point, the paper questions the ability of nation branding to deliver on its promise of providing economically disadvantaged nations with a new competitive edge. In addition, the paper considers the implications of nation branding for the political dimensions of nationhood and participatory citizenship. The analysis focuses on certain anti-democratic tendencies that are embedded in the logic of nation branding. Further, it points out ways in which nation branding constrains the range of possible national narratives that can be produced through its mechanisms. Ultimately, the paper argues that, by subsuming national symbols and narratives into a totalizing discourse of commodification and consumption, nation branding contributes to the hijacking of local (national) processes of political self-redefinition and depoliticizes the process of national identity construction. The paper concludes by suggesting that policy makers and scholars need a better understanding of the relations of power that underlie a political economy of national image making in a global environment.

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Nandia Kaneva is Assistant Professor at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism Studies at the University of Denver. She has a BA degree in Journalism and Mass Communication from the American University in Bulgaria, an MA degree in Advertising for the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communication, Syracuse University (USA) and PhD degree from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Colorado at Boulder. Her research addresses critical reflections of culture and communication and explores the construction of nation identity in post-communist Europe and stems from a broader interest in nation branding and public diplomacy as tools of power in the context of globalization and European Integration. Her work is published in journals such as *Advertising and Society Review*, *Media Development*, *Journal of Communication Inquiry* and *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* as well as in several edited books.