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WHAT ARE PUBLIC RELATIONS DOING IN A ‘PLACE’ LIKE PLACE MARKETING? A PROPOSED PUBLIC RELATIONS PLAN (PRP) FOR THE REGION OF KAINUU, FINLANDⁱ

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Abstract

Public relations constitute one of the core tools of place marketing. The aim of this paper is to analyse a proposed Public Relations Plan (PRP) for the region of Kainuu, Finland. This plan is strategic and focuses on effective communication with all the actors that are active in Kainuu, also aiming to contribute to its sustainable tourism development.

The PRP is separated in two sub-PRPs. The first one is related to the internal environment of Kainuu, focusing on the planning and implementation of particular actions that strengthen the active participation of the internal groups (enterprises, public organisations, citizens, etc.) in the promotion of the region’s image and, consequently, in the region’s tourism marketing. The second one has the same logic but is more complicated, since it is related to the external environment of Kainuu.

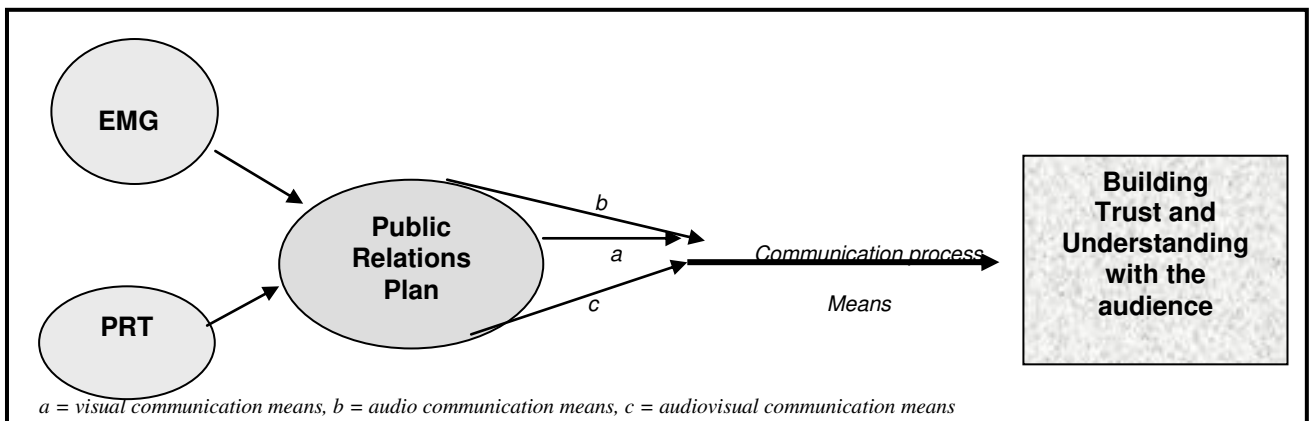
The data are derived from the INTERREG IIIC project *CultMark* (*Cultural Heritage, Local Identity and Place Marketing for Sustainable Development*) that was in operation in five European places (Nea Ionia, Magnesia-Greece – which was the lead partner – Chester-UK, Rostock/TLM-Germany, Kainuu-Finland, Pafos-Cyprus) from the beginning of 2004 till the end of 2006.

1. Introduction: Trust and Understanding as the Two ‘Key’ Dimensions of a Public Relations Plan

The Public Relations Plan (PRP) is one of the core tools of place marketing effectiveness (Avraham 2000, 2004; Dahles, 2002; Kim & Petrick, 2005; Kirat, 2006; Xie, 2006). Developing public relations at European or international level is something that requires experience and knowledge. In addition, it requires the availability of the appropriate executive person/s that could produce, implement and manage public relations actions.

Trust and Understanding are the two ‘key’ dimensions in order for a PRP to become effective for the place that implements it. The Executive Management Group (EMG)ⁱⁱ of Kainuu has to concentrate its efforts on the creation of the most appropriate message that will apply to the specific audience (the potential target markets). According to Figure 1, the core model of a PRP is based on the following:

Figure 1: Public Relations Model / Trust and Understanding



The audience has to show *trust* in the image and especially in the message that the decision-makers provide to the selected target markets. The message has to be clear, real and easy to *understand*, the second very important dimension of a PRP. The PRP is closely related to the Communication Process, which is part of the Place Marketing Pilot Plan (PMPP). The key point of the process is the audience, which is the final recipient of the message and, most of the time, the final consumer too. A high level of understanding also implies a high level of trust, and vice versa. And this is the main aim of the plan for the region of Kainuu.

2. The Definition of the Image of Kainuu

The creation, or the differentiation, of city/place image has extensively preoccupied specialists in the last 20 years (Lambooy and Moulaert, 1996; Hall and Hubbard, 1998:12). The creation of its image as a 'final good' is not something random, since it related directly to the character of its identity (potent or weak), as well as to the distinctive characteristics which constitute the main ingredients of the 'uniqueness' of each city/place (Jenkins, 1999).

In Kainuu, the image is based, on the one hand, on the combination of the vision and the distinctive characteristics of the region, followed by a distinguished approach concerning its identity. On the other hand, the region's experts support that the vision of the region is also based on the creation of the new modern image that Kainuu wants to promote. This fact is closely related to the alternative approach, concerning the region's identity. Kainuu wants to combine this modern character with the existence of a significant cultural heritage. Finally, this entire resultant package has to be promoted at international level. Ultimately, the region identifies the relation between its image and its identity in an efficient way. The problem in this case is that Kainuu has chosen to generate a new image and a new identity. This new profile could create advantages for the wider area, but only through the planning and the implementation of strong, innovative and efficient promotional policies, something in which Kainuu manifests low capacity and activity.

3. The Definition the Audience of Kainuu

The identification of the audience (PR target markets) is the next important step that the EMG of Kainuu has to take into consideration. The EMG, using the available data of target markets analysis, has to carefully define the audience of the PRP: those target markets where PR activities will take place. The identification of the audience concerns both the internal and external Kainuu environment. In the *internal* environment, the audience concerns residents, enterprises that relate to the character of the final provided good (arts, sport centres, restaurants, hotels, travel agencies, etc.), decision makers, authorities, organisations, cultural organisations and institutions, universities, research centres, high-tech firms and ecological or environmental organisations. In the *external* environment, the audience concerns tourists with special interests at national, European or international level, cultural, tourist and sport organisations at national and European level (museums, galleries, exhibitions, etc.), 'Winter

lovers', European and international winter sports organisations, associations or unions, organisations and associations of culture and museums, galleries, festivals, conferences, etc.

4. Kainuu PR model (internal and external)

The proposed *internal* PR model for Kainuu is based on the following parameters:

- Audience categories (mentioned above);
- Planning specific actions per audience category, building trust and understanding;
- Selecting and evaluating the appropriate communication means (visual, audio and audiovisual);
- Meeting and influencing the 'key' persons concerning the city's decision-makers and local actors;
- Co-operating with local media forces;

The proposed *external* PR model for Kainuu is based on the following parameters:

- Defining the audience (mentioned above);
- Building information networks with similar places;
- Developing partnerships with high-tech enterprises at European and international level;
- Planning co-operation with universities and research centres;
- Planning participations in international conferences, fairs and exhibitions;
- Participation in European programmes focusing on culture and business.

5. Methodology of the PRP (Internal and External)

The method used in the PRP methodology in order to set up a particular time limit is, as in the case of the Place Marketing Pilot Plan, based on the 'Critical Path Method' (Aravantinos, 1987/2007: 78-79; Nokes et al.: 2003/2007: appendix). More specifically:

1. Hierarchical presentation of PRP activities. Each activity is characterised by a particular name and the presentation of the activities is hierarchical. The important thing is to include all the appropriate actions in order that the PRP becomes a useful database for the implementation of the Place Marketing Final Plan. All the activities relate to the strategic planning process and focus on three dimensions: the planning, implementation and evaluation of each action.

2. *Immediate predecessor*: Concerns those activities (one or more) that have to be finished in order that the present activity takes place. This has major significance for the project, since it allows for estimating which of the activities are core (these have to be done first and any delay on their implementation affects the total planning of the project), and which are secondary (these could be implemented at the same time with other activities).
3. *Particular actions*: Some particular actions are specified for each step, in order that the overall development becomes an effective and flexible guideline for marketers to implement actions and at the time that the project has been decided to be implemented.
4. *Temporal horizon*: The existence of a specific temporal horizon is very important for each step and, consequently, for the whole project. The temporal horizon is closely related to the satisfaction of region's objectives in the context of a specific time planning framework. Time planning is also related to the existence of alternative scenarios in case some actions have to be changed and replaced by others. In the case of Kainuu, the report proposed that the first 150 days should focus on the development of the PRP in the region's internal environment, and the remaining 210 days in the region's external environment. This paper also supports that some of the actions concerning the external PRP can start at the same time as the activities of the internal PRP.

The CPM includes the following four main phases of the project.

PLANNING and PROGRAMMING: In these two phases decision-makers and local actors have to plan and prepare all those actions that related to the effective implementation of the PRP of Kainuu. The first step is the creation of the Public Relations Team (PRT), which will take the overall responsibility to plan and to perform the PRP with the support and the supervision of the EMG. All the following steps are related to Kainuu's vision and the audience categories and finally to the specific actions that will take place in its internal and external environment per audience category. The overall temporal horizon of these two phases is 140 working days. The primary actions need 80 days and the secondary actions 60 days.

IMPLEMENTATION: This phase is characterised by the supporting actions concerning the contribution of the appropriate communication means in the whole PRP as well as the specific actions per audience category that will take place in Kainuu's internal and external environment. The temporal horizon of each supporting action is potential and mainly concerns the planning and the selection of means that will be used in each case. The temporal horizon of each specific action is also potential and concerns the time period of each action. The phase of Implementation is the longest one of the project, since it lasts 190 working days. The primary actions only need 105 working days, and the secondary actions 85.

EVALUATION – FEEDBACK: This phase is related to the evaluation of the Internal and External PRP, the evaluation of the anticipated gains for Kainuu and the drawing of final decisions. The entire phase needs 30 working days for primary actions.

6. Conclusions: the Implementation of the PRP

The implementation of the PRP is not something random and it requires experience, good knowledge of the region and of the public: it depends, on the one hand, on the effectiveness based on the planning and the programming of a well-organised PMPP, and, on the other hand, on the ability of the PRT to implement the relevant PR actions. In the case of Kainuu, the focus is on the following:

1. Kainuu has to firstly orient its efforts at the national and international cultural, high-tech and sports market, since it constitutes a well-known cultural place, with the main advantages being its local distinctive characteristics.
2. The existence of a Place Marketing Office is an important tool that will help the region's executives to plan and execute the proposed PRP in an efficient way.
3. The core of region's development is the existence of a multidimensional image. The EMG and the PRT have to invest in a well-organised network for the promotion and awareness of this image, establishing a competitive position for the region in the European tourism and business market.
4. The region has to build trust and understanding with the residents and the other groups of its environment. This fact is the most important, since the whole preparation of the actions is aimed at satisfaction of this aim. The region also has to improve its position in the European market, gaining a high level of reputation and trust from business and the cultural environment.
5. Finally, the role of local actors and decision-makers is crucial,; something that is also valid for the case of the PMPP. Kainuu executives have to follow the proposed structure of the PRP correctly and present the significance of this project to the decision-makers.

The PRP used the Critical Path Methodology, with particular phases of analysis and steps of each action. This is the appropriate way for the region executives to consider the whole PRP, i.e. as a project with a particular temporal horizon, primary and secondary activities and a phase for the final evaluation. In combination with the PMPP, the region has two very

useful strategic tools in order to promote a strong and attractive image to its potential target markets.

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Endnotes

ⁱ The data for this paper are provided by the INTERREG IIIc *CultMark* project (Cultural Heritage, Local Identity and Place Marketing for Sustainable Development) that has been in operation in five European places from 2004 to 2006: Nea Ionia/ Magnesia/ Greece (lead partner), Chester/ UK, Kainuu/ Finland, Rostock-TLM/ Germany and Pafos/ Cyprus. We would like to express our thanks to the JTS INTERREG IIIC East and to the partners for the use of the delivered material. This paper largely draws on *CultMark* Project, 2006.

ⁱⁱ EMG (Executive Management Group): This group is responsible for the management and control of the Kainuu Place Marketing Pilot Plan as well as the PRP.