

City Branding and Climate Change

Exploring local engagement, climate action and participatory place branding in cities within the UK and Canada

A comparative, interdisciplinary research project



Catalysing Climate Action through City Branding: The confluence of activism and promotion to create local behavioural change for global impact.

Cities are increasingly becoming the battleground on which the war against climate change is fought. Cities are responsible for 70% of global carbon emissions that contribute to climate change, and as urbanisation increases, the need for decarbonisation at the city level becomes even more profound. To date, over 2,100 jurisdictions and local governments globally have declared a climate emergency. Because of their proximity to local residents, cities can be the site of relatively fast, yet collaborative and partnership-driven climate change planning and associated projects.

Central to urban policy and planning initiatives is the drive to meet the challenges of climate change to fulfil political and economic commitments and build a strong, positive reputation as a sustainable city. Cities have embraced core elements of brand strategy as a way to drive investment, retain talent, entice visitors, and encourage resident satisfaction and engagement whilst still moving towards their sustainability goals. Most directly, participatory city branding can be used as a catalyst to engage local residents and businesses and achieve buy-in for a comprehensive array of policy, practice and development aspirations presented by the brand.

Questions emerge, however, about how climate mitigation policies might align or diverge with city branding strategies. Specifically, what are the gaps, and also opportunities, to integrate climate action goals and messages into city branding discourse, and how can citizen engagement and action be catalysed by conflating the two?

Currently, a lack of broad theoretical or practical understanding exists linking city branding strategies and climate action, especially globally. More importantly, there is a grave lack of professional competence in this area, and place marketers are desperate for toolkits, case studies and effective strategies that can be implemented locally.

This research is the first of its kind that links climate activists, energy transition actors and environmentalists with Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs), place branding practitioners and local officials responsible for city marketing.

This programme is unique in that it centralises promotional considerations into the urban policy and governance spheres, integrating previously disparate and devolved urban processes to catalyse resident engagement and behavioural change.

The collaborators on this programme have a breadth and depth of collective and individual experience working with stakeholders, interviewing participants, holding workshops and analysing the challenges and opportunities inherent in city branding. This international team is uniquely positioned to execute this programme locally, working together for global impact.



Giannina Warren (she/her) is a Senior Lecturer in Place Branding and Promotional Culture at Middlesex University, London UK. Her research examines the intersection of promotion and policy in the development of 'Creative Cities', identifying ways in which private sector discipline in consumer research, marketing, branding and PR can help guide cultural public policy and sustainable urban planning for competitive cities and regions in the 21st century. Her work has been published in *Tourism Management*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Marketing Theory*, *Journal of Place Management and Development* and *International Journal of Tourism Cities*.

Prior to embarking on her postgraduate studies in the UK, her career spanned nearly two decades in Toronto, Canada as a specialist in visual identity, branding, advertising and public relations in high impact sectors such as finance, energy, legal, tourism, festivals and economic development. She spent six years at Toronto City Hall, managing city branding strategies, international promotional campaigns for public cultural events, resident-engagement programmes and tourism initiatives.



Dr. Chad Walker (he/him) is an Assistant Professor in Climate Change and Planning at Dalhousie University. He is an interdisciplinary environmental social scientist with teaching and research interests around justice, equity, and public support for low-carbon transitions. Recent published research includes studying the impact of environmental justice in shaping support for wind energy, critically investigating the meaning of community energy, and using diverse methodologies to better understand reconciliation, autonomy, and pathways for improved health via Indigenous-led renewable energy development.

Chad earned a PhD from Western University (2017) and worked as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Queen's University (2017-2019), the University of Exeter (2019-2021), the University of Saskatchewan (2021), and the University of Waterloo (2022). His work has been published in a variety of high-impact journals spanning several disciplinary boundaries, including: *Energy Policy*, *Environment and Planning A*, *Environmental Policy and Planning*, *Energy Research and Social Science*, *Environmental Studies and Sciences*, *Environmental Reviews*, *The Canadian Geographer*, and *Social Science and Medicine*.



Dr. Evan Cleave (he/him) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Toronto Metropolitan University. An urban and economic geographer, Evan uses qualitative and quantitative methods to explore how local governments attempt to address key local challenges. In particular, his research explores issues related to place branding, community and economic development, and enhancing local government capacity. His research has been supported by the Candian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's (SSHRC) Insight Development Grant (2020), Partnership Engagement Grant (2021) and Partnership Grant (2022). Evan is widely published, with peer-reviewed work appearing in *Area*, *Cities*, *Regional Studies*, *Regional Science*, *Urban Geography*, and *Urban Affairs Review*.

Evan received his PhD from Western University (London, Ontario, Canada) in 2018 exploring the effectiveness of place branding in Canada. He also had received his MA in Geography in 2013 (Western University), a M.GIS in 2012 (University of Calgary), and a BA (Honours) in Geography and GIS in 2009 (Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada). In 2018 Evan was a SSHRC Post-Doctoral Fellow at the University of Toronto Mississauga.

Preliminary Outcomes

To date, this project has encompassed a series of five focus groups with marketing, communications and PR professionals working for cities that have declared a climate emergency in Canada and the UK (n=27 participants across 19 cities). A 'Decision Theatre' approach to engage participants demonstrated that the communication challenges are both internal (within government) and external (stakeholders and target audiences).

Whilst cities are quick to make policy announcements regarding Net Zero targets, often adequate funding, strategic planning and resources allocated to properly communicate these policies are not forthcoming. Further, professionals are met with audience resistance to reception due to socio-economic disparities, competing priorities, and message fatigue.

The research points to some unique and innovative ways of bridging the gap that are both internal (unofficial and non-systemic ways of working within the bureaucracy) and external (creative message strategies, campaigns and citizen engagement initiatives).

By utilising an international and interdisciplinary approach to the research that includes marketing, media and communications, geography, and urban planning, this research might offer a better understanding of how cities can overcome sustainability communication challenges and catalyse behavioural change that will have a lasting local and global impact.

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