

# Dynamics of Competitive Advantage and Consumer Perception in Social Marketing

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## Chapter 6

# Place @–Branding and European Capitals: “City Visiting Cards” via Municipal Websites, Virtual Tours of Significant Places flying with Google Earth, and Conversational Exchanges about City–Places Experienced/ Imagined via Social Networks

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter extends the concept of place branding and applies it to the digital world of the Internet (place @-branding). Among the various environments of the complex digital universe of the Internet, the chapter deals in particular with (1) Websites as vehicles of images, representations, evaluations of places, and (2) social networks as spaces for the exchange and sharing of “lived” or “imagined” experiences of places by past-visitors and potential first-visitors. The analysis of place @-branding via Websites and social networks is based on empirical research data that targets various historic European capitals (Rome, Paris, Berlin, Brussels,*

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*Helsinki, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Warsaw, Vienna). The social representations of these cities are investigated by comparing: 1) their institutional Websites; 2) virtual tours made by Google Earth; 3) conversations among the members of two social networks (Facebook and Yahoo! Answers) on elements of interest concerning social representations and the “lived” or “imagined” experiences of these cities as first visitors (past-visitors) or potential ones (future first-visitors). The nature of these conversations is induced or spontaneous according to communicative constraints imposed by the two social networks by means of a series of piloted questions (in the case of Yahoo! Answers) and a selective focus on spontaneous communicative exchanges (in the case of Facebook).*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Our research on city-marketing via the Internet, exploring the contribution of new internet-based communication systems to psychosocial research in different forms and through different channels, with the focus on communication applied to the field of tourism, contributes to expanding the agenda for future research by environmental psychologists in the Internet era outlined by Stokols and Montero (2002) and Misra and Stokols (2011).

It is a further development of a broad research programme on *Place-identity and Social Representations of European Capitals in first visitors of six different nationalities* begun by de Rosa in the 1990s (see e.g. de Rosa, 1995; 1997, 2010a, 2010b, 2013c). The first wave research, based on a multi-method modelling approach (de Rosa, 2013b), has been subject to follow-up field study conducted in Rome at a distance of some decades and then extended to further historic European capitals (Paris, Helsinki, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Warsaw, Vienna), starting with a first comparative study between Rome and Paris (de Rosa, 2010a, 2010b, 2013b; de Rosa and d’Ambrosio, 2009, 2010, 2011; de Rosa, Dryjanska & Bocci, 2012).

In this article we present a selection of empirical findings based on three further different, but interrelated research lines aimed at detecting:

1. Some aspects of e-branding studied using a multi-method approach, with also comparative analysis of the institutional websites of ten historic capitals (Rome, Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Helsinki, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Warsaw, Vienna), starting from the assumption that the websites constitute official ‘visiting cards’ presented by the municipalities to residents and tourists (de Rosa, Bocci & Picone 2012). After brief examination of aspects concerning the usability of the websites which yield information about the communicative capacities of the cities and which were recorded using Nielsen’s Usability Test (Nielsen

& Loranger, 2006), the article presents the main results of the analysis grid drawn up by de Rosa and Picone relatively to the contents of the websites. These results will be integrated with qualitative information obtained using the Atlas/ti software program and whose applicative interest will be evaluated in light of other recent studies on the usability of municipal websites (Pribeanu, Marinescu, Iordache & Moisii, 2010). Starting from a comparison between the websites of Rome and Paris (analysed lengthwise in time by comparing the versions downloaded in 2003 and 2004) and of Paris (downloaded in April 2004), and subsequently extended to more updated versions and to the other municipal websites of the above-mentioned European capitals, the analysis highlights aspects relative to contents, structure, and various technical elements important from the user's point of view (graphics, interactivity and usability in particular), emphasising strengths and weaknesses. Besides their descriptive value and possible function in guiding web professionals and a city's institutional communication managers, the results have a historical value (given the volatility and dynamicity of websites, like many other Internet environments) with respect to the evolution of web 2.0 scenarios, assuming a particular interest for further comparative analysis with 2010 websites, currently under investigation (de Rosa, Bocci & Picone, 2012);

2. 'Virtual tours' made by means of Google Earth, "flying" over the historic European capitals (London, Madrid, Paris, Vienna) as not yet known tourism destinations for 'potential first-visitors' and as 'experienced cities' for 'past visitors'. The main goal of the cross-analysis between the research carried out in the field and on the Internet is to compare the preferred itineraries and places selected by the 'virtual tourists' (both potential first-visitors and past visitors) with the preferred itineraries and places chosen by the 'real first-visitors' interviewed during our field studies in the same historic European capitals on the basis of their imagined (before their visit) and experienced (after their visit) places. In this regard, the specific goals of the interrelated research on the digital exploration of places via Google Earth are:
  - a. To investigate differences between virtual explorations conducted with a "low information strategy" (by activating only the 'street' and 'street view' levels) and with a "high information strategy" (by also activating the geographic web level, and using the 'Panoramio' function and its repositories of images published by previous Google Earth users, 'Wikipedia' and its windows including images and historical information from the online encyclopaedia, and 'places'. These make it possible to visualize information and images about principal places of interest – with the exception of the application related to commercial enterprises.)

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- b. To investigate the differences between the exploratory strategies in virtual tours conducted by ‘potential first-visitors’ and ‘past visitors.’
3. The features most salient for user-surfers, potential and past visitors of the historic capitals reconstructed through multi-dimensional analysis of communicative exchanges on social network websites in relation to the main tangible and intangible aspects which evoke the perceived personalities of the cities compared with the brand proposals (Hankinson, 2001) and which give rise to more or less stereotypical, shared or diversified social representations of the places examined and their itineraries (see also De Choudhury, Feldman, Amer-Yahia, Golbandi, Lempel and Yu 2010). Explored in particular are induced or free conversations about the above-mentioned ten historic European capitals – chosen as tourist target destinations – among members of two social networks: *Facebook* (in groups, fan pages, personal profiles) and *Yahoo! Answers* (travel category), differentiated between ‘potential first-visitors’ and ‘past visitors’. The purpose is to identify:
  - a. The ‘*main places*’ of the historic European capitals investigated as ‘objects’ of social representations charged with symbolic value and emotional attributions.
  - b. The ‘*evaluations*’ made of these capitals by the members of the web communities during their free exchanges.
  - c. Comparison between the lists of ‘*places*’ mentioned as ‘*most significant*’ and the city ‘*evaluations*’ made by the real first-visitors of our field study and those mentioned by the members of the web communities in their free online interactions.
  - d. Any differences between the platforms of the two social networks (*Facebook and Yahoo! Answers*).

The aim is to move further from the current state-of-the-art developed under influences from sociology, mathematics and computer sciences in the field of social network analysis SNA as an approach to investigating the social structure (Furth, 2010), and to use social media to mine and analyse the meaningful conversations co-produced during on-line interactions of social network members. Research aimed at detecting social influence via interpersonal exchanges is even more interesting if we consider that our results show that interpersonal communication (and word of mouth) is the most influential among the various sources of knowledge about tourist destination cities (schoolbooks, literature, films, songs, internet, press media, tourism brochures, and documentaries, being the other sources of information).

## **INVESTIGATING E-BRANDING IDENTITY THROUGH THE CITY VISITING CARDS**

How do administrators choose to present the historic European capitals to citizens, tourists, and potential tourists using the innovative ‘city visiting cards’ constituted by institutional websites?

To answer this question, we investigate the specific form of Internet branding, which seeks to communicate brand identity through institutional websites: namely ‘institutional site identity’.

In what follows, we shall see how the self-presentations also involve ‘promises’ made to the public by cities. In some cases, we shall find outright institutional pledges made by mayors to citizens in a search for consensus/legitimation and ‘electronic democracy’ (Bolognini, 2001). Evident in other cases will be promotion of the city’s artistic-cultural heritage or its thriving economy so as to attract international tourism.

Before examining the contents of the websites, however, we shall first verify their communicative capacities by applying Nielsen’s Usability Test.

### **The Communicative Capacities of the Institutional Websites Evaluated by Means of Nielsen’s Usability Test**

There follows a brief examination of aspects concerning the usability of the websites yielding information about the communicative capacities of the cities and which were recorded using Nielsen’s Usability Test (Nielsen & Loranger, 2006). The purpose of evaluating a website’s usability is to obtain information on users’ needs, their understanding of the system, and the aspects that they appreciate or dislike. In the Usability Test, users test the system by performing simple tasks under observation: they identify the members of the municipality council; they send an e-mail to the webmaster; they find a map showing the layout of the city; they visit the section dedicated to employment searches/offers; and they find the cultural events scheduled for the next week.

The observer tracks:

- The time needed to execute the tasks.
- The error rate.
- The percentage of tasks completed successfully.
- The number of backtracks while executing a task.

Nielsen (1994) highlights that a test with five users makes it possible to map 85% of usability problems.<sup>1</sup> In what follows, comparison is made among the results obtained for the cities considered, the purpose being to determine the extent to

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which institutional websites – and which of them in particular – are able to meet the requirements of their users.

- **Time Needed to Execute the Tasks:** The Vienna website ([www.wien.gv.at](http://www.wien.gv.at)) required the least time to perform the tasks set by the Test (average time taken to perform each task: 35 seconds). Also very rapid was navigation of the Warsaw website (37 seconds), as well as those of Helsinki (40 seconds) and Berlin (43 seconds), whilst the greatest amount of time was needed to execute the tasks on the Lisbon website (92 seconds), followed by the Paris website (78 seconds). Intermediate times of between 45 and 75 seconds were recorded for the Rome, London, Brussels, and Madrid websites.
- **Error Rate:** The only site for which users-residents did not commit errors was that of Helsinki ([www.hel.fi](http://www.hel.fi)), followed, with a low number of errors, by those of Warsaw ([www.e-warsaw.pl](http://www.e-warsaw.pl)) and Vienna ([www.vienna.at](http://www.vienna.at)). The Lisbon ([www.cm-lisboa.pt](http://www.cm-lisboa.pt)) and Rome websites ([www.comune.roma.it](http://www.comune.roma.it)) ranked lowest, with more than 16 errors. In fact, both the Vienna and Helsinki websites had an intuitive architecture with clear and simple tabs. In the case of the Warsaw website, the performance of the subjects may have been favoured by the small size of the website. Errors committed by several users, as in the cases of the Lisbon and Rome websites, and to a lesser extent those of Paris ([www.paris.fr](http://www.paris.fr)), London ([www.london.gov.uk](http://www.london.gov.uk)) and Madrid ([www.munimadrid.es](http://www.munimadrid.es)) (7-8 errors), suggest that they should be restructured. Also the Brussels ([www.brucity.be](http://www.brucity.be)) and Berlin ([www.berlin.de](http://www.berlin.de)) websites, albeit with a relatively small number of errors (respectively 5 and 4), had a number of defects.
- **Percentage of Tasks Completed Successfully:** Although all the tasks were successfully completed (100% success rate), the percentage of successes progressively diminished in the cases of Madrid (96%), Lisbon (92%) and Rome (72.5%). As regards the Madrid website, failures were recorded in *sending the e-mail* because the panel for the service was positioned too marginally on the screen without a device giving it salience. The problems with the Lisbon website mostly concerned the task of *finding the section devoted to job searches/offers*, and they were due to an unclear tab for this section. The users had serious problems with the Rome website when trying to *find the map showing the layout of the city* – once again because of an unclear tab. In fact, in order to access a map of the city, the user had to click on a link with the tab “*Municipi*” (Municipalities). Other failures were recorded for the task of *finding cultural events scheduled for the next week*, which were positioned only at the bottom of an already very long home page.



- **Number of Backtracks while Executing a Task:** Whilst Helsinki, Berlin and Vienna were the city websites recording the least use of the ‘back’ command (from 3 to 5 for the various tasks), the websites requiring the most backtracks were once again those of Rome and Lisbon, plus Paris. The exponential increase in the number of backtracks links with the above-mentioned longer navigation times (particularly for Paris and Lisbon), as well as with a high number of errors and failures (as in the cases of Lisbon and Rome).

According to the four criteria of the Usability Test (time taken to perform the tasks; error rate; percentage of tasks completed successfully; number of backtracks while performing a task), the institutional city websites can be broadly classified using five different degrees of usability (see Table 1):

- **High Usability:** With optimal satisfaction of user needs. This category comprised the city websites of Helsinki and Vienna, which registered no failures in performance of the tasks, with little time taken to complete the test, a number of errors ranging between 0 and 2, and a small number of backtracks;
- **Medium-High Usability:** Berlin and Warsaw, which also registered a 100% success rate and rapidity in completing the test, but were penalized with respect to Helsinki and Vienna because the Berlin website recorded a larger number of errors, while that of Warsaw recorded a larger number of backtracks. Considering the results of other recent studies on the usability of municipal websites (see e.g. Pribeanu, Marinescu, Iordache & Moisii, 2010), we can define the usability problems of the Berlin and Warsaw city websites as being of minor importance (“smaller usability problems”). These problems may have irritated navigators, but they had no serious impact on the tasks, which were completed successfully and rapidly.
- **Medium Usability:** The London and Brussels websites, which although they recorded a 100% success rate in performance of the tasks, were penalized, with respect to the previous websites, by longer navigating times and a larger number of errors and backtracks. These institutional websites had moderate usability problems with major impacts on the performance of the tasks, but the users were able to find solutions in an average amount of time.
- **Medium-Low Usability:** This concerned the Paris website, mainly because of the long time taken to perform the tasks and the high number of backtracks, as well as the high number of errors, although this website too recorded a 100% success rate in completion of the tasks.
- **Low Usability:** Which indicates a need for restructuring, as found for the Madrid, Lisbon and Rome websites, which were penalized, compared with the above cities, by all four of the criteria used, but especially by the failure

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*Table 1. Ranking of the institutional websites according to their degree of usability*

European Capitals	Degree of Usability	Usability Criteria			
		Number of Backtracks while Executing a Task	Error Rate	Time Needed to Execute the Tasks	% of Tasks Completed Successfully
Vienna Helsinki	high	low	low	short	100%
Berlin Warsaw	medium-high ("minor usability problems")	medium-low	medium-low	short	100%
London Brussels	medium ("moderate usability problems")	medium	medium-high	medium	100%
Paris	medium-low	high	high	long	100%
Rome Madrid Lisbon	low ("major usability problems")	high	high	medium-long	72.5%-96%

rate in performance of the tasks (respectively: 4%, 8%, 27.5%). Belonging in this last category are institutional websites with major usability problems, with consequent difficulties of completing the tasks and notable losses of time.

**Focus on the Website Contents using the Grid Designed by de Rosa & Picone and the Atlas/ti Software**

Following this first overview, now presented are the main results of analysis using the grid designed by de Rosa and Picone (2010) relatively to the contents of the websites downloaded during the period September-October 2010, integrated with qualitative analysis conducted using the Atlas/ti software.

The contents of the various websites were classified using the categories in Table 2: Considered for each of the information sections were:

- Frequency of updating (daily, weekly, monthly.)
- Reliability, understood as the certainty and clarity of sources.

*Table 2. The website's information sections*

News	Tourism	Health
Press Releases	Sport	Youth
Publications	Economy	Education
Transport	Culture	International Cooperation

The pages of the ten websites downloaded with *Teleport pro version 1.29* were then qualitatively analysed using *Atlas/ti*<sup>2</sup>.

### **Frequency of Updating**

The presence of items such as the publication dates and the sources of the information published on websites is indicative of their levels of updating and reliability. However, it should be borne in mind that updated information in the ‘news’ section may coexist with information that does not require periodic updating in other sections of the website.

Of the various institutional websites considered, the one most frequently updated – during the time period considered – was [www.berlin.de](http://www.berlin.de) (municipality of Berlin), which was characterized by the presence of numerous news items and extremely frequent press releases. Often, not only the date but also the time was stated, given that the updating was performed several times a day. The news section, as with all the other websites, was positioned on the home page, where it was immediately accessible on logging in. There was a specific link to press releases (*Pressemeldungen*). A recent check has ascertained that the website maintains these updating standards: for instance, counted on 17-09-2012 were 12 press releases issued between 8:55 and 18:25.

The most recently updated publications were present on the London website, where they can still be viewed (website accessed on 17-09-2012) at “Latest publications” by following the “this week” link on the home page.

The Lisbon city website instead contained both recently non-updated news items (links relative to youth training projects) and information that did not need periodic updating (like some links to healthcare news).

The Warsaw website contained the most dated information, with news items going as far back as 2008. However, it should be pointed out that a more recent access found that the website had been completely restyled (see Figure 1 and Figure 2.) Reproduced below for comparison are the main sections of the two home pages in

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Figure 1. The website [www.e-warsaw.pl](http://www.e-warsaw.pl) retrieved on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2010



Figure 2. The website [www.e-warsaw.pl](http://www.e-warsaw.pl) retrieved on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2012



English before and after the restyling. It will be seen that the graphic components have been considerably improved (colours, logo, images, etc) in the restyled version.

Besides the new graphic design, also to be appreciated is the attention paid to news, with a calendar of the city's main events. Moreover, as already done with the Berlin website, news items now also bear the date of their publication. These innovations may be prompted by the major international events that have recently concerned the city of Warsaw: the European Football Championship of 2012, as well as events devoted to culture, especially music.

## Reliability

As regards the reliability of the websites, it is interesting to note that, in certain cases, there was a consistency between the degree of usability measured with the Usability Test and the degree of attention paid to contents:

- The Vienna, Helsinki and Berlin websites, which had a good degree of usability, exhibited various features of reliability.
- London and Brussels websites, with a medium degree of usability, recorded a high-medium level of information reliability, although they declined responsibility for some topics treated.

- The Lisbon and Rome websites, to which the Usability Test attributed a low degree of usability, did not provide explicit declarations guaranteeing a suitable level of information reliability.

Of the three websites recording the highest degree of usability it was Berlin which assumed the greatest responsibility for the information published. The “Impressum” page of the website specified the authors of the website’s various sections, which were either the city of Berlin or the “Berlinline GmbH & Co KG”. In particular, the city of Berlin was attributed responsibility for the contents of the “Politik & Verwaltung”, “Bürgerservice”, “Die Hauptstadt” and “Ihre Meinung” sections, while the “Berlinline GmbH & Co KG” was stated to be responsible for the “Tourismus & Hotels”, “Kultur & Tickets”, “Wirtschaft” and “Themen” sections. A similar assumption of responsibility was not found for the Vienna and Helsinki websites, which carried explicit disclaimers for some of their contents. For instance, the [www.wien.gv.at](http://www.wien.gv.at) website stated that neither the website nor the city of Vienna were legally responsible for the information provided. It is also stated that all the website’s contents had been carefully selected and checked, but an e-mail address was given so that inaccuracies could be reported or questions submitted. Similarly, on the Helsinki website, the page devoted to the authors of the site accessible from the link at the bottom of the home page – “hel.fi Web editors, Administration Centre” – declared that the city of Helsinki was responsible solely for information concerning the services provided by the city administration.

- In the cases of the London and Brussels websites, positioned midway on the usability scale, the reliability of the information on the website was medium-high. On the London website, the GLA (Greater London Authority) openly declared itself liable for all information on its own website but declined liability for the contents of linked websites. In the case of the Brussels website, a high level of information reliability was guaranteed both by the mayor (Freddy Thielemans), who declared himself the publisher of the website, and the GIAL (Centre de Gestion Informatique des Administrations), which limited liability to municipal services.
- The Lisbon and Rome websites come last because they obtained low scores on the Usability Test and a low degree of reliability, in that they neither accepted nor declined liability.

The sites for which the greatest discrepancies between degree of usability and level of reliability were recorded were those of Warsaw, Paris and Madrid (see Table 3):

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*Table 3. Degree of usability and level of reliability of the websites*

European Capitals	Degree of Usability	Level of Reliability
Vienna	high	medium-high (disclaimer of liability for certain information provided)
Helsinki	high	medium-high (disclaimer of liability for certain information provided)
Berlin	medium-high	high (no disclaimer of liability)
Warsaw	medium-high	low (no acceptance or disclaimer of liability)
London	medium	medium-high (disclaimer of liability for certain information provided)
Brussels	medium	medium-high (disclaimer of liability for certain information provided)
Paris	medium-low	high (no disclaimer of liability)
Madrid	low	medium-high (disclaimer of liability for certain information provided)
Lisbon	low	low (no acceptance or disclaimer of liability)
Rome	low	low (no acceptance or disclaimer of liability)

- Although the Warsaw website had a medium-high level of usability, it did not record satisfactory levels of reliability because nowhere on the site was there a page with a disclaimer or acceptance of liability. Nevertheless, present in the new version of the website, accessed on 17 September 2012, was “© Urz.d m.st. Warszawy”, where the © denotes copyright on the website’s contents.
- The Paris website, which also had a medium-low level of usability, obtained a high level of reliability because it stated, without disclaimers, that it was administered by the city’s DICOM Department, and that the editorial updates to the website were provided by all the city administrations under the guidance of the DICOM. Rather than protect themselves with disclaimers, the authors sought to protect copyright on contents and rights of reproduction.
- Also the Madrid website showed a discrepancy between the usability and reliability of content. Despite recording low usability, the site was characterized by a medium-high degree of reliability thanks to a page accessible from a small link at the bottom of the home page, “Aviso Legal” (legal notes), which expressly declared that the information on the website had been carefully selected and periodically checked. At the same time, it declined all legal responsibility for the website’s contents.

Of the three websites recording a discrepancy between usability and reliability it was that of Warsaw which was most penalized, because no explicit assumption of responsibility for its contents was stated. By contrast, the Paris and Madrid websites, although also penalized by scant usability, scored more highly for reliability, which in the case of Paris was without disclaimers.

## **Contents**

Application of the grid for analysis of the overall structure of a website (de Rosa & Picone, 2010), integrated with qualitative analysis conducted using the Atlas/ti software, showed that the websites with a medium-high degree of usability and reliability (Vienna, Helsinki and Berlin) furnished comprehensive information in all the thematic areas investigated, with some very extensive and detailed sections seemingly addressed to both tourists and residents. In particular:

- The Austrian capital, through its institutional website, promoted culture with an ample section; it conjugated culture and well-being, also as factors of tourism attractiveness; it provided information intended to attract capital to the city (section “work and business” “Arbeit & Wirtschaft”); it paid close attention to the well-being to which it devoted a section (“Gesundheit & Soziales”, Health and Social Services); it emphasised education and research (“Bildung & Forschung”); it had a dynamism expressed through information ranging from new sports trends, through courses to attend, to sports events scheduled in the city; it showed itself open to international cooperation, emphasising its normative aspects. The results of the analysis confirmed those already obtained by Sicilia, Perez & Heffernan (2008), who found that the Vienna website furnished appropriate information in diverse sections (administration, business, tourism, culture, education, health, housing, history and the job/career market). It ranked high in the classification compiled by the authors, together with other capitals, including some with a high ranking as regards website contents in our research. However, although Vienna’s website was very comprehensive, it only provided detailed multilingual information for visitors on other pages devoted to tourism.
- The Helsinki website took care to welcome potential tourists by providing a long text with a series of links to museums, the opera, galleries, restaurants and night life. Links useful for visiting the city were also accessible from the section “Transport and maps”. Consequently, the website neglected neither potential tourists nor residents, listing the services available to various categories of users. It expressed dynamism through its “active city” sports section. It promoted culture also in regard to international openness. It stressed

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the quality of the city's public services, which ranged from health ("A broad range of health care services") to education; this latter having the distinctive feature of being entirely public. It also emphasised the Finland's flourishing economy.

- Like Helsinki's website also that of Berlin welcomed tourists and residents by providing complete, updated, and reliable information ranging from transport to tourism, from culture to the economy, from sport to health, from young people to international policies.

The results of application of the de Rosa & Picone (2010) content analysis were partly confirmed through use of the Atlas/ti software. This software enables searches to be conducted on Primary Documents (website text files) to identify codes. Interesting in this regard is that, of the various institutional websites analysed, that of Vienna recorded the highest frequency for the code "culture" with a percentage of 9%; while in the case of the Berlin website, the percentages for the codes "culture" and "tourism" were both 5%. The Berlin website was the most self-referential: in fact, the code "Berlin" occurred with a percentage of 48%. At the same time, the Helsinki and Berlin websites were those that most valued their users, in that the frequencies of the code "users" were respectively 7.73% and 6.74%. Vienna, Berlin and Helsinki shared with the other European capital websites a wealth of graphic components, but it was the Helsinki website which had the highest percentage (46.35%) of images with descriptions.

The websites for the cities of London and Brussels, which respectively recorded medium and medium-high levels of usability, had well-developed sections in terms of content, but they also had a number of shortcomings. In particular:

- London presented itself as "innovative" in regard to urban transport services; and "dynamic" in regard to a series of sport services, with such attractive highlights as being the venue of the 2018 Football World Cup. The English capital also expressed its commitment to maintaining its reputation as location leader for businesses; overcoming the recession; increasing the city's competitiveness; removing inequality of access to the London healthcare services; and ensuring a successful future for young Londoners. This image seemed intended to involve citizens in electronic democracy (Bolognini, 2001), with encouragement from the Mayor to propose cultural initiatives and his pledges on various issues. Nevertheless, in some respects the website failed to promote the city from a touristic and international perspective, so that it tended to be self-referential.
- By contrast, the Brussels website emphasised international openness both with a section furnishing tourist information – directly accessible from the



home page via the “Tourism” link - and a link to the official tourism website [www.brussellsinternational.be](http://www.brussellsinternational.be), with three further links to a Google map showing the city’s three tourist information offices. International openness was also documented by the presence of a “Europe & International” section. Brussels completed its image with sections entitled “Events, culture, sport and leisure”, “Trade, economy & finance”, “Social & health”, “Childhood, youth and family”, “Education, employment & training”, promoting itself through features on culture, sport, economy-finance, and health care, with some mention of young people and their education. Rather scarce were references to transport systems, although some information on city mobility was available at the “Public works & mobility” section of the main menu.

In regard to the Brussels institutional website, the Atlas/ti software also emphasised the importance of the information component by recording the large presence of the codes “information” (freq. 15.77%) and “services” (freq. 11.13%) on the website.

Finally, both the Lisbon and Rome websites, with low degrees of usability, seemed to pay little attention to tourism and international cooperation. However, whilst the Lisbon website contained a device accessible from the “Alojamento” link through which users could find accommodation in the city and make bookings online (information retrieved on 17 September 2012), the Italian website directed users to an external website. In particular:

- The Lisbon website organized its contents into sub-categories providing information on transport, sport, economy, culture and education, catering to the various categories of users, with particular regard to young people.
- The Rome website informed users mostly about transport, sport, culture, health and education, neglecting the city’s economy in favour of socio-cultural and administrative aspects.

Of the two websites that of Rome recorded the higher percentage for services: 11.63%, which was the highest value among the ten websites considered. Nevertheless, as already emphasised by Sicilia, Perez & Heffernan (2008), the websites of the cities of Rome and Lisbon did not furnish all the information expected in terms of either variety or quantity.

- Of the three websites recording a discrepancy between usability and reliability, we have already seen that Warsaw was the city most penalized in terms of the reliability of its website, which was also devoid of several sections. Summary information was provided on transport “from” and “for” the city, on tourist attractions, and education. More detailed sections were devoted

### ***Place @-Branding and European Capitals***

to the economy and culture. A page accessible from the “Arts and Culture” menu contained, besides text alone, some useful links to museums, theatres, and the Warsaw Opera. Each of these attractions was briefly described and its address was given. However, it was impossible to find information about the events scheduled at these attractions. In the more updated version of the website – accessed on 17 September 2012 – it was possible to read about several, even recent cultural events – relative, for instance to the previous week – but in certain specific cases like Opera, it was not yet possible to view the calendar.

- The situations of Paris and Madrid were different. Although they recorded a medium-low degree of usability, they showed a medium-high level of reliability in the contents of their websites, which were well developed. However, the Madrid website catered only to city residents, drawing on other sources for tourism and international cooperation, whilst the Paris website seemed to omit only economic information, in favour of tourism-culture and social affairs.

The overall picture depicted by the three above-described evaluation criteria (degree of usability, level of reliability, and degree of content completeness) distinguishes the websites of the capitals considered into classes relative to their communicative capacity, as follows (see Table 4):

- The cities of Vienna, Helsinki and Berlin, with ‘high’ communicative capacity.
- London and Brussels, with ‘medium-high’ communicative capacity.
- Paris and Madrid, with ‘medium’ communicative capacity.
- Lisbon and Rome, with ‘medium-low’ communicative capacity.
- Warsaw, with ‘low’ communicative capacity, which nevertheless should be further explored in light of the changes recently made to the website.

The constant ranking of the institutional websites of the northern European capitals, Helsinki, Vienna and Berlin (with the exception of Warsaw), at the highest levels with respect to all the parameters considered in the analysis means that the ‘visiting cards’ of those European capitals give them the cutting edge in place-marketing, and that they provide reference models for experts in digital communication concerned to improve the performances of analogous institutional websites. Conversely, the southern European capitals considered – Rome and Lisbon – are unsatisfactory in regard to the digital communication of their potential to attract tourism. They reveal a gap which also reflects the delay in the informatization of those countries (see Table 5). Midway between these two extremes lie the central European capitals: London, Paris, and Brussels.

*Table 4. Degree of usability, level of reliability, and content completeness of the websites*

European Capitals	Degree of Usability	Level of Reliability	Degree of Content Completeness	Communicative Capacity
Vienna	high	medium-high	high	high
Helsinki	high	medium-high	high	high
Berlin	medium-high	high	high	high
Warsaw	medium-high	low	low	low
London	medium	medium-high	medium	medium-high
Brussels	medium	medium-high	medium	medium-high
Paris	medium-low	high	medium	medium
Madrid	low	medium-high	medium	medium
Lisbon	low	low	medium	medium-low
Rome	low	low	medium	medium-low

## **FLYING OVER THE HISTORIC EUROPEAN CAPITALS WITH GOOGLE EARTH**

Another way to anticipate, or to recall, visits to the historic European capitals is offered by Google Earth. This tool enabled us to investigate the differences between:

- Virtual explorations conducted with a low information strategy and with a high information strategy.
- The exploratory strategies in virtual tours conducted by “potential first-visitors” and “past visitors”.

On the basis of our starting hypothesis we expected to find that “potential first visitors with no prior experiential knowledge of the city and in particular those conducting virtual explorations with a low information strategy” would cite more generic places (i.e. ones without specific names) or very well-known “prototypical” places symbolic of the city (see Figure 3); while “past visitors with prior experiential knowledge of the city and in particular those conducting exploration with high

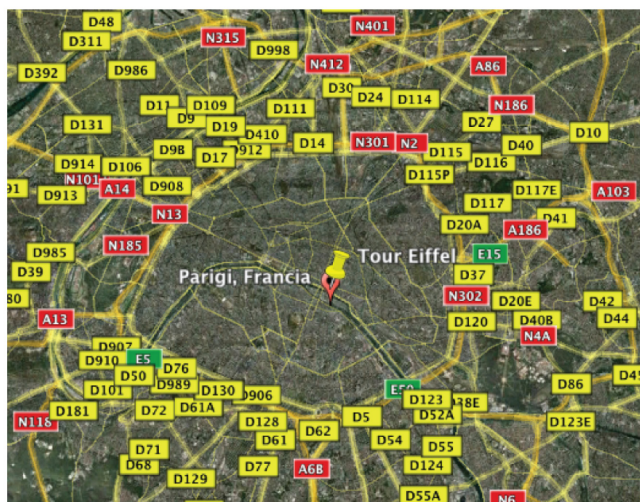
**Place @-Branding and European Capitals**

*Table 5. Internet usage in Europe*

Europe	Population ( 2012 est. )	Internet Users 30-June-12	Penetration (% Population)
Finland	5,259,250	4,661,265	88.6 %
United Kingdom	62,698,362	52,731,209	84.1 %
Germany	81,471,834	67,364,898	82.7 %
Belgium	10,431,477	8,489,901	81.4 %
France	65,102,719	50,290,226	77.2 %
Austria	8,219,743	6,143,600	74.7 %
Spain	46,754,784	30,654,678	65.6 %
Poland	38,441,588	23,852,486	62.0 %
Italy	61,016,804	35,800,000	58.7 %
Portugal	10,760,305	5,455,217	50.7 %

(source: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats4.htm#europe> data updated on June 30 2012).

*Figure 3. Virtual explorations of Paris conducted with a low information strategy: generic and unnamed places or the most stereotypical icon-places (Tour Eiffel)*



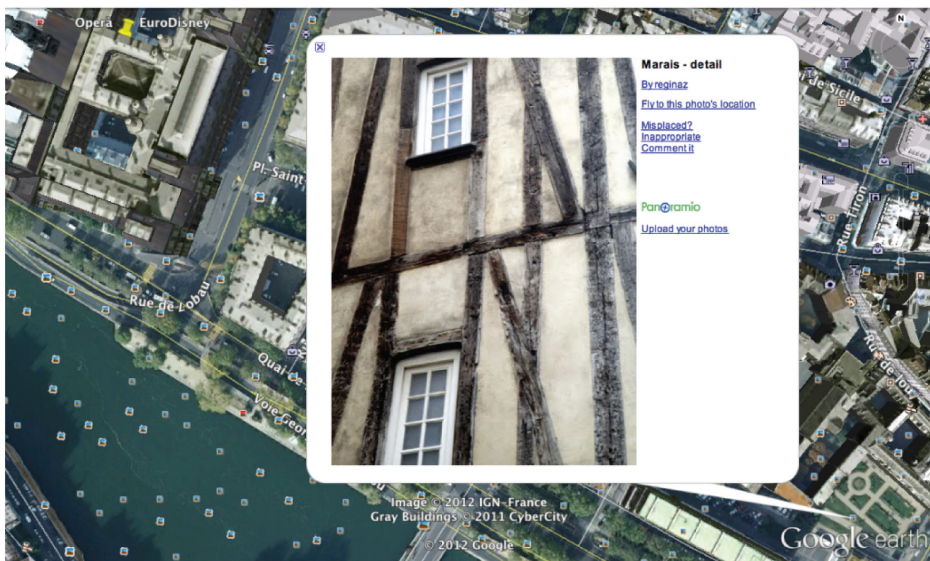
information strategy” would cite more specific places not necessarily coincident with the iconic places of the capitals in question (see Figure 4).

An exploratory study on the cities of Vienna, London, Paris and Madrid – carried out on university students attending the Communication and New Media laboratory of the Faculty of Medicine and Psychology of the Sapienza University of Rome, during the period September-December 2009 – asked “potential first visitors with low and high information” and “past visitors with low and high information” to identify and indicate ten places in the target cities.

The results of this study-pilot only partly confirmed the hypothesis (see Table 6). In fact:

- **Comparing the Extreme Groups:** “Potential first visitors with no prior experiential knowledge of the city, conducting virtual explorations with a low information strategy” cited *generic places* more frequently than “past visitors with prior experiential knowledge of the city, conducting exploration with high information strategy” (12 versus 1). However this result disappears looking at the total *generic places* cited respectively by the potential first visitors and by the past visitors, independently on the low/high level of the exploration strategy (13 versus 16).

*Figure 4. Virtual explorations of Paris conducted with a high information strategy: Marais*



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Table 6. Places identified and indicated in the European historic capitals in different information conditions using Google Earth

European Capitals/ Type of Place	“Potential First Visitors” with Low Information		“Potential First Visitors” with High Information		“Past Visitors” with Low Information		“Past Visitors” with High Information	
	Generic	Specific	Generic	Specific	Generic	Specific	Generic	Specific
Vienna	10	0	0	10	10	0	1	9
London	0	10	0	10	5	5	0	10
Paris	0	10	0	10	0	10	0	10
Madrid	2	8	1	9	0	10	0	10
Total	12	28	1	39	15	25	1	39

- Generic Places:** Are more frequently cited by those conducting exploration “with low information strategy” belonging to both groups of potential first visitors and past visitors when compared with those conducting exploration with high information strategy (12 versus 1 among the potential first visitors and 15 versus 1 among the past visitors). This is certainly due to the additional information about the places available also for the subjects, with no prior experiential knowledge of the capitals, who conduct exploration with a “*high information strategy*”, and therefore additional other users’ knowledge by activating the geographic web level, using the ‘*Panoramio*’ function and its repositories of images published by previous Google Earth users, ‘Wikipedia’ and its windows including images and historical information from the online encyclopaedia, and ‘places’.

The results also showed that both “potential first visitors with low and high information” and “past visitors with low and high information” tended to identify and indicate more *specific places*, with a marked preference for symbol-places, icons of a city with high prototypical value. However, partially confirming our hypothesis as above stated, among those conducting the exploration with high information strategy, the *specific places* are even more frequently cited than the *generic places* (28 versus 12 and 39 versus 1 respectively in the two sub-groups of the potential first visitors and 25 versus 15 and 39 versus 1 in the two sub-groups of the past visitors). The exception was Vienna, for which generic places were mentioned only by the “potential first visitors with low information”, while for London and Paris both the “potential first visitors with low information” and the “past visitors with high information” indicated specific places, never generic ones. In the case of Madrid, generic places were indicated in two cases, compared with the eight specific places identified by the “potential first visitors with low information”, while all the “past visitors with low and high information” to Madrid mentioned specific places.

Notwithstanding the paucity of the data, we may interpret the references to specific places as a tendency for visitors (“potential first” and “past”) to let themselves be guided in their exploration by prior knowledge (not necessarily of experiential nature) about the cities considered, except for Vienna, which was perhaps the least known among our young subjects compared with the popular London, Paris and Madrid. The high popularity of the historic capitals considered, as well as the presence of symbol-places in them, may therefore have facilitated recourse to specific and famous places also among those subjects who had never visited them. In particular:

- In the cases of Paris and Madrid, frequent references were made to places of artistic-architectural interest by both the “potential first visitors with low information” and the “past visitors with high information”, who indicated the Tour Eiffel and the Opéra, as well as the Plaza Mayor, which also included reference to the Palacio Real (an institutional place), with some allusions to the socio-recreational dimension as identified in places like EuroDisney or the Bernabeu Stadium.
- As regards London, references were made to different typologies by both “potential first visitors with low information” and “past visitors with high information”. These tended to identify and indicate artistic-architectural places like Westminster Abbey; institutional ones like Buckingham Palace; and physical-natural ones like St. James Park or Hyde Park.
- Finally in the case of Vienna, the ten generic (i.e. not named) places identified and indicated by the “potential first visitors with low information” related to the following typologies: artistic-architectural (building; cathedral); urban (street, square); physical-natural (park, river); while the ten specific places identified and indicated by the “past visitors with high information” included artistic-architectural places like the Schonbrunn Castle and the Museum of Modern Art (MUMOK) institutional places like the Parliament; socio-recreational ones like the zoo; and physical-natural ones like the Oberlaa Park.

From the cross-analysis between the research carried out in the field and on the Internet, intended to compare the preferred places selected by the “virtual tourists” (both “potential first-visitors” and “past visitors”) with the preferred places chosen by the “real first-visitors” interviewed during the field studies in the same historic European capitals (de Rosa & d’Ambrosio, 2011), it is possible to conclude that the main landmarks in common referred to the artistic-architectural and institutional dimensions. In particular, for the cities of Paris and Madrid both the “virtual tourists” and the “real first-visitors” cited the Tour Eiffel and the Palacio Real, while for the cities of London and Vienna respectively they referred to Buckingham Palace and Schonbrunn Castle. In the popular imagery, therefore, the tower constructed

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on the occasion of the centennial of the French Revolution coexists with the pomp of the monarchic tradition.

Moreover, the “virtual tourists” – both as “potential first visitors” and as “past visitors” – also made reference to the socio-recreational and naturalistic dimension: those places of shopping, folklore, and leisure that for “real visitors” assume importance above all when they return home.

In short, both the data collected in the field research by interviewing “real tourists” and the preliminary results obtained by the pilot study conducted on “virtual tourists” emphasise the representations objectified through the symbol-places of the cities, thus highlighting the importance of the “destination image”, which comprises, besides personal factors of a psycho-social nature, also stimulus-factors like sources of information (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

## **INVESTIGATING E-BRANDING IMAGE THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKS**

By drawing on diverse sources – official and specially unofficial (word of mouth, schoolbooks, literature, films, songs, internet, press media, tourism brochures, and documentaries etc) – it is possible to reconstruct the images of the historic capitals considered. The municipal websites explored by this study, with their “institutional site identities”, constitute one of the possible sources of information – indeed, according to some authors, the principal one (Sicilia, Perez & Heffernan, 2008) – and they may provide cognitive anticipation of the actual experience. It is in any case through the interweaving of numerous textual, iconic, fictional, etc. sources that the different targets cities reconstruct their “brand images”. Therefore of interest is an exploratory comparison between the representations of cities conveyed by administrators through institutional websites and the representations negotiated and jointly constructed by visitors and potential visitors to cities through spontaneous conversations and exchanges of experiences in the new online meeting places (the social networks) of high aggregative capacity.

This comparison, which will be useful for web professionals (webmasters, content developers, web designers, etc.) and those responsible for “institutional” communication by cities, will be conducted by analysing the most salient contents of communicative exchanges among ‘potential first-visitors’ and ‘past visitors’ in the most popular social networks: *Facebook* (in groups, fan pages, personal profiles) and *Yahoo! Answer* (travel category).



## The Historic European Capitals through Images

Considered in what follows will be the symbol-places of the cities referable to Lynch's (1970) notion of landmarks, not only because of the aesthetic and artistic-architectural features but also, and especially, the identitarian dimensions of the cities considered. A total of 2371 places were collected from conversational exchanges in the social networks *Facebook* and *Yahoo! Answers* during the period between October 2010 and October 2011 in regard to the historic capitals: Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Helsinki, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Warsaw, and Vienna.<sup>3</sup>

The capitals evoked most frequently were London and Madrid, with respectively 36.07% and 25.01% of the places cited, of which respectively 88% and 78% were specific, versus 12% and 22% which were generic (see Table 7.) Brussels recorded the highest percentage of generic places (i.e. ones of categorial type, like squares, institutional buildings, museums, parks, etc., not specifically named), whilst all the places evoked for Paris, Vienna and Lisbon were specific and identifiable.

The historic capitals (see Table 8) considered were cited in the free conversations of the subjects on the social networks mainly in terms of their artistic-architectural places: for Warsaw and Lisbon, the percentage exceeded 50%; while lower percentages were recorded for Vienna (47%); Paris (40%), Brussels (34%) and London (33%). Also in the cases of Madrid and Berlin, albeit with a lower percentage (31.5%), the artistic-architectural category was the most representative, followed by the urban category (Madrid 31%; Berlin 26,5%).

The list of the places evoked for the various capitals was subjected to lexical correspondence analysis with the assistance of the Spad software, which made it possible to synthesise the information into five factors.

*Table 7. Evocation of places with reference to the historic capitals considered*

European Capitals	Places Evoked	% of Places Evoked
London	855	36,07
Madrid	593	25,01
Paris	275	11,60
Brussels	162	6,83
Berlin	147	6,20
Vienna	143	6,03
Lisbon	116	4,89
Warsaw	61	2,57
Helsinki	19	0,80
Total	2371	100

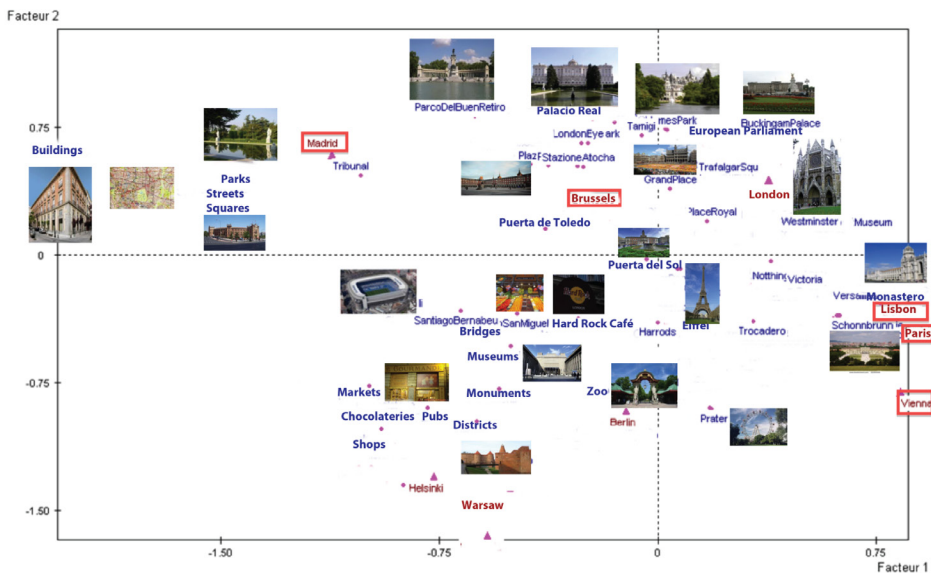
**Place @-Branding and European Capitals**

*Table 8. Classification of places with reference to the historical capitals considered*

European Capitals	Socio-Recreational	Urban	Artistic-Architectural	Institutional	Geographical	Physical-Natural	Other	Total
London	18%	16%	33%	3.5%	13%	13%	3.5%	100%
Madrid	17.5%	31%	31.5%	4%	7%	7%	2%	100%
Paris	16%	12%	40%	0%	24%	8%	0%	100%
Brussels	12%	12%	34%	12%	6%	12%	12%	100%
Vienna	13%	20%	47%	13%	0%	7%	0%	100%
Berlin	16%	26.5%	31.5%	5%	21%	0%	0%	100%
Lisbon	0%	25%	62.5%	0%	12.5%	0%	0%	100%
Warsaw	0%	0%	75%	0%	25%	0%	0%	100%
Helsinki	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Graphical representation of the factors (see Figure 5) enabled interpretation of the structure of associations among the lexemes, so that we could highlight aspects not directly identifiable on reading the individual factor tables. The geometric-structural approach, with particular regard to the interaction between the first horizontal factor and the second vertical one, made it possible to plot the positions of the labels for the places in the various European capitals on the Cartesian plane.

*Figure 5. Graphic representation of the intersection between factor 1 in horizontal position and factor 2 in vertical position with reference to the places evoked on the social networks*



The upper-left quadrant of the figure contains the cities with high percentages of generic places: Madrid and Brussels; while the lower-right quadrant contains the capitals characterized 100% by specific places evoked: Lisbon, Paris and Vienna. Moreover, these latter are the capitals that, together with Warsaw, record the highest percentages of artistic-architectural places. Specifically:

- For Madrid, besides the “Plaza Mayor”, the “Palacio Real” and the “Stadio Santiago Bernabeu” – respectively with evocation frequencies equal to 31, 24 and 17 – already apparent in the tours selected with Google Earth, the places most recurrent in the social network are “buildings” (freq. 34), together with other generic places with urban references like “streets” and “squares”. When specific, the latter, with the “Puerta del Sol” (freq. 32) relate to the famous Madrid *movida*, as already pointed out in de Rosa & d’Ambrosio (2011). Also to be noted is the naturalistic component, in both generic terms (“parks” freq. 20) and specific ones (“Parco del Buen Retiro” freq. 27).
- With reference to Brussels, evident in the figure is evocation of the “Grand Place”, a place which recurs with greater frequency in the research conducted on the social networks (freq. 20), followed by the “Atomium” (freq. 17). Other generic places evoked for Brussels with lower frequencies are: “chocolateries” (freq.5); “museums” (freq. 4); “parks” (freq. 3) and “pubs” (freq.3).
- Most notable for Lisbon is the “Monastero dos Jeronimos” (freq.11), which together with “Bairro Alto” and the “Belem Tower” (both with frequencies equal to 12), is the place in the city most often evoked in the social networks. These places were also found to be the most significant in Lisbon for the “real visitors” surveyed by de Rosa & d’Ambrosio, both before and after the visit.
- Paris is represented by the “Tour Eiffel”, the symbol-place symbol of the city (freq. 27), which already appeared in the tours selected by the explorers with Google Earth together with the “Operà” (present with freq. 3 in the social networks) and “Eurodisney” (present with freq. 16 in the social networks). The Eiffel Tower is a sort of icon-prototype for the city. It was already selected as the most significant place overall, both before and after the visit, by the “real visitors” in the study by de Rosa and d’Ambrosio (2011). Other Parisian places recurrent in the social networks with high frequency are the “Louvre Museum” (freq. 21) and “Notre Dame” (freq. 16). These same places, together with the Eiffel Tour, were cited by the Italian “real visitors”, both before after their visits, testifying to the importance of the historical memory dimension in the representation of the French capital.
- The icon of Vienna is instead the “Schonbrunn Castle” (freq. 14), already cited by the Google Earth explorers and also found to be Vienna’s symbol-place by the research conducted on Italian “real visitors” (de Rosa & d’Ambrosio,

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2011). Also the Parliament is mentioned, both with reference to Google Earth and the social networks, but whilst with Google Earth various generic places were listed for Vienna, only specific places appear in the social networks, among which the highest frequency is recorded by “St Stephen’s Cathedral”, which does not occur either in Google Earth or the field research on “real visitors” (de Rosa & d’Ambrosio 2011).

- With respect to the other capitals considered, London appears in the figure with its artistic-architectural and institutional aspects, with “Westminster Abbey” (freq. 35) and “Buckingham Palace” (freq. 37), which together with “St James’ Park” (freq. 8 in the social networks) and “Hyde Park” (freq. 30 in the social networks), is also present in the Google Earth tours. Attachment to the monarchical tradition was already evidenced by the research on “real visitors” by de Rosa & d’Ambrosio, which also acknowledged the English precision objectified in the famous “Big Ben”. The latter is also cited in the social networks with a frequency of 36. But here the London place with the highest frequency is “Piccadilly Circus” with freq. 44. In regard to socio-recreational places, the social networks also mention the famous “Hard Rock Café” of London.
- Finally, for Warsaw and Berlin, the figure respectively shows the “old city” (freq. 5), “museums” (freq. 8) and “zoo” (freq. 5), while omitted from the figure are:
  - The “Cathedral of Tuomiokirkko” for Warsaw (freq. 3), because the city is positioned on the edge of the figure and not all the words evoked by the subjects, because of their factorial coordinates, can fit inside the figure’s borders.
  - And the Alexanderplatz (freq. 12) and the “Brandenburg Gate” (freq. 11) for Berlin, because it is concealed by other words in the figure.

The majority of the places – an extensive panorama of which is provided by the Figure 1 – have been drawn from the social network *Yahoo! Answers*, rather than from *Facebook*, because of the different structuring of the two social networks. In fact, on *Facebook* it was only possible to collect texts appearing in spontaneous conversations among users (in groups, fan pages, personal profiles), while on *Yahoo! Answers* it was possible to prompt conversations on the theme by using as an outline questions inspired by the questionnaire used by de Rosa (1995) with the “real visitors”.

Among the cities most ‘chatted about’ on *Facebook*, Madrid is the *queen* of the social dimension related to the capitals, with 30% of places elicited, evoking the Puerta del Sol, the streets and squares referring to the *movida* rich with emotional aspects relative to the travels and places of past visitors (96%), who share their

emotional experiences of the places in conversations with potential visitors (4%) among other members of the same social network.

By contrast, in the conversations of the members connected via *Yahoo! Answers*, the informational character and the tendency to provide detailed and practical information about the destination tourist city prevail as means to share representational maps of the cities visited with the future potential visitors. In fact, when "potential first visitors" are distinguished from "past visitors", it is almost exclusively the latter who contribute to evocation of the places in the various cities, having obviously had experience of them.

### **The Historic European Capitals through Words**

Besides the 2371 places evoked, also memorized on Facebook and *Yahoo! Answers* were the evaluations made of the cities,<sup>4</sup> with the recording of a total of 1293 adjectives distributed in Table 9.

Almost one-quarter of the total evocations refer to Madrid alone, followed by Paris with 19.64%. All the cities share a huge number of references to the "aesthetic and artistic-architectural" and "emotional" dimensions. However, in the case of Brussels, the "emotional" dimension is balanced by the "socio-interpersonal" one, while for Berlin and Warsaw the "functional" dimension prevails. Finally, Lisbon is the capital for which, albeit with low percentages, the most valued dimensions are the "economic" one and the chromatic dimension evoked by the "colour" of the city.

Also in this case, as for the places, the adjectival evocations were subjected to lexical correspondence analysis with the aid of the Spad software. The figure derived from the intersection between the first horizontal factor and the vertical second one

*Table 9. Evocations of adjectives with reference to the historic capitals considered*

European Capitals	Adjectives Evoked	% of Adjectives Evoked
Madrid	300	23.22
London	254	19.64
Paris	236	18.25
Vienna	143	11.06
Lisbon	131	10.13
Brussels	93	7.19
Berlin	70	5.41
Warsaw	34	2.63
Helsinki	32	2.47
Total	1293	100

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plots on the Cartesian plane the adjectives evoked with respect to the European capitals (see Table 10.)

- Predominant on the left-hand side of the figure are the “aesthetic and artistic-architectural” and “emotional” dimensions. Positioned here is Madrid, which is perceived, in all its splendour as “enchanted” (freq. 32), “marvellous” (freq. 22), “stupendous” (freq. 17), “fantastic” (freq. 8) “splendid”, “magnificent”, “impressive”, “attractive.” Although it is the only city deemed “perfect” (freq.3), Madrid’s positive image seems to spread among the historic capitals, including the nearby “Vienna”, “Paris”, “London” and “Helsinki”, which share the dimensions of “magic”, “uniqueness” and “magnificence.”
- Particularly appreciated in the case of Vienna is its historic centre, considered “beautiful”, “marvellous”; while in the collective imagery the city shares “elegance” and “romanticism” with Paris.
- Paris is both imagined and experienced as “exciting” (freq. 5), “unforgettable” (freq. 3) and “luminous” (freq. 3); while London appears “safe” (freq.4), “cosmopolitan” (freq.3), but also “expensive” (freq.8) and ‘unreliable weather’ (freq.6).
- Appearing in the positive upper-right quadrant are instead cities whose “functional dimension” is most appreciated: Warsaw, Berlin and Brussels are the capitals perceived/experienced as “practical”, “tidy”, “clean”, adjectives synonymous with efficiency and productivity.
- The lower-right quadrant comprises references to the “social-interpersonal” and “colour” dimensions, with particular regard to the city of Lisbon, where the climatic dimension “warm” and “sunny” (freq. 3) conjugates with the “cordial” and “friendly” style of the inhabitants.

*Table 10. Adjectives evoked with reference to the historic capitals considered and categorized in dimensions*

European Capitals	Aesthetic and Artistic-Architectural	Visuo-Perceptual	Colour	Functional	Economic	Socio-Interpersonal	Emotional	Naturalistic Nature	Total
London	37	6.7	1.2	11	6	12	19	7.1	100%
Madrid	59	2.6	0.3	3.7	7	7.7	16.7	3	100%
Paris	47.46	5.08	0.85	5.9	2.5	3.9	30.5	3.81	100%
Brussels	25.8	3.3	0	18.27	4.3	20.4	20.4	7.5	100%
Vienna	67.8	6.3	0.7	4.3	0	4.2	16	0.7	100%
Berlin	27	10	1.4	20	7	14.3	17.5	2.8	100%
Lisbon	38.9	6.1	3.8	4.6	12.9	10.7	15.4	7.6	100%
Warsaw	11.8	8.8	3	32.7	0	2.9	29	11.8	100%
Helsinki	28	9.5	0	12.5	9.4	6.2	34.4	0	100%

Hence, opposed to Berlin’s representation centred on “functional” aspects is the tourist-vacationist image of Lisbon, which, unlike the capitals of the North, also appears inexpensive. This view of Lisbon as a cheap and pleasant tourist destination replicates the finding of de Rosa and d’Ambrosio (2011) with Italian “real visitors”.

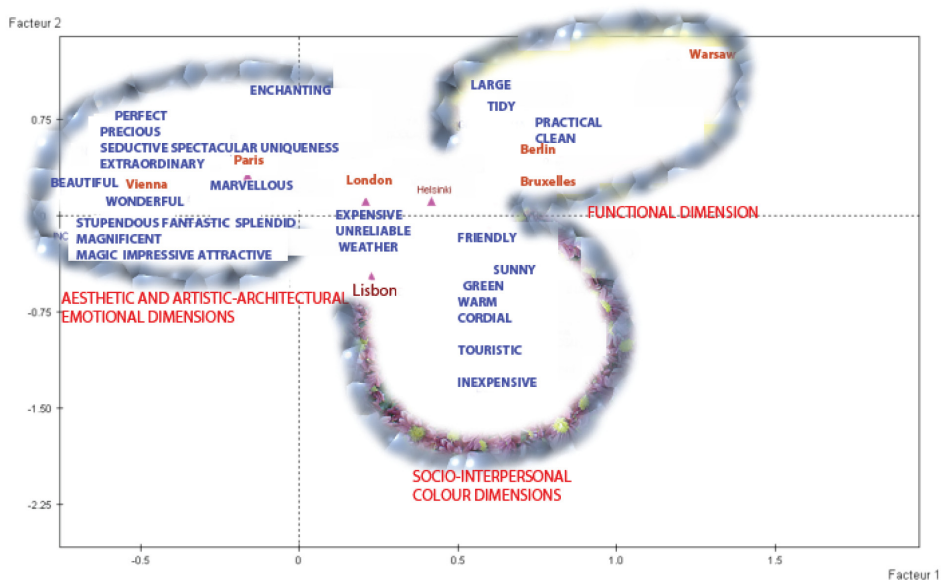
Given the distinction between the qualitative text produced on *Facebook* and *Yahoo! Answers*, although larger percentages were recorded through *Yahoo! Answers* (60%) than with *Facebook* (around 40%), the data tend to be more balanced than the already-considered evocations of places (see Figure 6.)

As for places so for adjectives, it is again the city of Madrid (69%), this time together with Vienna (69%) and Paris (44%), that receives adjectival attributions on Facebook with strong emotional connotations shared among the social network’s members.

Conversely, no adjective was collected on *Facebook* for the cities most characterized by functional aspects (Warsaw, Berlin and Brussels), the subjects of conversations mainly among the members of the social network *Yahoo! Answers*, given its communicative purpose of privileging informational elements over emotional ones.

Finally, given the distinction between “potential first visitors” and “past visitors”, as for the evocations of places also in the case of adjectival attributions, a

*Figure 6. Graphic representation of the intersection between the factor 1 in horizontal position and the factor 2 in vertical position with reference to the adjectives evoked on the social networks*



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much larger amount of the latter were recorded by “past visitors” (88%), for whom knowledge of the city visited acquires experiential connotations.

Research of this kind, based on free conversations among members of social networks, are of great importance from the ecological perspective of non-intrusive research in natural contexts (although they are on-line and virtual environments).

## **E-BRANDING IDENTITY AND E-BRANDING IMAGE: THE TWO PROFILES OF THE HISTORIC EUROPEAN CAPITALS**

At this point, it is possible to conduct a crosswise reading of the results obtained by the three above-described research lines. In particular, we will verify:

- Whether and with what evaluative meanings certain (functional/dysfunctional, socio-recreational, artistic-architectural, economic, etc.) dimensions are evoked in the collective imagery of cities through the social networks in regard to the same meaningful places selected during the virtual tours made of the preferred places by flying with Google Earth over the historic capitals subject to the research (already visited by past-visitors or which potential future-visitors declare that they intend to visit.)
- And in what ways and to what extents (level of updating, level of reliability, amount of information) such dimensions are again found on the institutional websites within an overall quali-quantitative and modelling research framework.

Assuming that “e-branding identity” and “e-branding image” are two sides of same coin, the findings thus far enable us to construct brief profiles of the historic European capitals.

- Vienna is the capital which, with its outright “Internet strategy”, is most attentive to the needs of residents and tourists by combining – thanks to the high communicative capacity of its institutional website – services, culture and tourism. By identifying its symbol-place as Schonbrunn Castle, recognized as iconic by “real” as well as “virtual” visitors – both flying over the city with Google Earth and describing it on the social networks – Vienna records a prevalence of places belonging to the artistic-architectural category, which consistently flanks the “aesthetic and artistic-architectural” and “emotional” dimensions.
- London and Paris are in a similar position. Their institutional websites respectively exhibit a medium-high and medium communicative capacity. In



regard to contents, the former appears less attentive to tourism and international aspects, concentrating instead on internal ones to foster a strong identity that is also open to change. The latter seems instead to neglect economic aspects while instead emphasising touristic-cultural and social features. Both capitals have their icon-places, such as Buckingham Palace and the Eiffel Tower, which are cited by both “real” and “virtual tourists”. Finally, both rely on their “aesthetic and artistic-architectural” and “emotional” aspects, which combine well with the prevalence of artistic-architectural places.

- Although Madrid, like Paris, has an institutional website with a communicative capacity rated as “medium”, its role is emphasized in around one-quarter of the discourse on the social networks concerning the adjectives evoked. Also Madrid has its icon-places recognized by “real and virtual tourists”, which make its history and tradition tangible. Finally, its website is rich with “aesthetic and artistic-architectural” and “emotional” elements that make it “perfect” and “unique” in the eyes of visitors, thus emphasising, as in the case of other capitals, the fundamentally “emotional” nature of Madrid’s brand (Gardner & Levy, 1955; de Chernatony, 1998).
- The consistency of Madrid’s brand image is confirmed when applying Anholt’s “City Brands Index” ([www.simonanholt.com/Research/cities-index.aspx](http://www.simonanholt.com/Research/cities-index.aspx)) calculated on Italian subjects included in a panel of more of 20,000 ordinary people in 20 different countries<sup>5</sup>. On 50 cities in the world, for each of the cities subject to our research<sup>6</sup> it was possible to measure a series of dimensions (Anholt, 2006b), which, moreover, showed affinities with our categorization of adjectives:
  - **Presence:** How highly people in Italy rank the “overall importance” of the capital cities and their contribution to the world in culture, science.
  - **Place:** How highly people in Italy rank the “attractiveness” of the capital cities, and people’s perceptions of the physical aspects of each city.
  - **Pre-Requisite:** How highly people in Italy rank the “services and accommodation” in the capital cities – corresponding to our category “functional dimension.”
  - **People:** How highly people in Italy rank the “people” in the capital cities (warm, friendly, or cold and prejudiced against outsiders) – corresponding to our category “socio-interpersonal dimension.”
  - **Pulse:** How highly people in Italy rank the “liveliness” of the capital cities.
  - **Potential:** How highly people in Italy rank the “opportunities” offered by the capital cities: work, business...– corresponding to our category “economic dimension.”

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According to the results, Madrid is the city that occupies the highest position in the international ranking. In particular, among the 50 cities considered, Madrid comes second for the dimension “people” and fourth for the dimension “attractiveness” (see Table 11).

- Some similarities between Madrid and Lisbon are apparent. Also in the case of Lisbon, in fact, an institutional website with medium-low communicative capacity and seemingly unconcerned with tourism and international cooperation is off-set by the substantial presence of places and adjectives connoting the city in both artistic-architectural and socio-interpersonal terms. Comparison of these results with those obtained by de Rosa and d’Ambrosio (2011) shows that Lisbon has maintained its symbol-places – “Bairro Alto” and the “Belem Tower” – unchanged over time.
- The city of Helsinki has a profile partly the reverse of that of Madrid and Lisbon. It has an institutional website with high communicative capacity, dedicated to tourism, presenting a dynamic city open to internationalization, and with points of excellence in certain services. Nevertheless, Helsinki records the smallest number of places and adjectives evoked on the social networks.
- Besides the differences that characterize cities and their targets, a critical factor for Helsinki seems to be its inability in recent years to propose a unified brand for its municipalities, which often compete against each other. In fact, Ilmonen (2010:42-43) writes as follows in regard to the branding of northern cities:

*Table 11. Anholt’s City Brands Index applied on 3 October 2012*

Capital Cities	Presence	Place	Pre-requisite	People	Pulse	Potential
Madrid	7	4	6	2	6	8
Paris	3	6	17	15	3	4
Rome	1	3	33	3	1	19
Vienna	9	7	13	11	10	20
Berlin	8	21	3	19	14	12
Brussels	11	16	12	12	37	14
London	4	24	16	23	4	1
Helsinki	35	25	15	16	39	25
Warsaw	37	32	27	31	36	34

([www.simonanholt.com/Research/cities-index.aspx](http://www.simonanholt.com/Research/cities-index.aspx))

“A brand is a promise that must be kept. A brand based on exaggeratedly unreal or too general images cannot last long. The campaign for Stockholm “Capital of Scandinavia” and that for Copenhagen “Premier Capital of Northern Europe” were not successful in the Scandinavian countries. They had to be halted because they proposed images which conflicted with the local reality and pursued exaggerated goals. Secondly, a brand should be based on a commonly shared view. In the Helsinki region, three strong municipalities have long competed with each other and they rarely cooperate, each developing its own strategies. Although a shared strategy has been devised for the entire Metropolitan Region of Helsinki (H.M.R.) – with the slogan “Helsinki Region – Europe’s Magnetic North” – it seems that the municipalities are creating their own “brands” with slogans, images and marketing:

- Espoo has adopted the slogan “City of Creativity and Expertise” in the high-tech commerce area of Otaniemi, where the University of Technology and Nokia are headquartered.
- Vantaa has used the “*Good Life*” slogan and builds its strategy on the airport in the centre of Aviapolis.
- Helsinki does not have its own slogan but relies on its role as a traditional urban centre unique in the area.”

However, despite the difficulties just described, the Helsinki tourism website ([www.visithelsinki.fi](http://www.visithelsinki.fi)) finally proposes, amongst others, the following as “strategic goals for tourism in Helsinki”:

- Helsinki has a unified brand.
- Tourism in the Helsinki Region is developed according to comprehensive plan.
- The Helsinki Region is marketed as an entity.

This renewed strategic vision highlights the need for a strengthened “brand identity” that fully exploits the potential of the Web for building a “brand image”.

- In a situation which also involves its institutional website is Warsaw, which, at least at the time of the data collection, was presented with web pages deficient in several respects, among them tourism. It may be that the recent drive for Warsaw’s internationalization has contributed to a restyling of the city’s identity which has also concerned its official website. With time, this restyling may enhance Warsaw’s “e-branding image”, which is shown to be currently rather poor by both the results of our research (in regard to the places and adjectives evoked) and those obtained on the City Brands Index (where,

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compared with the other capitals in the above table, Warsaw occupies generally the lowest positions in the ranking and, out of the 50 capitals considered, appears in 37th place for “importance” and 36th place for “liveliness”).

- Other capitals which exhibit a high and medium-high communicative capacity although they record a rather low number of places and adjectives evoked on the social networks are respectively Berlin and Brussels. The websites of both cities pay attention to tourism and internationalization, as well as to internal matters ranging from culture to sport, from social policies to the economy. Both cities have consolidated landmarks, such as Alexanderplatz and the Brandenburg Gate for Berlin, and the Grande Place and the Atomium for Brussels. Finally, both of them, besides the “aesthetic and artistic-architectural” and “emotional” dimensions, emphasise the “functional” one.

To conclude, this comparative analysis, which has cut across various European capitals highlighting the inextricable relationship between “e-branding identity” and “e-branding image”, furnishes useful information on the most opportune strategies of @-marketing adopted by the cities analysed. The purpose of the suggestions made is to steer web professionals and the managers of institutional communication by cities towards possible convergence among the dimensions conveyed by e-branding, the social representations of users, and their evaluations as past or future consumers of the target cities and their places: that is to say, by virtue of both their experiences as past visitors and their expectations as potential consumers of the tourist destinations and their imagined places.

It is therefore possible to concur with Syssner’s (2010) proposal concerning the techniques of anchorage and positioning to create a complex web of branded places, which, Syssner argues, can be understood only from a multi-level perspective on place branding, and other proposals recently advanced in the literature (Sicilia, Pèrez and Heffernan, 2008).

Account is also taken of the “need to rearticulate the functional/physical and representational/symbolic dimensions in city branding”, on the basis of the distinction drawn by Giovanardi (2010) between ‘*hard versus soft factors*’. This distinction characterizes traditional place marketing discourses, urging scholars and place managers to rearticulate these dimensions according to the different groups of brand users involved, and pressing “for a closer collaboration between marketers and other professionals involved in policymaking”.

For that matter, the need to articulate functionalist/physicalist and transactionalist (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981) and symbolic/representational ones is well known to scholars of social representations and the social memory of urban places (Milgram & Jodelet, 1976; Milgram, 1984; Jodelet, 1982, 2010; Pailhous, 1984; de Alba, 2002, 2009 2011). This theoretical perspective (Moscovici, 1961/1976, 2000;

Jodelet, 1989, 2008; Kalampalikis and Haas, 2008; Palmonari and Emiliani, eds. 2009, among others) and particularly the specific ‘modelling’ paradigm developed in its regard (de Rosa, 2011a, 2011b, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013c) constitute the guiding inspiration and the unifying factor of the research programmes undertaken by the European PhD on Social Representation and Communication Research Centre and Multimedia Lab (<http://www.europhd.eu>) on various topics (de Rosa, 2012b), and therefore also of the research papers presented in this article, with the specific focus on the close interweaving between social representations and communication conveyed by the new digital environments.

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*Annamaria de Rosa* is responsible for the ideation of the whole research programme and its interrelated research lines (field study and analysis through new media) and for the conception of this chapter, in which a selection of the research results has been presented and jointly discussed with Elena Bocci.

*Elena Bocci* has collaborated to the coordination of the human resources employed on the research for the data collection, to the data analysis and to the discussion of the results presented in this chapter with Annamaria de Rosa.

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## **ENDNOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> For detailed information see de Rosa, Bocci & Picone, 2012: 224-227.
- <sup>2</sup> For the download procedures and the preliminary and main steps of the analysis see: de Rosa, Bocci & Picone, 2012:227-231, including the codes used for the application of the software translated into the various languages.
- <sup>3</sup> The data collection considered texts in Italian, spontaneous and induced, produced by a population consisting of 672 users of the social networks divided as follows for the declared variables “gender” and “age”:
  - gender: 42.5% male, 44.5% female, 13% not determinable;
  - age: under 25 y.o. 1.3%, 26-33 y.o. 1.2%, 34-41 y.o. 0.3%, over 41 y.o. 0.3%, 96,9% not determinable.25% of the 672 users were selected through Facebook, and 75% as users of *Yahoo! Answers*.

Because it was not possible to determine the variable “nationality”, excluded from the survey were conversations relative to the city of Rome, where the only linguistic information available – texts written in Italian – would have been insufficient to distinguish between tourists and residents.

4 Also the survey on adjectives considered texts in Italian, spontaneous and induced, evoked from a population consisting of 945 users of the social networks this time divided as follows for the declared variables “gender” and “age”:

- gender: 40.6% male, 50.2% female, 9.2% not determinable;

- age: under 25 y.o. 2.1%, 26-33 y.o. 0.8%, 34-41 y.o. 0.3%, over 41 y.o. 0.3%, 96.5% not determinable.

464% of the 945 users considered were selected on Facebook and 53.6% as users of *Yahoo! Answers*.

Also in this case, conversations relative to the city of Rome were excluded from the data collection.

5 The *City Brands Index* measures what the ordinary people really think about the world’s cities: their people, their environment, their facilities and infrastructure, their culture and nightlife, their tourist attractions and their potential for immigrants.

6 It was not possible to measure the *City Brands Index* for Lisbon, not included in the database of 50 cities.