Demarketing places: Rationales and strategies

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Abstract The concept of demarketing, originally introduced by Kotler and Levy (1971), can be used in the context of places to describe specific activities aimed at deflecting interest, visitors, and/or investment to a particular place. This paper presents an exploratory investigation into the use of place demarketing in the UK. Thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted with place-marketing practitioners whose work was identified as incorporating elements of place-demarketing practice and activity. Four main rationales for demarketing places were identified: sustainability of the place product; market segmentation and targeting; reducing the effect of seasonality; and crisis prevention/management. The strategies identified in the place-demarketing process include: no marketing; redirection/marketing alternative places; informational place demarketing; restricting access; and pricing mechanisms. The paper concludes by drawing together some of the issues and implications that the demarketing of places raises.

Keywords demarketing; place marketing; rationales; strategies; UK

Introduction

Increasingly, places are perceived as being in competition with each other (Kotler, Asplund, Rein, & Haider, 1999; Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993; van den Berg & Braun, 1999; S.V. Ward, 1998; S.V. Ward & Gold, 1994). In such a climate, the last 30 years have seen development in the practice of place marketing (Kavaratzis, 2004; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005, 2008; S.V. Ward, 1998), and the professionalisation of its associated activities (Griffiths, 1998; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008; Wilkinson, 1992). Mirroring this evolution of place-marketing practice has been the emergence of a number of parallel streams in the academic literature on the subject. In the management arena, this literature is arguably rooted in normative studies of place marketing, which take standard marketing theories and apply them to the context of places (e.g. Kotler et al., 1993, 1999). Concurrently, in the geography and social-science disciplines, attention to place marketing has been more critical and tied in with issues such as place representation (e.g. Ashworth & Voogd, 1990, 1994; Barke & Harrop, 1994; Fitzsimons, 1995; Gold & Ward, 1994; Kearns & Philo, 1993; Paddison, 1993; Short, 1999; Short & Kim, 1999; S.V. Ward, 1998) and the
operation of place-marketing agencies (e.g. Hall & Hubbard, 1996; Peck & Tickell, 1994; Sadler, 1993; van den Berg & Braun, 1999). Related to this are the contestation of place images and the marginalisation of some place stakeholders (e.g. Boyle, 1997; Boyle & Hughes, 1994; Brownill, 1994; Burgess & Wood, 1988; Goodwin, 1993; Kenny, 1995; Neill, 1993), which in turn has significant implications for the way places are promoted and managed. More recently, reflecting S.V. Ward’s (1998, p. 6) call for a more ‘synthetic approach’ to the study of place marketing, there has been a confluence of these managerialist and critical-literature streams in discussions about place branding (e.g. Dinnie, 2002, 2008; Hankinson, 2004; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005, 2008).

One significant omission from the place-marketing canon has been a focus on those situations in which marketing effort is employed to deter people from visiting places. Indeed, the majority of the emphasis in the place-marketing literature is on attracting inward investment, tourism, residents, and so on. By contrast, the notion of keeping people away from places – in other words, place demarketing – appears to be the ignored mirror image of place-marketing activity. In reality, however, demarketing places has been occurring as long as place marketing itself. It has been especially important in the field of tourism, where as part of the process of segmentation, targeting, and positioning (Beeton, 2003; Clements, 1989), demarketing has, for example, been used to develop exclusivity in given resorts through the passive (and sometimes active) discouragement of certain market segments. More recently, issues pertaining to the environmental and archaeological protection of some tourist sites and destinations have necessitated a focus on place-demarketing practice, although tourism practitioners and academicians may couch this in terms of sustainability (Beeton, 2003; Beeton & Benfield, 2002; Benfield, 2000; Gilmore, Carson, and Ascencão, 2007). In this paper, the term ‘place demarketing’ is preferred, not least because the activities it encompasses cover more than merely tourism. Indeed, it will be seen that place demarketing can be as much about keeping people away from locations for the purposes of crisis management and avoidance as it is about sustainability.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Following a review of the literature on demarketing generally and place demarketing more specifically, attention turns to the exploration of two research objectives that remain poorly expounded in the literature: to identify (i) the rationale(s) for place demarketing and (ii) the strategies adopted to implement it. Bearing in mind its exploratory nature, this research involves a qualitative approach incorporating in-depth, semi-structured interviews with place-marketing stakeholders who were identified as operating in contexts where place-demarketing activities might be appropriate. Following an examination of interview data, the paper concludes by drawing these findings together in a detailed discussion about how they enhance our understanding of place marketing (and demarketing) theory. There is also wider consideration of how such findings fit in with the established literature on demarketing more generally.

The concept of demarketing

The basic premise of demarketing involves decreasing the consumption of a product (Baker, 1998; Bennett, 1995; Koschnick, 1995; Mercer, 1999). The concept was first articulated by Kotler and Levy (1971), who defined demarketing as ‘that aspect of marketing that deals with discouraging customers in general or a certain class of
customers in particular on either a temporary or a permanent basis’ (p. 75). The primary scenario motivating such activity is one of ‘overfull demand’, whereby ‘demand exceeds the level at which the marketer feels able or motivated to supply it’ (Koschnick, 1995, p. 148). In such circumstances, Kotler and Levy (1971) identify three types of demarketing that may be practised:

- **General demarketing** – which is ‘required when a company wants to shrink the level of total demand’ (p. 75), and may be appropriate in times of temporary product shortages, chronic overcapacity, and product elimination (where some loyal customers may still require/desire a superseded product);

- **Selective demarketing** – which is ‘required when a company wants to discourage the demand coming from certain customer classes’ (p. 75), either because satisfying their needs is perceived to be relatively unprofitable or undesirable in terms of the possible impact on other segments. Beeton (2003) and Clements (1989) regard selective demarketing as an inherent part of the process of market segmentation and targeting, and Gerstner, Hess, and Chu (1993) see it as a means of competitive differentiation;

- **Ostensible demarketing** – which ‘involves the appearance of trying to discourage demand as a device for actually increasing it’ (p. 75). The basic premise of this approach is that the marketer ‘works on the principle that people want what may be hard to get and may even masochistically “enjoy” being neglected by the seller’ (p. 79).

Academic research into the application of demarketing principles has focused on contexts where the ‘product’ offered to the customer is an especially finite resource. Thus Beeton and Pinge (2003) identify health care and tourism as the main areas where the principles of demarketing have been mostly practised (in the specific context of health care see, e.g., Borkowski, 1994; Kindra & Taylor, 1995; Mark & Elliott, 1997; Wall, 2005; and in a tourism context, see Beeton, 2003; Benfield, 2000; Clements, 1989; Curtis, 1998; Gunn, 1994). Other contexts have included demarketing the car as an element of transport policy (Wall, 2005; Wright & Egan, 2000).

Two clear motivations behind demarketing activity are identified in the literature. First, reducing use of and/or limiting access to resources/facilities whose ability to cope with demand is finite – examples occur in both health care (e.g., Borkowski, 1994; Kindra & Wayne, 1995), via raising prices/reducing promotion, access, or service levels (Kotler & Clarke, 1987), and tourism, via price increases/restricting distribution (Beeton & Benfield, 2002). A second interlinked motive relates to changing consumer behaviour as an attempt to reduce the need for these finite resources in the first place via promotional campaigns – examples being campaigns relating to non-smoking and reducing alcohol abuse (Wall, 2005) and those discouraging private car usage (Mackett, 2001).

The notion of demarketing has implications for the concept of market orientation, defined by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) as the generation of market intelligence, its dissemination, and organisational-wide responsiveness to it. In situations where demand is ‘overfull’ and an organisation is seeking to reduce demand through demarketing activity, market orientation is arguably less relevant. Indeed, Kohli and Jaworski (1990) identify certain environmental ‘moderators’ that may influence the relationship between market orientation and business performance:

A market orientation requires the commitment of resources. The orientation is useful only if the benefits it affords exceed the cost of those resources. Hence,
under conditions of limited competition, stable market preferences, technologically turbulent industries, and booming economies, a market orientation may not be related strongly to business performance. Managers of businesses operating under these conditions should pay close attention to the cost-benefit ratio of a market orientation. (p. 15)

Similarly, in a place context, those places with overfull demand may not feel the need to be market oriented. However, such a view is arguably short-sighted. According to Kohli and Jaworski (1990), one of the ‘pillars’ of market orientation is customer focus. Thus even places with overfull demand need to consider market orientation in order to maximise positive customer experiences of the place product. This provides a reminder that place customers are heterogeneous in nature, hence the need for places to be multi-sold. Consequently, demarketing activity targeting one set of place customers, such as tourists, is not necessarily at odds with the notion of market orientation, especially if that demarketing activity helps maintain or enhance the satisfaction levels of another segment of place customers, such as local residents.

**Demarketing in a place context**

In line with the principles of market orientation, the conventional wisdom of place marketing argues that one of its key roles is the creation of a positive holistic image for a locality through the selective appropriation of place product elements relevant to particular audiences and their commodification in appropriate media. Where the literature considers the issue of negative place images, the focus is on the identification of effective strategies for image improvement (see, e.g., Avraham, 2000, 2004; Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Kotler et al., 1993, 1999). The implication is that a negative place image is undesirable per se.

However, Medway and Warnaby (2006, 2008) have argued that an exclusive focus on image improvement may not be the only marketing approach available to places, and that there may be some situations where accentuating the negative may be an appropriate place-marketing strategy. Specific to place contexts, they go on to define demarketing as ‘activities aimed at deflecting interest, visitors and/or investment from a particular place’ (Medway & Warnaby, 2008, p. 644). This broad definition of place demarketing is supported in this paper.

Medway and Warnaby (2008) also identify different demarketing motivations and activities relating to various scenarios. The first of these involves the basic distinction between passive and active forms of place demarketing. Passive demarketing of place is a process that is manifest in many different contexts and is arguably implicit in the segmentation, targeting, and positioning process for places, as outlined by Beeton (2003) and Clements (1989). Passive demarketing can be both general (where a place need not actively encourage visitors due to the fact that it already has what Kotler et al., 1999, p. 52, term an ‘overly attractive image’) and selective. In this latter use, by emphasising certain place attributes to market a location to certain types of individuals or organisations, it may automatically follow that other elements that may attract alternative types of individuals or organisations are de facto demarked.

In contrast, active demarketing of individual places may also occur. Following Kotler and Levy (1971), who in their original exploration of the concept suggested that demarketing may often be a temporary strategy, Medway and Warnaby (2006, 2008) suggest that active demarketing of places may typically occur over a discrete
time period, often to manage and attempt to avert or reduce the impact of a crisis situation. A prime example of this was the UK foot-and-mouth crisis in 2001, where many central and local government agencies actively demarked the countryside. The effectiveness of this activity was manifest in the enormous uphill struggle of remarketing the countryside post crisis, when it became increasingly clear how adversely rural economies had been affected (for further details, see Donaldson, Lee, Ward, & Wilkinson, 2006; Franks, Lowe, Phillipson, & Scott, 2003; Phillipson, Bennett, Lowe, & Raley, 2004; N. Ward, Donaldson, & Lowe, 2004). Medway and Warnaby (2008) also identify another form of active demarketing – informational place demarketing – which may be implemented by agencies internal or external to particular places. An example of this would be the way that various national governments provide ongoing advice to their citizens about which locations they should not travel to.

In their discussion of demarketing in a tourism context, Beeton and Benfield (2002) suggest that it is ‘currently being unconsciously used, but has not been adequately recognised or actively pursued as a marketing or management tool’ (p. 502). This paper builds upon previous work – in particular Medway and Warnaby (2006, 2008) – to investigate the practice of place demarketing across various sites and locations in the UK.

**Methodology**

The relatively neglected nature of place demarketing in the academic literature suggested that an exploratory and qualitative approach would be most appropriate. Consequently, a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with place-marketing stakeholders was undertaken. These interviews involved flexible questioning set around key themes (Gardner, 1978). As noted earlier, the objectives of these interviews were twofold: to determine the rationale(s) for place demarketing and the strategies adopted to implement it.

In total, 13 interviews were eventually conducted with various place-marketing stakeholders, who typically were representatives/employees of one of four types of organisation:

- local authorities [four respondents];
- tourist sites [three respondents, two of which were responsible for designated World Heritage Sites];
- national parks [four respondents];
- voluntary/pressure groups with an interest in how space (particularly rural space) is managed and marketed [two respondents].

The selection of this sample involved a snowball technique suitable for the inductive, theory-building approach adopted in this study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thus initial contacts were made with known place-marketing stakeholders operating in contexts where demarketing may be appropriate (Medway & Warnaby, 2006). One of the challenges here was initial unfamiliarity with the term ‘place demarketing’ amongst some respondents, despite the fact they were practising it. The term was introduced during the interviews without undue emphasis, a point at which some respondents demanded clarification. All respondents clearly recognised the characteristics of place demarketing when it was explained to them and, where
relevant, were able to identify other potential respondents who practised place demarketing at the end of the interview. Contacts and links were followed in this way until a point of data saturation was reached, whereby new interviews appeared to be adding little new knowledge or information (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

There were specific considerations taken when designing the interview schedule because the interviews were being conducted by telephone. Frey and Oishi (1995) indicate that questions designed for personal and telephone interviews should be written in a ‘conversational style’. Adopting this approach helped the participants feel at ease and allowed them to answer honestly. This conversational style was also effective in revealing rich, detailed, and personal accounts of the issues under discussion, rather than collecting what may have been sanitised ‘public accounts’ (Cornwell, 1988) of an occasionally contentious issue. Such contentiousness came not least from the fact that demarketing a place can sometimes have negative impacts on businesses and organisations in terms of reduced visitor numbers. For this reason, the identity of the respondents and the places/destinations for which they are responsible has been disguised to ensure anonymity.

The interviews, typically lasting between 45 and 60 minutes, were conducted by phone at prearranged times with the interviewees, and were recorded and subsequently transcribed. From interview transcripts, salient themes were highlighted via transcript excerpts and quotes, in line with the process of theme and content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and more specifically the template-analysis technique (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; King, 1998). The results of this research, structured by the research objectives, are reported below.

**Rationales for demarketing places**

*Maintaining the quality of the place brand*

Undoubtedly, one reason why places have implemented demarketing strategies is to make their place product more sustainable in terms of managing visitor numbers to help ensure a lesser but regular supply. Even though some places would benefit financially from more visitors, those responsible for their management recognise that there may be adverse affects on the place product with consequent implications for the place ‘brand’, in that:

> ...too many visitors can result in a negative experience for all the visitors. (Respondent 1)

For example, in one site with World Heritage status:

> At certain times of the year ... we don’t allow access at all to allow the grounds to recover. (Respondent 2)

*Market segmentation and targeting*

Another reason for places using demarketing is to target a favoured type of place consumer. As another respondent, responsible for tourism promotion in a county of the UK, explained:

> Rather than trying to get more people down [here], it’s about improving the quality of the stay and therefore improving the quality of the person that’s coming to stay in [the county]. (Respondent 3)
Similarly, another representative from a town in this county stated:

...you have to accept there are different markets, and we need to find the right markets who are more attuned to the environmental product that we have to offer. (Respondent 4)

Here, the appeals and imagery used in the place-marketing process were specifically tailored to the tourist segments, which this particular town wished to attract, and there was awareness that this imagery would equally demarket the location to other segments. This approach supports Beeton and Benfield’s (2002) view that ‘in markets with choices, coercion to change behaviour is usually impossible but influence through targeted selective messages is always an option’ (p. 505).

Reducing the effect of seasonality

Another reason why locations are demarket is in an attempt to spread visitor numbers over time and therefore reduce the negative impacts of seasonality. Thus the aim is to demarket locations as being only summer destinations to places that can be visited all year round. This has obvious implications for how a place is portrayed in marketing-communications activity. In the case of another county in the UK:

...we are very careful and responsible with our imagery and we encourage pictures of clouds, and sitting by an open fire, and people walking along the beach in the winter with a dog. So people don’t just think of [the county] as a summer destination and want to all come at the same time. I mean, we really have been working hard as a county to reduce seasonality because it not only affects the experience of the visitor, but also affects the economy. (Respondent 5)

Crisis prevention/management

Demarketing is also a powerful tool for managing or preventing a crisis. Sometimes, this kind of demarketing activity is ‘reactive’ in its response to a crisis that is already occurring on the ground. Thus, during the 2001 UK foot-and-mouth epidemic, demarketing was used extensively to warn visitors to rural areas about the potential hazards of the disease spreading and in effect ‘close the countryside’ (Respondent 6).

However, there is evidence to suggest that place demarketing can also be used in a ‘proactive’ way to prevent a crisis, as well as to manage it. An example would be the use of place demarketing to deflect possible acts of disorder at large public events. During the 2006 World Cup, many UK cities and towns discouraged football fans from congregating around large open-air TV screens in city and town centres, fearing the potential for disorderly behaviour. A respondent from one such city in the north of England stated:

...we didn’t allow the BBC to broadcast any of the England games on the BBC screen [in the city centre], and we got them to put up a message that games would not be shown but that tickets were available for the [organised] fan park prior to the England games. (Respondent 7)

Similarly, another UK city was very concerned about the influx of protestors that were expected to attend a major political event, and took precautions accordingly:

There were strong messages going out that we were an inclusive city but we didn’t want any trouble. The messages were if you’re going to cause trouble don’t do it here or don’t come. (Respondent 8)
Strategies for demarketing places

A number of place-demarketing strategies were identified from the research, which are discussed in more detail below.

No marketing

In order to manage visitor numbers, some study locations did not implement any marketing activities at certain times of the year:

...this is a particular property where we do not want any more than 163,000 visitors per year. We have to control them in May, June and July, so we do not do any marketing then. (Respondent 1)

Another destination, with World Heritage Site status, did not actively promote itself because of already high visitor numbers:

...we don’t focus on attracting any new target markets, but rather on maintaining the experience for those that would come anyway. (Respondent 9)

However, the multiplicity of stakeholders with management involvement in some places meant that ‘no marketing’ was usually implicitly rather than explicitly articulated as official management policy because of ‘political’ considerations (including the financial implications arising from reduced visitor numbers). It was recognised that demarketing was ‘a very fine balancing act’ (Respondent 4). Indeed, this fear of excessive reduction in visitation was a key reason why one of the attractions mentioned above does not make their demarketing policy official:

I think we would be very unwilling to formalise the non-promotion just in case visitor numbers drop to [a level] where we need to promote. (Respondent 9)

Redirection to alternative places – ‘diversion demarketing’

A second strategy identified concerns places that are demarketed by the promotion and marketing – or redirection – of visitors to an alternative place offer. In short, these are places that want visitors to come, but not to outstay their welcome; the place marketer can facilitate this need by suggesting alternatives.

This demarketing by the promotion of another place, or suggestion of alternatives, has been used by a city-centre coordinator in the south of England to deflect the visitor pressures arising from organised parties of continental school children. Consequently, attempts have been made to demarket the city by promoting other nearby places of tourist interest, and the city-centre coordinator has tried to communicate the fact that a full day visit is not needed:

... school parties at the Academic Centre are welcome, but we would really appreciate it if you could organise your tour so that you don’t spend your whole day in [the city], which is not all for children really. After they have visited the cathedral, it is quite a small town, there’s not an awful lot for young kids, so we created a programme sending them to other alternatives such as zoos and things like that. (Respondent 10)

Another respondent, responsible for a World Heritage Site, referred to this process as ‘switch marketing’:
... we are trying to mitigate the impact of high visitation on ancient sites, so we work very closely with the people that tend them. We might promote a certain site for a while and then these people may tell us that this is over-popular and is having a negative impact on the site so we may then promote an alternative... We may in this case actually remove a site from our marketing or from our imagery, but we may also offer alternatives and just mention the site in text. So it's like 'switch marketing' if you wanted a better word. (Respondent 4)

**Informational place demarketing**

From the interviews, it became apparent that information plays a significant role in much demarketing activity related to places. But in some cases, information dissemination through a very highly orchestrated use of the media becomes an important element in communicating accurate information about the place. This echoes the concept of *informational place demarketing* discussed elsewhere by Medway and Warnaby (2008). This is critical in a crisis situation, where immediate and forceful place-demarketing intervention may be essential in order to diffuse the crisis.

Thus information was used to prepare one city proactively for the huge influx of visitors expected for a major protest demonstration. This was motivated by a desire for crisis prevention and specifically to discourage any forms of public disorder that were being predicted. Information disseminated by the city authorities played the role of educating organisations, action groups, and the public on exactly what was happening and how to act responsibly. This was not demarketing in a very negative manner, but rather in the neutral and precautionary sense of a public information message:

*If people were coming to the march they should think ahead, they should organise their transport and get their accommodation organised... We also set up a call centre for people to ring and get information from what was happening, to where to stay, to road closures or anything like that. That was available throughout the period and, of course, there was a website. We also set up a media information centre so we could get the information to the media.* (Respondent 11)

This kind of strategy for place demarketing can also be used to try to diffuse the impact of an actual crisis that is already occurring. This was certainly the case during the 2001 UK foot-and-mouth outbreak when those responsible for the management of various National Parks in the UK used extensive media relations to provide constantly updated information to various place stakeholders and the general public. The aim of this was to help steer people away from the countryside so as to try and contain the disease:

*[We used] firstly mass media to hit the general public, and secondly our own contacts with community representatives, be they local councillors, be they MPs, or be they other representative groups like the ramblers [i.e. the Ramblers Association], to make sure they had accurate information. For instance, we were producing foot-and-mouth news updates on a daily basis that we were e-mailing and sending out to people, so there was a constant flow of what was happening and how things were changing.* (Respondent 6)

Such demarketing effort and intervention is not always welcome by all stakeholders, especially if the message itself is perceived as being over-alarmist:

*TV was very effective and it caused a lot of concern, a lot of resentment amongst the people who were in the tourism business in the countryside, because every single night there would be pictures of funeral pyres where diseased animals had...*
been slaughtered and as a precaution were being burnt. The fuels they would use were things like coal, oil, hay, straw, railway sleepers, and all sorts of things which produced a huge amount of smoke. To see images of this hanging over the countryside, well it looked like the end of the world, and no one was going to come and visit that sort of an area. (Respondent 12)

From another perspective, information has also served to educate many potential visitors to places in a proactive manner, rather than being a sudden reactive measure. Such an approach is used to help maintain sustainable tourism in environmentally sensitive sites and locations such as National Parks:

[A key issue is] environmental impact, particularly erosion . . . because a lot of the events now go on in the autumn and winter months when the ground is very wet and it’s a lot more susceptible to erosion . . . We have a code of good practice which is on our website. (Respondent 13)

Here, information in the form of a ‘code of good practice’ may not be as dramatic as the crisis-related media communications outlined above, but it does have the role of warning visitors that they have a duty to act responsibly if they are to visit specific areas. This may result in some reconsidering whether they are to frequent a particular place, in effect helping to demarket the location to some of its prospective users.

Restricting access

The place-demarketing strategies discussed thus far concentrate mainly on trying to influence and change the attitudes and behaviour of visitors. Such strategies rely on the target audiences cooperating, and it could be argued that the final-place purchase decision is still primarily made by the individuals themselves. By comparison, if an organisation actually restricts or makes access difficult to a place, the final purchase decision is not solely made by an individual; instead, they are forced to comply with predetermined restriction guidelines. There are a number of manifestations of this kind of place demarketing.

One tourist site involved in this study uses a timed ticket system, which is enforced when visitor levels reach a predetermined figure. This system avoids overcrowding and any consequent dilution of the visitor experience. This is a very controlled and abrupt measure, which restricts the number of visitors entering parts of the site at any one time. Such a strategy proves to be effective in controlling visitor numbers, especially when combined with the ‘no marketing’ policy that this site uses during the summer months (see above). Access control of this kind can be a successful place-demarketing measure, as it does not rely on communicating and cooperating with target consumers but instead prohibits access at the point of entry.

The southern English city mentioned above has also tried to restrict access to visitors by imposing a booking system for coaches, primarily with the aim of reducing the number of school parties. However, this restriction policy has been very difficult to manage because city centres are public rather than private managed spaces. This highlights a distinction between two fundamentally different forms of place, with the city containing a wider ‘assemblage of products’ (Jansen-Verbeke, 1986), making it even more difficult to demarket:
We received a few bitter remarks from the coach companies who see it as a case of, ‘You should be lucky we are bringing people to your city and it is up to you to organise them once they are there’. (Respondent 10)

Demarketing involving the restriction of access may be considered as very contentious by some, and the conflicting interests of different place stakeholders may need to be accommodated and managed effectively if it is to be successful. An obvious source of potential conflict is those independent businesses proximate to (or within) the place that may depend upon visitors to their main attractions for revenue and profits. Obviously, any restriction of visitor access will directly impact on them, and they may resist any activities in pursuit of such a strategy. Thus, in the southern English city that had issues with large parties of school children visiting, many businesses in the city were seen to actually welcome such parties:

The kids spend quite a lot of their money, it’s amazing the amount of money these youths have on them. They spend their money on gadgets, on silly hats … and to be honest they spend more than the adult visitors … So the local businesses make a lot of money from the students, and they are welcoming to them. (Respondent 10)

Likewise, those responsible for running of one of the main tourist attractions in this city were reluctant to engage in demarketing because ‘they are desperate for cash’ (Respondent 10). Thus, while place-marketing agencies may seek to engage in selective demarketing, in terms of discouraging visitation from a particular segment of visitors, other stakeholders are more concerned with increasing visitation and consumption more generally of all visitor segments.

The restricting access strategy can also be used for crisis prevention/management. The UK 2001 foot-and-mouth epidemic again provides some good examples of such a demarketing strategy being used. Evidence from interviewees with a stake in rural places revealed that although the media was influential in keeping visitors away from the countryside during the foot-and-mouth outbreak, signposting also played a very important role in the overall demarketing of rural areas. Certain footpaths were open but access to others was forbidden altogether, and this message was communicated via general warning signs detailing the danger of spreading foot and mouth. These signs were liberally dotted around on stiles and gates by local authorities, farmers, and other rural stakeholders. They strongly reinforced the demarketing message seen in the wider media, and in the end imposed an even greater reluctance on walkers and visitors to enter the countryside per se. As noted earlier, this proved to have implications for place stakeholders, and contributed to a significant ‘remarketing’ task for the countryside when the foot-and-mouth outbreak was over.

As Kotler and Levy (1971) stated, ‘there is the danger of over-reducing short-run demand, which can be more serious than increasing it too much’ (p. 79). In short, demarketing can be implemented too successfully – especially in crisis situations – leaving places with a very hard job to do in remarketing themselves once the crisis had passed:

I think it was either the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for the Environment who came out and said, ‘The countryside is closed’. This was a very strong and simple message that those people who didn’t live in the countryside automatically heeded … The issue is how do you sell that message of ‘Don’t come’ into a message that says ‘Don’t come because there are very good reasons [not to], but please don’t forget about us because we want you to come
back later’ … The early messages [relating to the countryside and foot and mouth] were very vivid, stark and definitive. They caused a number of problems about encouraging people to come back. (Respondent 12)

**Pricing mechanisms**

Pricing is a policy that has been suggested by Kotler and Levy (1971) as a means of discouraging demand. Analysis of the interviews suggests that pricing is used as a demarketing strategy, even though this may not always be by means of simply increasing the price. In the case of one study location, the following quote demonstrates the policy enforced to ensure visitor levels do not rise or exceed the desired level:

> There is never actually a special offer to go into the garden, and there is never actually a special offer for coach parties – they pay the full price. There’s never a reduced price for students or pensioners. …We do not offer any concessions or discounts or offers. (Respondent 1)

This attraction has decided not to offer any discounts in an attempt to limit demand. In addition, other attractions further develop this place-demarketing strategy by making certain that the organisations who promote them are not promising discounts either:

> …if the National Trust were doing any special offers in the busier months for other National Trust properties, we would ask them not to include us. (Respondent 2)

One interviewee identified a particular destination that was facing immense pressures in terms of the resources they needed for residents and visitors, and to overcome this they were using price as a strategy for demarketing their place product to lower-income groups:

> …their economy is reliant on tourism and there is a fantastic pressure on their resources because of this, so what they have done is gone for a very upmarket approach. To stay a week in their good hotels costs you about £3000 per person and they have tried to balance their sustainability by going very upmarket. In doing this, they are limiting people with lower incomes to day visits because they cannot afford to stay there. They are almost demarketing by making it so expensive to go there. (Respondent 4)

This demarketing strategy could arguably discourage lower income visitors, thereby raising some ethical issues that were first recognised by Kotler and Levy (1971).

**Conclusion**

This research has identified a number of rationales for place-demarketing activities and also a variety of strategies by which place demarketing can be implemented. These strategies are not mutually exclusive, and a specific location may operationalise more than one of these strategies simultaneously, or alternatively may change strategies over time depending on context. The research also identified issues that place (de)marketing practitioners may need to take into consideration when planning and
implementing activities – issues that could be considered as challenges that may need to be overcome.

As mentioned in the introduction, Kotler and Levy (1971) in their original exposition on wider demarketing identified three manifestations of this activity: general, selective, and ostensible. This research found no evidence of ostensible demarketing being practised in relation to places, although such activity could occur in a place context – perhaps where persons were discouraged from visiting a particular tourist resort to help enhance its aura of exclusivity, which could in itself be perceived as a key attraction. However, there was evidence of general and selective demarketing, although it may be useful to view these two phenomena not as mutually exclusive alternatives but as the opposite poles of a place-demarketing continuum, within which the various strategies identified above may be positioned. Accordingly, strategies such as no marketing and restricting access could be regarded as general in their application, in that they would apply to all users/visitors of the place concerned. Conversely, other strategies incorporate elements of selective demarketing to a greater or lesser extent. For example, marketing alternative places, informational place demarketing, and even pricing mechanisms (in some cases) may be specifically targeted towards certain tourist and visitor groups and publics. Such selectivity can also be defined temporally (e.g. seasonally or peak versus off-peak periods), as well as in terms of the target audience for the demarketing message.

As regards the rationales and strategies employed in place-demarketing activity for the UK locations described above, a number of managerial observations and implications can be identified. First, it can be seen that more than one demarketing strategy may be used by a single place at any one time. For example, informational place demarketing was combined with a policy of restricting access in many rural areas during the 2001 foot-and-mouth outbreak. Second, the combination of demarketing strategies used by any given place reflects factors such as its desired market positioning as a place ‘product’ and its available resources. Thus it was seen above how the place-demarketing activity in one location was aimed at reducing the effects of seasonal visitation and infrastructural overburden in the summer months. This, in turn, was inherently linked to a desired move to promote the location as an alternative autumn/winter destination and an associated resource for this in the form of a marketing-communications campaign and budget.

Third, the issue of time is also critical, with demarketing only being appropriate at certain times for certain places. Thus place-demarketing activity can be time specific (i.e. dealing with a crisis situation), cyclical (i.e. managing seasonal flux in visitor numbers), or indeed ongoing. Mirroring Kohli and Jaworski’s (1990) notion of environmental moderators influencing the effectiveness of market orientation, the particular context of a place may have an impact on the extent and effectiveness of demarketing activity. Environmental moderators relating to place demarketing appear to take two forms. General moderators arise from the (over) abundance of natural or other resources, which ensure place attractiveness and require issues relating to sustainability to be an ongoing element of marketing planning and activities if the appropriate place experience is to be maintained. Specific moderators may arise from a particular crisis situation or may be cyclical in their impact as a result of factors such as seasonality. Whatever the form of these specific moderators, their impact occurs over a finite rather than an ongoing period.

In an attempt to summarise these issues, Figure 1 comprises a normative framework for the place-demarketing process. On the right-hand side of Figure 1, it can be seen that the general place context and specific place moderators feed through to various
rationales for place-demarketing activity (e.g. ensuring the sustainability of the place product; market segmentation and targeting; reducing the effect of seasonality; and crisis prevention/management). The right-hand side of Figure 1 also indicates that in order to achieve the specific objectives arising from such rationales, agencies can implement various strategies (e.g, no marketing; redirection/marketing alternative places; informational place demarketing; restricting access; and pricing mechanisms).

As place-demarketing strategies are implemented, Figure 1 demonstrates that they should be simultaneously monitored, involving constant evaluation and reflection of their effect and their impact on the place itself. This becomes an iterative process, whereby monitoring and evaluation may lead to modification of the demarketing rationales and strategies within the context of the place under scrutiny.

Thus far, these concluding observations have a more managerial and normative focus. However, the practice of place marketing and demarketing also raises issues relating to the more geographically orientated critical approach, briefly outlined in the introduction. In particular, this refers to how places are represented and the extent to which this representation is a consensual one. Where place demarketing is concerned, this is particularly important. It has been demonstrated above, for example, how the demarketing of a place by one set of stakeholders may be unwelcome or unhelpful for others. The foot-and-mouth crisis of 2001 is perhaps the best example of this. A concerted campaign of place demarketing the countryside by a variety of wider policy-oriented stakeholders ended up communicating the image of a no-go area of burning pyres of animal corpses. For the small/medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with a stake in such places, these images were perceived as alarmist and damaged many livelihoods. This raises important questions about who controls place demarketing (and marketing) activity, and brings into sharp relief the notion of power relations in particular place contexts. Such concerns have been a major theme in the critical geographical tradition, albeit in other specific contexts.
Given the plethora of stakeholders that can be involved in the place-demarketing process, some of whom may have different and conflicting agendas, communication and consultation amongst them is critical. Moreover, it is essential that this communication and consultation extends between these stakeholders and place-demarketing agencies. First, this would raise awareness of the rationale(s) motivating any proposed place-demarketing activity, and second, it would ensure that, as far as is possible, stakeholders support and collaborate in any resulting demarketing strategies to ensure consistency of approach. The left-hand side of Figure 1 attempts to capture the importance of such factors in the place-demarketing process.

The place-demarketing rationales and strategies identified and discussed in this paper can inevitably be seen to represent simplifications of a vast number of place-specific realities. Notwithstanding, this exploratory research, summarised in the normative framework provided in Figure 1, presents a useful starting point for further more substantial empirical investigation into a neglected area of place-marketing activity. Moreover, the concepts and ideas developed in this paper may begin to provide place-marketing organisations and practitioners (e.g. tourism agencies, local authorities, town-centre managers, etc.) with a clearer understanding of when place demarketing might be appropriate, and the relative utility of any place-demarketing actions taken. This should be helpful where the sense making of past demarketing activities is concerned, as well as in the planning of future place-demarketing interventions.

References


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