

The Role of Integrated Communication within Place Marketing: The Province of Florence Case*

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Abstract

Purpose of the paper and literature addressed - The focus of this paper is to analyse the role played by integrated communication with regard to place marketing strategies and policies, as defined and implemented by Local Government Authorities (LGA), in order to establish and manage interaction between actual and prospective local business users within the same area. This research will draw on the theoretical perspective of place marketing as an approach for the creation and further consolidation of a relationship network between Authorities that manage territory elements (LGA) and place users (people and business investors). Marketing place relations are characterized by a widespread and deep nature able to create a medium-to-long term partnership between local "supplier" and "buyer". This type of interactions show evidence of an interconnected dimension, characterized by two essential elements: not only is there a system of commonly shared values, but there is also uniformity between investors' goals and those possessed by local interest holders.

Research method - The method used in this research is founded on the qualitative business case study method.

Research findings - The most important research findings of this paper can be summarized as follows: a) analysis of the marketing strategies and policies developed for the business segment by the Province of Florence in 2005; b) analysis of the communication activities developed by the Province of Florence in view of the chosen place marketing strategies; c) analysis of the interactive-collaborative quality of the place marketing communication developed by the Province in favour of businesses clustered in the Florentine area or interested in creating business relations with the territory; d) analysis of the role played by the place marketing communication used by the Province of Florence in establishing a local network between LGAs and place business users.

Main contribution - From both a theoretical and a managerial point of view, the objective of this paper is to provide some indication in creating a research method aimed at evaluating place marketing actions, and specifically, those involving LGA communication. For this purpose and in order to assess the effective value of place marketing, it will also be necessary to develop appropriate techniques, capable of verifying drawn investments, as well as of identifying any further, more complex event.

Keywords: Place Marketing, Integrated Communication, Local Government Authorities, Place Network, Case Study Research

* Gaetano Aiello and Raffaele Donvito share the final responsibility of this paper. Gaetano Aiello wrote the sections "Introduction: network and relationship dimension of place marketing" and "Province of Florence network and its life cycle"; Raffaele Donvito wrote the sections "Network creation and development: the role of place marketing strategies and integrated communication" and "Province of Florence place marketing activities and the role of communication". Both authors wrote the sections "Network life cycle and place marketing strategies: a dynamic model" and "Final remarks: the need of integration".

Introduction: network and relationship dimension of place marketing

The place marketing concept has been object of a widespread doctrinal discussion; apart from the reviews on each theoretical position, our intention is to point out how the scientific doctrine has developed progressively attributing relation and network based characteristics to this marketing area. In other words, it is possible to point out the existence of two types of prevailing theoretical approach that moreover have developed in chronological order. A first thought transposes the principles of the North American marketing concept, referred to the territory, attributing the Local Government Authorities (LGAs – political and administrative bodies that rule a specific local community and territory) with the role of marketing planner for their geographical areas; regardless this perspective is not rich of relation and network characteristics, it distinguishes itself for having approached the territorial dimension with the marketing perspective in a non-extemporary manner by priming a plurality of subsequent further studies that deal with this binomial.

Walsh's philosophy (1989; 1994) goes in this direction. The LGA is asked to develop a territorial marketing plan through which it engages in specific managerial decisions. In line with this approach but marked by a wider point of view is Kotler, Haider and Rein (1993) perspective. According to their position, "Place Marketing" is characterized by several specific activities such as a) the definition of a correct mix of structural characteristics and services offered in the area b) the arrangement of a system of incentives for the current and potential users of the services and infrastructures of the area c) the singling out of distribution systems for the services and products made in the area and finally d) promoting the image of the area with the objective of forming a correct perception in the potential user. Others such as Van den Berg, Bronezza, Van der Meer (1994) and Texier (1992) intend place marketing as a gathering of all these activities that when carried out in a specific geographical location of the LGA create a more attractive area for investors. In this perspective the marketing plan for the area analyzed should be inspired directly by the needs of the investors; in other words, place marketing has the objective to favor the settlement of new economic activities both productive and cultural and the development of those already located in the area.

A second trend which in part is pervaded by a perspective which leads back to the Resource (and Knowledge) Based View, extends the place marketing approach towards a reticular and perspective network. In this direction, Valdani and Ancarani (2000) distinguish between internal and external place marketing; in detail it enables to define place marketing as an analysis of the needs of the stakeholder and clients/markets aimed at building, maintaining and strengthening advantageous trade relations with stakeholders (internal place marketing) and with external public references (external place marketing) with the final aim of increasing the value of the territory, of the businesses and their attractiveness setting in action a vicious circle of satisfaction-attraction-value. Both Valdani and Ancarani and previously Martone (1998) underline how the territory cannot be intended as an entity in itself but rather must be interpreted as a reticular dimension made up by local bonds and links (internal network) and by extra-local bonds and links (external network). In the external place configuration the bonds (businesses, institutions, and territories) are seen under a co-evolutionary light, aimed at generating knowledge based competitive advantages. A strong reticular and relation connotation is recognized also in Caroli's (1999, p.44) position, which underlines how "a system of relations between a subject that has the duty to organize the offer (LGA and /or agency of territorial-place development) and the potential buyers (of the territory) represented by the investors and by the current or potential user". These relations are characterized by a much larger nature compared to the "territory transitions" (which is much emphasized in the first current of thought) implicating vice-versa a wide variety of interactions and relations among the subjects involved in the network in a medium-long term temporal horizon. The relation between the buyer and supplier of the territory becomes cooperation and qualifies for two fundamental elements: the sharing of a system of common values (on the one hand the investors should share the social model and the economic growth that characterizes the area, on the other hand those in charge of the area should adopt a favorable perspective towards the investors) and coherency between the investor and LGA objectives (Latusi 2002, p.45).

It's important to underline that thanks to this point of view, place marketing gains an extra valency network because its organization distinguishes itself through a necessary characteristic able to involve all the components and bonds (singled out variously) of the territory; this shared dimension is noticed in those very elements that qualify the objectives of place marketing that even though finalized for the economic development of a given area, must remain coherent with the objectives of solidarity, social equilibrium, environmental compatibility and competitiveness. Varaldo (1999) observes how place marketing in the contemporary to macro-economic context, is probably one of the best ways to govern local development. In the relationship perspective the contributions of Hakansson, Tunisini, and Waluszewski are particularly interesting because they analyze the concept of place through the

Industrial Network Approach. In particular this approach, which hints at works by Johanson and Mattsson (1985), asserts the analogy between the concept of “position” engaged by the companies/organizations of the network and the concept of place. This similarity, according to the authors, heralds interesting implications because it enables to define territory not only as a geographical benefit but rather as a combination of a much wider set of resources; based on this assumption it is possible (rather necessary) to analyze what the relations are and how they tie together the resources of a particular place with those of another. In short, the territory emerges as a result of the relationship interactions among subjects whose characteristics are conditioned and even created by the companies/organizations and by their long-term interactions.

Finally, we want to point out how apart from the doctrinal acknowledgement of the two main theoretical trends there are more specific positions on place marketing that have influenced its relationship evolution variously. Paoli (1999) among others, concentrates on the demand of the industrial investors and defines place marketing as all the activities that are exercised on one specific geographical area can make that area attractive for a selected group of logistic-industrial investors; the perceived needs put into effect the design of the characteristics of the area. Others such as Van der Meer (1990), Ashworth and Voogd (1988) rather than concentrating on specific actors focalize their interest on defined territorial contexts referring to the town's dimension (City Marketing and Town Center Management) and define place marketing as a group of activities that act as a link between offers of urban functions with the demand coming from the residents, local businesses, tourists, and potential users of the territory and where the aim of this process is to maximize the efficient operation of the area according to the fixed social and economic objectives. From these contributions emerge two peculiar dimensions of place marketing. The first is reticular that regards the structure and the dynamics of the relationships among the various bonds that make up the social and economic web of the territory and other external bonds. The second is relational and marks the nature of the ties that are established among the various actors inside and outside the territory object of the marketing action. Both dimensions make up as many guide lines for further studies on communication dynamics that will be object of specific analysis in the next sections of this paper.

Network creation and development: the role of place marketing strategies and integrated communication

In order to analyze the role of communication in the construction and development of place networks, we believe necessary to clarify the network concept and the characteristics of the relationship between network and communication here selected; in literature, in fact, there are numerous definitions of the network concept (Easton and Araujo 1992 p. 63; Bengtsson and Kock 1999, p.180; Huggins 2000, p.112) and numerous attempts to build network taxonomies and typologies (Huggins 2000, p.112; Rosenkopf, 2000 p. 341-344).

However, in this paper our referral to fundamental characteristics of the network are those contributed systematically by Ford, Gadde, Hakansson and Snehota (2002) and that are lead back to interaction, interdependence and incompleteness. In particular, referring to the concept of interaction, the authors want to emphasize how the plurality - members of a business network - are active and heterogeneous subjects that interact to search for solutions to their various problems. The characteristics of the interdependence is instead verified in the measure in which the members of the network are not independent but inter-dependent among them in the sense that each one has a limited discretion to develop independent political strategies; this means that their output is strongly influenced by attitudes and actions of the other members with whom the are in relation. Referring to incompleteness the authors underline how no member of the network has the resources and competences that are necessary to satisfy the needs of other subjects and therefore depend on the resources and completeness of other members. In this sense the network enables its members to accede the resources of others and eases its flow. Aware of the difficulties of defining the boundaries of a network that descend from this perspective, our empirical research uses the above mentioned characteristics to analyze the network to which the LGA of the Province of Florence is connected.

As regards to the relationship between the concept of network and communication it is necessary first of all to underline how the latter is a fundamental part and even a constituent of the relations that animate each network (Oikkonen, Tikkanen, Aloioutsijarvi 2000); from this position relations are not separable from the communicative dimension and are deeply conditioned by the ways through which communication is structured, valued and understood (Duck 1998). This characteristic is even more marked in business relationships both dyadic and network which evolve as the result of a communication process (especially of interpersonal nature) between the subjects involved; in

particular when long-term relationships are considered it is possible to develop a parallelism between the concept of communication and social exchange episodes that with other typologies of exchange episode (economic, legal, etc.) mark and determine the interactive and relation flow among the subjects (Hakansson 1982). Note also how even if communication influences contextual and structural characteristics of the relationship or the networks, it is at the same time conditioned by it (Oikonen, Tikkanen, Ahojoutsijarvi 2000); this proves that communication and relationships interpenetrate completely. Finally, it is important to underline how the influence of the perceived dynamics (influenced by communication) of the subjects involved in the network can generate very different visions that are directly connected with the network picture of each single member. From this descends the necessity to correctly organize the flow of communication that animates the network (including the place network) making it necessary to adopt an integrated approach.

In the case of place marketing an area communicates externally and shares internally in order to make its vocation, its characteristics and its value visible thus trying to influence the opinion and behavior of the subjects to whom it is directed in order to activate a long lasting relationship (Caroli 1999). In this perspective the actor delegated to manage the place communication process (generally the same subject that is responsible for all place marketing or the development agency who gives the authorization) must be able to recognize the strategic value of the communication process (Ostilio 2000). This actor creates an intimate relationship among the bonds of the network and has the duty to represent the identity of the territory and develop a positive place image of the geographical area and resources that are there contained. The body in charge of place communication is ordered to coordinate the communication exercised by those that co-manage the various components of the entire complex territorial "product" (Siano 2001). For this reason the planning and carrying out of the communication strategies set a strong necessity of coordination that must coincide with the coordination reserved for the definition and harmonization the place "product". It is necessary that this coherence be guaranteed in the most efficient way possible because failure of the coordination effort risks causing an uneven perception or contradiction among the addressees of the communication (actual or potential members of the network) of the territory. According to our perspective this objective can be reached by favoring first of all an involvement of all the actors in the definition process of the offer and secondly to develop an integrated communication approach. In particular the integration perspective by recognizing the existence of a plurality of communication areas pushes towards an implementation and planning of the communication activities so that a unified and coherent vision of the entire offer is guaranteed (Fiocca 1994 p. 7-14; Corvi 1994; Collese and Ravà 2004).

The integration viewpoint implies furthermore particular analytical attention regarding the various public typologies to whom it is directed and decisive in relation to the specific objectives obtained. In the case of place communication it is possible to single out the typologies of addressees of place communication through two criterion (Caroli 1999): a) the type of interest in the territory b) belonging or not to the territory. In detail, the first criterion enables to discriminate among those subjects that are buyers of the territory (actual and potential) from the "influential" subjects of the buyers; the second criterion distinguishes instead the internal resident user from the external one.

A mix of the two criterion creates the following public typologies; internal buyers (residents, workers, local businesses, local investors), external buyers (tourists, excursionists, foreign businesses, external investors), internal influence (local media, local associations, interest groups, opinion leaders), external influence (consulting businesses, opinion leaders, national and foreign media, financial institutions, various associations, external territorial-place development agencies). The integration viewpoint also implies a careful harmonization of the various communication instruments that the place marketing actor has available (for example advertising, personal communication, fairs, public relations, websites, brands) that must be able to exploit as much as possible the intangible contents of the identity of the area; these media in the politics of place communication are characterized by a high level of articulation caused by the complexity of the very product-territory.

According to us the integration of the communication instruments used in the various phases of the relation are particularly important. In particular the "ex ante" media selected to influence the expectations of the addressees and emphasize the main characteristics of the place first of all impersonal communication must be coherent with those used "during" the relation in order to meet the expectations, strengthen trust (Maizza 2000) and obtain an investment process.

Network life cycle and place marketing strategies: a dynamic model

From both a theoretical and a managerial point of view, we have tried to develop a model to analyze place marketing and to interpret the role and the pertinence of the strategies and policies of marketing to it pertained. In greater detail, this model of the "life cycle of network marketing" has the objective to

reveal the most appropriate strategies and policies of place marketing that are activated in the various evolution phases of the network pointing out in particular the role of integrated communication. From a general theoretical point of view it is interesting to underline even if the doctrine has largely studied the network concept however hasn't thoroughly analyzed with the same emphasis the ways through which the networks are created and how they evolve and develop over time. According to the Benson-Rea and Wilson (2003) perspective regarding the contributions developed by the IMP on the evolutive nature of the networks it is possible to recognize two main theoretical trends.

The first is concentrated on the context of process change of the network (Easton, 1992) evidencing how this is mainly made up of activity links, exchange ties and actor bonds in the measure in which the relationships that characterize it evolve; furthermore the component network elements change in time becoming more or less important according to the evolutive dynamics that interest them.

The second perspective analyzes the structural change of the network (Holmen et al. 1999); in this sense it analyzes the positions occupied by actors within a net or network, or the dyads which make it up that can increase as new members are added to the network or vice-versa reduce if the members leave. Harmoniously with this vision Walker (1998) underlines how nevertheless the formation and evolution of the network does not follow a foreseeable path but is however destined to evolve in terms of component networks.

In the attempt to merge the above mentioned positions, Håkansson and Snehota (1995) point out how a business network is never stable and how its structure stands out by inherent dynamic features, characterized by a continuous organizing process (1995, p. 271). For this reason, the dynamics change of the network originates from links, ties and bonds which are developed in the relationships that at the same time coevolve with the modifications that it generates.

Apart from the specific nature of the evolution some doctrinal contributions tried to identify the possible phases in which to articulate the process of evolution (life cycle) of the network. Easton (1994, pp. 49-50) recognizes four typical phases of evolution of a network that go from a) formation of a community through b) the constitution of an informal network and a following c) formal network to a phase of d) disappearance/rebirth/renaissance. Human and Provan (2000, pp. 342-43) identify instead five stages of evolution of the life cycle of a network; in particular these phases can be lead back to a) pre-network organisational field b) network formation, c) early growth, d) emerging legitimacy deficiencies and e) sustainment or demise of the network. The authors underline in particular how extremely considerable is the process of construction of the legitimacy (credibility) for the overall growth of the network, without which the network would be easily directed towards a demise phase; in this perspective the successful evolution of networks will be conditioned by the capacities to recognize legitimacy to all those members that from external positions are gathered in one network and that is promoted by some "funders". Wallenklint and Holm (2000, pp. 244-45), on the other hand describe the development of the network as a process that is stretched out along a curve made up by a plurality of distinct phases; a) the awareness phase, b) the formation phase, c) the growth phase, d) the stabilisation phase, and eventually e) the decline phase. In the awareness phase some businesses acquire the knowledge of the presence of threats and/or opportunities in the business environment; this pushes them to enter in the formation phase inside which the various potential members of the network try to define the co-operation areas and the content of co-operation. In the growth phase there is a thorough study and definition in detail of the aims of basic co-operation in which new areas introduced are added –contextually introduced in this phase. In particular the businesses involved aim at reaching a higher degree of mutual co-operation instead of activating competitive dynamics. The stabilisation phase shows when there are no new development paths or there are no other areas of co-operation in the achieved network.

Keeping in mind the above mentioned positions and considering that Sansoucy (2000) points out the existence of a temporal evolution of the activities of place marketing originated by the LGA [these activities go from a) image building alla b) investment generation ed alla c) investment assistance], we believe that in relation with the territorial network three phases can be identified: 1) awareness, 2) pre-network – informal network, 3) formal network, 4) growth and 5) sustainment-demise-rebirth-decline-renaissance. Based on these divisions Table 1 presents and describes the prevailing characteristics of each of the phases identified and underlines the specific focus; furthermore the table in object illustrates the activity of place marketing that qualifies the single phases and theorizes the peculiar role undertaken by the communication of the evolution path of territorial networking. Based on these divisions Table 1 presents and describes the prevailing characteristics and the specific focus of each of the phases identified; furthermore this table illustrates the activity of place marketing that qualifies the single phases and theorizes the peculiar role undertaken by the communication of the evolution path of territorial networking. Finally, to better understand the place marketing activities dynamic, it is important to emphasize the relevance of the "place pack" building process; according to Paoli (2004)

the activity of planning and building a specific place pack (made of territory, buildings, infrastructures and relations) is one of the most important step in preparing the place supply to be addressed by LGA to the other members of the network (place pack buyers).

Table 1 – The phases of the life cycle of the territorial network and the role of communication

Phase	Characteristics	Focus	Main activities of place marketing	Prevailing role of communication
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a basic nucleus of the territorial network of an area • General definition of the place marketing project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate awareness of the place marketing project • Image Building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic place marketing planning • Institutional and personal communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of basic nucleus • Generate awareness
Pre-network/ informal network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other members join the network basic nucleus • The level of interaction is variable and the relationships are not codified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enlarge the network and arrange the territorial offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing planning of place marketing • Communication with other potential members of the network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favour network enlargement
Formal network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships among the ties of the network are structured in stronger forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidate the network ties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the creation of territorial packages • Communicate the distinctive advantages of the area
Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The network grows in terms of number of components and in terms of interactivity among the ties. • Investment attraction in the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enlarge the network and attract investments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment attraction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the distinctive advantages of the area • Relationship communication to attract investments
Sustainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The network stabilizes in terms of number of components and in terms of interactivity among the ties • Investment attraction in the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stabilize the network and continue to attract investments • Investment assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment assistance/care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the distinctive advantages of the area • Relationship communication for investor tutorship
Demise/rebirth/ decline/reneascence (eventual)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The network after the phase of sustainment declines • There are demise alternatives of the network rebirth and reneascence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discharge or reformulate the network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency planning • Ex-novo planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shut down communication versus relaunching communication

Source: author's elaboration

Referring to the life cycle occupied by the territorial network of the Province of Florence it is possible to observe that the latter has crossed over completely to the awareness phase in the local and national dimension while only partially on an international level (Table 2); in that territorial stretch in fact the activities of communication addressed to actors with whom to activate bonds and links is still very marked. In a similar way, while the local territorial network is in an advanced phase of formal network, the interantional and national levels even if moving in that direction are still connected to the pre-network phase. According to us, and overall, the dynamics of the life cycle that distinguish the Florentine network is part of the rules ascribed to the evolution of each territorial network that is

characterized by a long-term temporal horizon; in this sense the growth and consolidation phases of the network, animated by a considerable transactional territorial intensity necessarily follow the phases of the pre-network and formal network now in act; in this sense this growth phase generates interest (investments attracted on a medium-long term) only in the measure in which the patient work of the network construction has been constant and efficient.

Table 2 – The crossing over of the life cycle of the territorial network of the Province of Florence

Phase	Local network	National Network	Internatioal Network
Awareness	Crossed	Crossed	In act of completion
Pre-network - Informal network	Crossed	In act	In act
Formal network	In act of completion	In the initial stage	In the initial stage

Source: author's elaboration

Province of Florence place marketing and integrated communications: results of a case analysis

The empirical method used in this research is founded on the business case study method (Yin 1994). In particular the research is focused on the collection of secondary and primary data pertaining to place marketing strategies and policies, and specifically with regards to the communication activities developed by the Province of Florence¹.

Province of Florence network and its life cycle

In the Florentine province, place marketing is promoted, planned and carried out by a local institution that is made up by the province of Florence, the city of Florence and the Chamber of Commerce of Florence through Promofirenze its special agency. Our research has first of all noticed that for these actors place marketing represents “the study, the exploitation and the promotion of the territory with the aim of attracting foreign investments and sustain local development”; based on this approach the group of promoters of the area attribute place marketing as a role of identification, valuation, and promotion of the differential advantages that the Florentine territory can offer to an investor (industrial, commercial, or financial) compared to other concurrent areas.

As codified in theoretical terms also for the province of Florence, these policymakers, in order to develop strategies and carry out the politics of place marketing have first activated a process of relationship network building with a vast stage of territorial actors. In this paper we will attempt to outline both the structural-relation characteristics of this network and to trace the evolution process that has distinguished it from birth to the stage of the life cycle it has now reached. From a structural point of view the place network of the province of Florence appears to be articulated on three levels whose boundaries furthermore appear destined to becoming ever more faint; these levels identify a local network, a national network and an international network. (see Fig. 1).

The local network - Place marketing Promoters can count on a local network consisting of the Region of Tuscany, the other municipalities in the province of Florence, Business Associations, the Agency for Tourism, the University and other local actors that are directly implied in the settlement process and in the economic development. The creation of a solid local institutional network is directly functional to the planning and implementation of place marketing representing the main direction for arranging strategies and avoiding conflicts, waste or duplication of resources. Among the main steps of development of this level of network, summarized in Table 3, two specific moments stand out for importance.

The first is the birth of the central nucleus of the network occurred with the signature of the protocol of agreement for place marketing between the province of Florence, the municipality of Florence and the Chamber of Commerce in 2001. The second moment in level of importance is the further specification

¹ The gathering of secondary data is based on the analysis of reports, publications and websites dedicated to territorial marketing developed by Promofirenze and by the Province of Florence; the gathering of primary data is instead based on interview protocols submitted to the planners and managers of place marketing strategies and policies within the Province of Florence. In particular we wish to thank Dr. Enno Ghiandelli of the Province of Florence and Dr. Sabrina Montaguti of Promofirenze.

of this protocol agreement in 2004 in which Promofirenze is officially attributed the role of activator of the projects of place marketing for which the three underwriters pledge to however maintain a common coordination.

Table 3 – The main stages of the development of the local network

Year	Object of Networking
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Protocol of Agreement for place marketing between Province of Florence, Municipality of Florence and Chamber of Commerce, Promofirenze
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidation of Protocol of Agreement for place marketing between Chamber of Commerce, Promofirenze and Province of Florence • Convention for place marketing between Chamber of Commerce of Florence and Mountain Communities of Mugello and Florence.
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protocol of Agreement for Place Marketing between the Chamber of Commerce of Florence, Promofirenze and the District of Empoli Valdelsa
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protocol of Agreement between the Chamber of Commerce, the Province of Florence and the Municipality of Florence that thanks to Promofirenze has confirmed its position as activator of Place Marketing for the Florentine area • Protocol of Agreement for Place Marketing between the Chamber of Commerce of Florence, Promofirenze and the Municipalities of the Florentine plain
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protocol of Agreement for Place Marketing between the Chamber of Commerce of Florence, PromoFirenzed and the Municipalities surrounding the City of Florence

Source: author's elaboration

As said previously, Promofirenze, is a special agency of the Chamber of Commerce of Florence², and has been operating since 1990 in the sector of services to enterprises to promote their development on international markets. Since 2001 Promofirenze has set up a department for place marketing and consulting for investors. Its place marketing supply can provide advisory services to companies interested in developing their business in Florence. The agency is also the office of the Euro Info Centre -IT 361- (one of the 260 EIC set up by the General Directorate of Enterprises in the framework of the European Commission), whose activity is to inform and assist enterprises on matters concerning Community policies, programmes and actions. In addition, Promofirenze has been recognised by the European Union as a Business Innovation Centre (BIC)³, i.e. as the local centre for dissemination of entrepreneurship, new business creation and the development of existing SMEs.

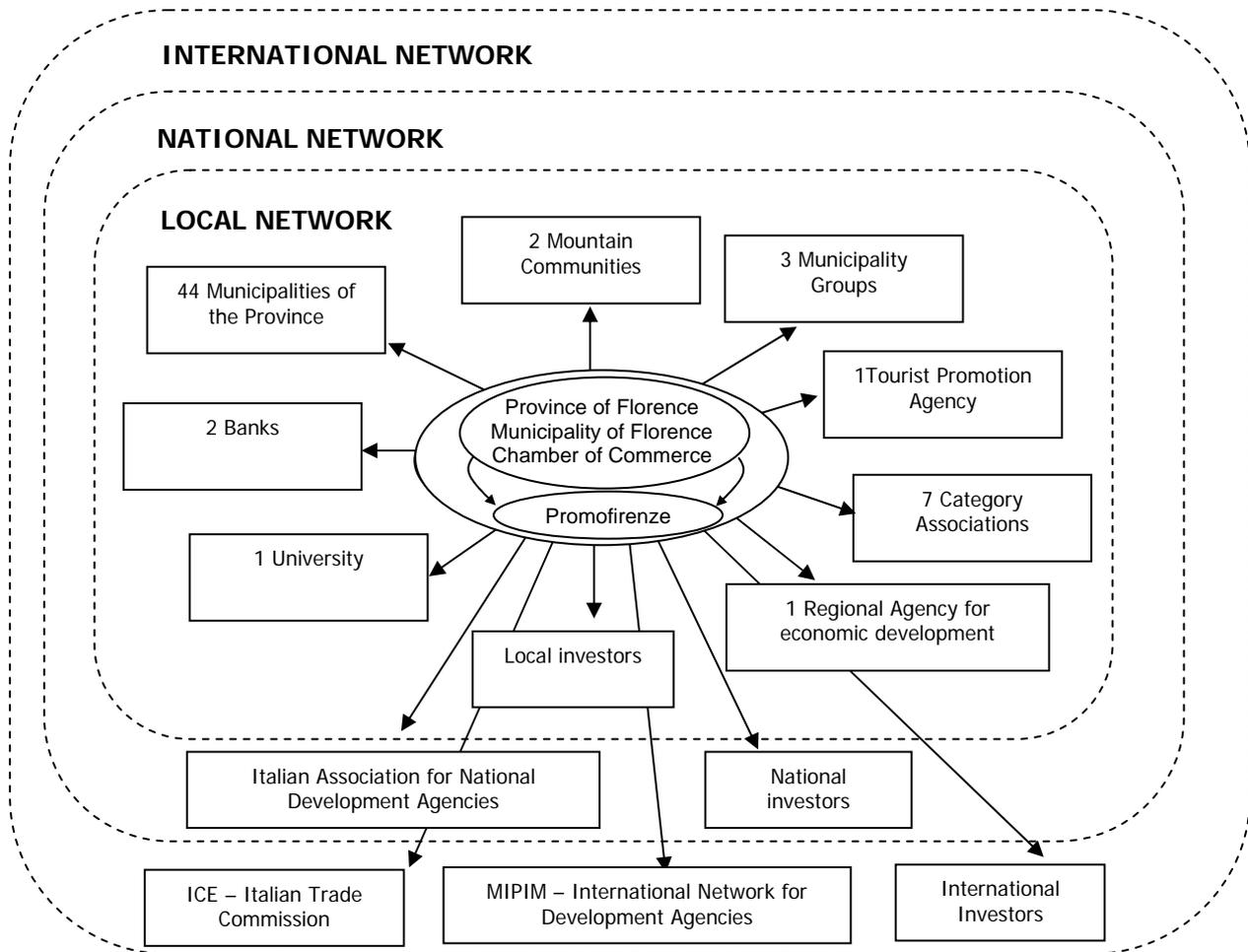
Surrounding this central nucleus the local network is made up by 44 municipalities of the Province of Florence, 2 Mountain Communities, 3 Municipality Groups, Category Associations of the area (Industrial Association, trade, hotel-keepers, artisans, and farmers), 2 banks (local savings bank), 1 University (Faculty of Economics), 1 tourist agency, and 1 Regional Agency of Development (Tuscany Promotion). This complex local network and the different evolution stages in which these relations of the various bonds of the network occur pushes its components to the creation of a type of coordination between the various members (for example: periodical meetings for the concerted implementation of the project with mountain communities of Mugello and Florence, District of Empoli Valdelsa, Municipalities of the plain of Florence) with the intention of managing excellent projects.

National Network: The National Network develops first of all by participating at the MIPIM, the international fair of Place Marketing (of which we will speak of further ahead in this paper) that has permitted Promofirenze to generate links with the international development agencies and directly with the potential investors. The international network foresees an interconnection with ICE (Italian Trade Commission) ministerial agency for international support of Italian businesses on whose behalf should enable the Florentine area to share the relations developed and with a potential to develop beyond the boundaries of the very ICE.

² The Chamber of Commerce of Florence has a long tradition in history. Its origins go back to 1770 when every shopkeeper or artist was required to register in its ledger. Today, the Chamber of Commerce of Florence performs three main functions: Administrative function; Promotion of economic activities; Consumer safeguards and market rules.

³ BICs are support groups for the innovative PMI and entrepreneurs gathered in one European network, the European BIC Network (EBN).

Fig.1 – The general structure of the place network of the Province of Florence



Source: author's elaboration

From the description of the network and the stages that have determined its course it is possible to notice a dynamic in which both relations (Easton 1992) and structures (Holmen *et al.*, 1999) of the network have evolved. First of all in a temporal time span that goes between 2001 and 2004 roles and relations of the nucleus of the network have modified; in fact, promoters originally marked by roles that were not clearly specified have with time codified them in two distinctive levels: one level of strategic decisions, having a political nature with at the top the Province and secondly the municipality of Florence with a role of garrison, stimulus and appeasement having at the head Promofirenze. Secondly, beyond this evolution typology the network has flanked a course of structural change caused by the entry of new members and of the consequent growth of micro-positions that has brought the network to evolve from a local level to an international and national level. The presence of new actors has been one of the elements that has pushed promoters from the Florentine area to attribute the organization of Place Marketing to a single subject (Promofirenze) with the objective of presiding relations with other members avoiding a duplicative and superposing method. From an empirical point of view, we notice how even in the case of place networks (in analogy with business networks more traditionally analyzed) relations and structures are never stable; also, how in this case the dynamics of change of the network originate from links, ties and bonds which are developed in the relationships that at the same time co-evolve with the modifications they generate (Hakansson and Snehota 1995). About the stage of the life cycle occupied today by the place network of the province of Florence it is possible to observe how the latter has crossed over completely to the phase of awareness of local and national dimensions while only partially on an international level; in that territorial group in fact, the activities of communication addressed to actors with whom to activate bonds and links is still very marked. In a similar manner while the local place network is in an advanced phase of formal network, the national and international levels even if moving in that direction are still connected to the pre-network phase. According to us and overall, the dynamics of the life

cycle that marks the Florentine network are part of the rules attributed to the evolution of each place network that is characterized by a long-term temporal horizon; in this sense the phases of growth and consolidation of the network are animated by a considerable intensity of territorial transition that is necessary subsequently to the pre-network and formal network phases now in course; in this sense these phases of maturation generate results (the investments in the medium-long term) only in the measure in which the patient work of construction of the network is constant and efficient.

Province of Florence place marketing activities and the role of communication

In relation to the stages of the life cycle crossed over by the network of the Florentine area the politics of place marketing carried out by Promofirenze are lead back to four macro areas that appear to strengthen the structure of the formal network and the entrance of the network in the phase of growth; in particular, these areas are identified as such: a) networking, b) planning and rating of territory c) communication and promotion of the territory; d) investment attraction and care. In line with the objectives of the paper, we will dwell specifically on the analysis of the communication phenomenon implied by the different objectives and connected to the various addressees of each of the four areas mentioned above. As we can see from Table 4 these addressees are qualified in various fields, are targets of more than one place marketing activity and have a plurality of different communication flows; this consideration emphasizes the need to integrate communication which is already referred to in the theoretical level and on which we will dwell further ahead for the case of the Province of Florence.

Table 4 – Objectives of the marketing activity and place communication

N.	Activity area	Objective of activity	Objective of communication	Target of communication
1	Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a local, national and international network for the Florentine territory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate awareness of the network (local, national and international) • Guarantee the activation and development of the network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional subjects (LGA, Development agencies) • Potential investors (industrial, commercial and financial)
2	Planning and rating of territory and place pack building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Singling out of areas and greenfield containers • Singling out of areas and brownfield containers • Monitoring and censoring of the areas • Creation of Place Pack - investment packages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer knowledge to members of the local network for singling out and continuative planning of the opportunities of investment of the territory. • Enable the co-planning of the place package 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional subjects (LGA) of the local network
3	Communication and promotion of the territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and promotion of the territory aimed at favoring the investments of the Florentine area • Communication and promotion through events – seminars and fairs • Impersonal communication - press • Institutional impersonal communication – editorial initiatives • Communication – interaction through the web 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate awareness (mainly international and secondly local and national) • Communicate the peculiarities and benefits of the area and of place pack of the Florentine area to favor investments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional subjects (LGA, Development agencies) • Potential investors (industrial, commercial and financial) • Influencers
4	Investment Attraction Investment Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favours successful localized investment • Visits for outlining opportunities of investment • Tutorship for the settlement of the investment • Supply services of qualified assistance for potential investors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate in a highly relationship and personalized manner with single potential investors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential investors (industrial, commercial and financial) • Institutional subjects (Development agencies)

Source: author's elaboration

- A. The network activity is characterized for its strategic aspect that influences the whole place marketing area. In fact, as already outlined, this activity determines the contextual and structural characteristics of the relationship or the networks, allowing to maintain, include or expel members from the network. In terms of communication for the networking, Promofirenze intends to generate and consolidate the level of awareness of the network between actual and

potential members and to facilitate the consolidation of the formal network. The actor of place marketing intends to intervene on the very social exchange episodes, pointed out by Hakansson, that mark and determine the interactive and relation flow between the sides. The means of communication used fall in large part into personal characteristics and interconnect the top positions and top organizers of the Promofirenze network with the top organizers of the members of the network. This typology of personal communication has been facilitated by the creation of Boards of Coordination and Seminars of dissemination of the culture of place marketing among the bonds of the local network.

- B. The activities of planning and rating of the territory intend to single out the localized opportunities able to attract new productive investments to the area (the so-called greenfields) and to strengthen the ties of the businesses already present on the territory (the brownfield investments as operations of venture capital, member recruitment or business cessions). This analysis functions to reach the primary objective of the process of place marketing meaning, in other words to attract investments; this analysis should allow in fact to single out areas of potential investment and to measure their specific level of competitiveness through analytical details in the strong points, weak points, opportunities and threats of each territory. The rating and monitoring process enables to (based on the single opportunities singled out) create localized packages (place pack building activities) whose attributes, if clearly identified, can become object of transparent exploitation and communication for the potential investor. Strongly criticized data regards, especially, the definition of localized packages that often are subject of mixed approval or veto of the members of the network whose rules of operation are not completely defined. However, we notice the necessity to intensify the dialogue between the various subjects of the LGA in order to define richer packages and especially with the aim of demolishing the bureaucratic-administrative barriers that could prevent, in an irreparable manner, the success of the investment. For this reason the process of communication connected to territorial planning and rating are of fundamental importance because the opportunities of investment are monitored thanks to an arrangement and tight dialogue with the local place network (CCIAA, Province, Municipalities and category associations). The flow of communication moves inside the network through two main paths: personal communication and web based. The former is directly between Promofirenze and the members of the local network and the Productive Activities Help Desk (SUAP) that is an operative interface between the LGA of the province of Florence and the investors and also sorts out information on place marketing. The web based communication instead has a special website (www.firenzebusiness.it – which will be explained shortly) in which all members of the network can gather and analyze the various localized opportunities -coordinated by Promofirenze- that are continuously underlined by each member.
- C. Communication and promotion of the territory activated by Promofirenze and directed to investors and influences intends to reinforce awareness of the network (from which descends an explicit need of integration of the entire communication process) and especially to underline the peculiarities and the benefits that mark the area and the place packages in order to favor investments. The communication mix organized by Promofirenze is made up by the following: 1) communication and promotion through events, seminars and fairs 2) impersonal communication through the press 3) impersonal communication through excellent editorial initiatives 4) communication and promotion aimed at investors (scouting) 5) communication and web based interaction. The first typology of communication -events- foresees participating in seminars and national and international fairs with the aim of presenting localized opportunities in the Florentine area to business investors and influences (site selection manager) as well as to the awareness of the local institutions of the Florentine territorial area and other geographical areas). This type of communication has first of all relied on the MIPIM, the Cannes International Fair of Place Marketing (probably the most considerable European event in terms of place marketing) and secondly the MATE, the Rimini Place Marketing Show. Regarding impersonal communication through the press, PromoFirenze has chosen almost exclusively editorial forms and articles dedicated to further studies on activities of place marketing obtained through institutions that lead back to daily newspaper headings both general and economic on a national level, general and specialized magazines and international news agencies. Regarding impersonal communication PromoFirenze is developing a publication to send to target institutions and internal and external entrepreneurs with the aim of presenting the strong points of key sectors and excellence of the metropolitan area including services offered by place marketing; this communication instrument with an extra-national aspiration has the task of presenting investment opportunities of the Florentine

area as well as economic/productive excellence of the area on an international level (case history of excellent businesses). Finally web based communication aims at increasing the level of interaction and involvement of the network subjects through digital technology; to reduce the time-space barriers of interaction PromoFirenze and its partners have developed www.firenzebusiness.it, the portal created to promote local economic development and attract investment. The site, which has been active since 2004, wants to establish in particular the portal of Florentine place marketing and act as an interface for foreign investors that want to invest or develop business in the province. This site was created also for the needs of the local network members to participate in an active container that is able to promote the territory; in this perspective the website enables a "democratic" vision to the various actors and becomes the collector of the entrepreneurial activities and projects. The site tries to 1) present the Florentine area 2) illustrate the main strong points and weak points of the economy of the province and region 3) promote opportunities of local consensus greenfield investment and enable geo-references 4) space and visibility to the local businesses that are looking for national and international partners 5) offer on-line services (information on financial opportunities, news, appointments, links to institutional and entrepreneurial networks, assistance to businesses 6) supply information for a first analysis of feasible investment and on-line assistance to potential investors 7) communicate place marketing activities undertaken.

- D. Activities of investment attraction and investment care have the objective to favor successful localized investments and to supply qualified assistance to potential investors. This duty is carried out by Promofirenze through the planning and creation of visits by the investor to profile the localized opportunities; these visits aim at concluding the investment and to supply all assistance pre and post localization. Investment care activity acts as the complement of the research activity and reception of the investors and guarding the output of advisory services regarding business start ups possible partnerships, access to types of financing, the situation of the local market. An instrumental result of this activity is that Promofirenze tries to be for investors the first and possibly only interface of the productive localized route. As we can easily see, the investment attraction and care activity is strongly effected by the output of the planning phase or rather by the inclination of localized packages and by the coordination to the administrative and bureaucratic stages; in fact the clear configuration of the offer that enables a more efficient matching between territory and the national and international demand. Also the communication that gives life to the process of investment attraction and care is characterized by the prevailing personal nature (provided by the web based communication and interaction). In particular the activity of communication of the greenfield opportunities foresees research aimed at investors through geographical database analysis (desk research or through Promofirenze help desks located in Moscow, Tokyo and China).

Final remarks: the need of integration

In reference to the moulding proposed in this paper and based on the results emerged from the analysis of the Florentine territorial network, there are three conclusive considerations which are bearers of theoretical implications (the first) and managerial implications (the second and the third).

First of all the empirical analysis confirms the characteristics of the network concept proposed by Ford, Gadde, Hakansson e Snehota (2002); in detail compared to the dimension of interaction, the plurality of the members of the network show, even if at various stages, levels of activity and interaction in order to search for solutions for their different objectives (consider the interaction generated by the single members afferenti to the category of the provincial municipalities with the basic nucleus of the local network, PromoFirenze). The characteristic of interdependence is strongly evident because the very "promoters" of the network (the basic nucleus of the local network) and especially the activator (Promofirenze) have a discretion limited to the development of independent strategies and policies and see their output strongly influenced by the attitudes and actions of the other members with whom they have a relationship (take for example the impossibility of Promofirenze to carry out the localized investment without a harmonious approach of the other members of the local network). Finally also in relation to the incompleteness it is evident that no member of the territorial network has the resources and competences necessary to satisfy the needs of the other subjects thus depending on the resources and competences of other members (Promofirenze builds a place pack of which it does not have the effective property-availability that is tarnished by the members of the local network). The second observation derives from the recognition of the existence of a life cycle of the territorial

network; this should push the LGA and all the promoters of the territorial network to diagnose in the best way possible the evolution stage through which to verify which are the marketing instruments used and their coherency with the phases of the cycle in act. This analysis should allow consequently the construction of a set of effective indications of the action of structured place marketing keeping in mind the specific objectives of each of the evolution phases of the network. In particular in the case of those networks that must cross over to the stage of the formal network as is for the Province of Florence, it is important to verify how the formalization of the roles of the members involved in the network are developing while waiting to see the localized installation of the investment members.

Third of all and exclusively referred to the territorial network of the Florentine province, it is possible to see a series of factors that generate a necessity of integration of the place marketing and communication policies. The first of these factors is carried out in the verticle articulation (the local, national and international levels) and in the horizontal articulation (the complexity of the local level) of the Florentine network. This articulation in fact determines a high level of difficulty in the planning and the realization of the communication policies which must be beneficial for the various types of members and able to bind the relationships. The second generative source of integration necessity comes from the partial cross over of the addressees of the communication of place marketing as shown in Table 4. The last factor that derives from the first two is substantially in the plurality of the means of communication necessary to reach the addressees and to receive the desired communication effect. To these areas needy of interaction, the promoters of Florentine place marketing have answered making available other lines of specific intervention. The first connected to the evolution of the network has the attribution of activating the responsibilities of place marketing policies to a single subject (Promofirenze) with the objective of harmonising as much as possible the stimulus and in particular the communication towards other actual and potential members of the network. The second answer foresees the activation of socialization courses and sharing of the knowledge of the members of the local network through more or less formal meetings (seminars, workshops, coordination boards) in order to avoid putting in act contradictory or useless actions of place marketing (as can be for example the promotion of a localized offer whose destination is not sufficiently clear among the members of the local network). Finally, Promofirenze is developing a communication architecture in which even though various means are used it is aimed at resuming in an integrated manner all of the stimulus sent forth towards the addressees. It is in this sense that we believe the tendency of Promofirenze is to develop the forms of communication at a high level of relationship involvement as those activated by the physical network and by the digital technology.

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