



# Climate Emergency

## How Place Branding Can Help to Address It

Inspiration and practical advice for community leaders and location developers, managers and marketers. Curated by **The Place Brand Observer**, in partnership with the **Sustainability Leaders Project**.

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# Table of Contents

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Foreword	2
Key Takeaways	3
Climate Change — Why Bother?	4
How Climate Change Impacts Your Place Brand	5
How to Make Place Branding Strategies Climate-Ready	6
Place Branding as a Climate Solution	7
How Cities and Countries Do It - Examples	9
Further Reading	10
TPBO Premium	11
Contributing Specialists	12

# Foreword

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## Dear reader



There is great, but currently unrealized potential for place branding strategies to take a lead in making countries and cities more environmentally sustainable. The main challenge is to reformulate the agenda of place branding in a way which supports resilience and sustainability - especially as we now face the climate emergency.

The crucial thing is for place managers to recognize that the climate emergency is a topic of importance to place brands. Climate change issues must be addressed in place brand strategies, and this is rarely the case. Secondly, place brand strategies should possibly have less of a focus on economic growth as the be-all and end-all and, instead, focus more on issues of resilience and sustainability.

Which of course is easier said than done. As Malcolm Allan emphasizes, several hurdles tend to prevent place brand professionals from taking action on the climate emergency, including:

- Your boss (local, regional or national politician or senior public official) being a climate change denier or unwilling to invest in measures to address the looming crisis.
- Fear that actively engaging with the topic and addressing climate-related issues might signal investors that your place has a problem and is not safe to do business in.
- Belief that place branding initiatives have to always be positive, attractive and focus on stories that induce happiness.

A location's climate has been a long-standing trope of place marketing and branding messages. Perhaps going forward, we need to emphasize its resilience: how well it is prepared to handle the climate emergency and its implications. Similar to what we are now experiencing with health and safety declarations, in response to Covid-19. And as more and more places and organizations seek to demonstrate responsible behavior as "good global citizens", being proactive about climate change and other sustainability concerns, will be (rightly) expected — or at least a reputational advantage.

Some of the experts whom we interviewed for this white paper are skeptical about how much of an impact place branding initiatives can have on the climate crisis, on a global scale — advocating instead to focus on initiatives which benefit the resilience and sustainability of specific locations. And clearly, local initiatives matter. At the same time, since place branding is all about strategic, long-term visioning, it does have the potential and symbolic power to educate, inspire and foster cooperation — among a place's stakeholders and community, and also across borders. And that's exactly what we need to adequately address the issue.

I hope you find this white paper useful and if you do, please help us share this important message by spreading the word among your colleagues and friends.

Got feedback? I'd love to hear from you. Connect with me on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#), or email [editor@placebrandobserver.com](mailto:editor@placebrandobserver.com).

Happy reading!

**Florian**

Florian Kaefer, Ph.D.  
Switzerland

# Key Takeaways

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## **Don't build your brand positioning on climate change.**

Basing brand positioning on climate-related initiatives alone will not provide the points of difference required for successful branding, because they may be easily matched by others. However, climate change initiatives may be essential to brand management and brand partnerships.

## **Secure your place brand reputation.**

Place branding in 2020 is at a juncture where values around sustainability are becoming more important. Cities, regions and countries not including the climate crisis and other sustainability concerns in their strategic branding might find their reputation and competitiveness threatened.

## **Invest in green infrastructure.**

Green infrastructure plays a key role in attracting businesses and people and provides the grounds for recreational and outdoor industries to flourish. Neglected green infrastructures affect a place's image and consequently hinder efforts to attract investment and ensuring residents are happy.

## **Cooperate with others.**

Place branding is all about mobilizing diverse stakeholders, which also happens to be critical for addressing the climate emergency. Seize this potential.

## **Listen to your audiences.**

For many groups, especially the younger generations, the climate emergency response of places will be among the main criteria of place evaluation and will influence their behaviour. Investors, visitors and residents are attracted to those cities which have a thriving economy, good living conditions, and a 'smarter' and 'cleaner' environment.

## **Back your brand promises with actions.**

Greenwashing is no longer an option, as it's being called out by well-informed citizens and stakeholders. The days are over of printing your annual report on recycled paper to show how "green" and responsible your organization is. Now it is about tangible, measurable actions to address the climate emergency.

## **Show that your place cares.**

Many big names in the corporate world have long made bold climate commitments. Expectations are growing to see similar commitments made by communities and places.

## **Attract the right investments.**

Places taking minimal to no action in addressing the climate emergency will face the tough question from intelligent investors and people — what are you doing to address it? If the answer is nothing or an action that is the equivalent of "greenwashing", then, their brand will be viewed as damaged goods.

# Climate change — why bother?

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## A new credibility indicator.

The 2020s are all about tangible, measurable action in addressing the climate emergency. The 2010s saw how “greenwashing” was called out, with all stakeholders now being held accountable for how green their operations, energy use, resource efficiency, supply chain etc. really are. Place branding strategies must internalize this fact, to be viewed as credible. The climate crisis stance of places is fast becoming a critical differentiator.

## Changing behavior of your audiences.

Commitment to climate protection is becoming one of the key decision criteria for people when considering where to go on vacation, where to live, study, work, invest or set up a company. For many groups (especially the younger generations), the climate emergency response of places will be among the main criteria of place evaluation and will set the direction of their behaviour.

## Place reputation.

If places want to build reputation, they need to show – in imaginative ways – their sense of community, identity, and virtue. That is, show – in original, creative and inspiring ways – that a place is capable of doing what's right. This includes mitigating climate impact, but many other global challenges as well (biodiversity loss among them). The climate emergency is a ‘clear and present danger’ to the planet as a whole, and inevitably to some places in particular, by virtue of their increased susceptibility to disruption arising from their location. Not engaging with the climate emergency has the potential for significant reputational damage for those places that adopt such a position.

## Impact on residents of a place.

Climate has a direct impact on the quality of the resident's lives. As a consequence, it is one of the pillars that need to be considered in a location's initiative choices around placemaking. Any city or country which seeks to improve the quality of life for its residents or citizens must ‘walk the talk’ and include measures which actually create a greener, cleaner and safer environment for all.

**"Climate change is the greatest challenge we face. Nevertheless, people will still travel. So, places should focus on attracting those whose environmental impact will be lowest and whose contribution to the community will be greatest. This means proper destination management planning, minimizing visitor impact, and developing visitor experiences that encourage responsible behaviour."**



**Tom Buncle**  
**United Kingdom**

# How climate change impacts your place brand

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## Place brands need to stay relevant.

Climate change and sustainability are a must for all places and destinations. Being aware of the climate emergency and putting sustainability in the center of any place branding strategy will be key to stay relevant in the future: especially if we think about our future generations; it is a responsibility for all of us to leave them a liveable and enjoyable world.

## Green infrastructure is vital and sustains your brand.

Three possible domains link place branding and green infrastructures:

**Economic** — investing in green infrastructures with the income generated through branding.

**Communication** — using branding to raise awareness for the preservation of green infrastructures in cities.

**Policy integration** — using the advantages of preserved green infrastructures in place branding strategies, as they support a place's attractiveness.

## Sustainability as a part of your brand proposition.

If your country or city is authentically oriented toward valuing the environment and addressing the impacts of climate change, then the climate emergency provides a catalyst to drive the initiatives and policies that you want to deliver. If it's not a core part of your proposition, then it is likely to create discomfort in your city or country, and it will take more than smart branding to resolve that gap.

## Diversification of your place economy.

Companies today want to be able to portray a responsible climate image, which means that they are more likely to invest in a city or country that has a progressive climate image. This is particularly tricky for places that rely heavily on fossil fuels for their economy. If they want to survive the upcoming energy transition without a severely damaged economy, they need to think about changing their image from an oil economy to whatever would be best suited as a replacement economy.

**"There will be a great demand for new, green, climate-friendly solutions. Cities around the world will know where to find these solutions — and it will be in the cities with the most positive climate image. In every region, there are opportunities for cities to become the regional hub, if not an international hub, for climate-friendly solutions."**



**Hjörtur Smárason**  
Denmark / Iceland

# How to make place branding strategies climate-ready

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## Create awareness and foster international cooperation.

Countries, regions and cities can no longer afford to ignore climate emergencies whilst articulating their place branding strategies. In fact, given our existence being inextricably linked with climate emergencies, place branding strategies should effectively use this as an opportunity to both create awareness of the efforts and initiatives being made in this direction, as well as to reiterate the call for action for international cooperation. This is the new determinant and measure that should find its way into place branding surveys, the extent of which would define responsible living. Successful place branding strategies often mobilize diverse stakeholders and this is something critical to successfully address the climate emergency.

## Focus on brand partnerships.

The science and policies directed toward addressing climate change are going to be dynamic, with many advances and changes. It's likely that the efforts and techniques in addressing these issues will also be common to competitor locations. Some will be local, others national and international. Place brand positioning relies on points of difference. It is likely that basing your brand positioning on climate-related initiatives alone will not provide the lasting points of difference required for successful branding, because they may be easily matched by others.

## Back your brand promises up with real actions.

Place branding is a strategic narrative, and combating climate change should become a part of this narrative. Embracing climate-friendly measures, like promoting public transport or recycling, will always be perceived as positive. Integrating relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals into your placemaking, economic development or talent and investment attraction strategies is vital both for branding, development and being a citizen in the world today.

**"While climate change initiatives may not be central to a brand, they may be essential to brand management and brand partnerships. It may be necessary for organizations responsible for the sustainability of the local environment, construction and government policy to be closely tied to the brand strategy."**



**Bill Baker**  
**USA**

# Place branding as a climate solution

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## **Boost awareness on climate change issues.**

As brands are committed to impact and can change consumer behavior, country and city brands may play a role in boosting awareness, concern, and care for climate change, as well as other social and environmental issues. This is especially true as cities and countries, meaning their communities, stand for lifestyle values: a city/country brand points to those values that a local community may collectively decide to engage with.

## **Boost citizen cooperation.**

Countries, regions and cities are powerful international actors that are able to address climate emergencies. Climate issues can only be resolved through a cooperative approach, one where traditionally understood notions of individual competitiveness, cost-effectiveness, national interest, and pride will need to be redefined. Place branding teams can run campaigns to mobilize citizens to change habits that affect the sustainability of the place. This might achieve important changes that will be reflected not only in their place's future but in its perception.

## **Boost a cultural mindset.**

The challenge of place branding is to effectively boost a cultural mindset that, by educating and inspiring, contributes to positive relations with the branded place (e.g., residents, visitors, policy-makers choosing and showing responsible behavior) and opens to universal concern for climate change with a local interpretative key. In this regard, the pairing of place branding and cause marketing would be worthy of attention and further experimentation.

## **Educate residents.**

In addition, strategies to educate residents on facts regarding the climate would be useful. How many people understand the potential that planting more trees has to reduce carbon emissions? In contrast, doomsday hyperbole is rarely helpful. Education drives better decision-making in almost every case.

**"Place branding strategies can become an engine to address the climate emergency. If a brand revisits its purpose and includes the climate emergency in its mission and vision, it will then be possible to mobilize all of the different stakeholders — businesses, citizens, the educational sector, media, NGOs and foreign partners — to develop and advocate sustainable public policies in diverse areas."**



**Joao Freire**  
**Portugal**

# Place branding as a climate solution

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## **Act on a global level.**

Places should adopt policies to mitigate the impacts of global warming. The issue is not one that should be left only to state governments or even to large cities. From the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group to ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, places of any size have numerous platforms to get their voices heard and to influence international policies.

## **Act on a local level.**

Most community leaders recognize the need to understand the environmental impact of decisions, but undoubtedly more can be done to better articulate both the short- and long-term effect. For example, communities that experience a boom cycle often fail to think through the impact of decisions that fueled the boom on their public health services. They run forward and then realize significantly more investment is needed to ensure clean water and air for their residents. Better local decision-making that protects the environment will help.

## **Help your community envision a climate-friendly future.**

The branding of places needs to start from the needs and interests of local communities, rather than corporations. It is useful to understand place branding as a form of aspirational talk that does not primarily represent the place as it is in the present moment, but sets a future vision for what it could become, which can inspire and push climate change action.

Embracing the climate issue, place branding teams can seize this as an opportunity to help their locations envision a cleaner, greener future.

# How cities and countries do it — examples

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## Iceland

In Iceland, the tourism industry and destination promotion organization are helping travelers, citizens, and investors to be responsible and sustainable in their actions. For example by encouraging less plastic use and responsible travel behavior through destination branding, under the umbrella brand of 'Inspired by Iceland' — reports Inga Hlin, former director at Promote Iceland.

[Read more on Iceland's country performance, its brand image and reputation](#)

## Copenhagen, Denmark

Copenhagen has put its strategic focus on building a growing, yet climate-friendly export industry. As Sebastian Zenker, professor at the Copenhagen Business School, reports, Blox-Hub is a center in Copenhagen for companies that specialize in different fields of green, sustainable urban development. The climate topic is part of their brand (for example, Copenhagen with its aim to be a climate-neutral city). Having this strategic agreement within the city urges its policies to be developed in this direction, and creates awareness for these topics within and outside of the place.

[Read more on Copenhagen's city performance, its brand strength and reputation](#)

## Ontario, Canada

Places that invested in green technologies some time ago are well-positioned for the future. One Canadian example shared by Jeannette Hanna of Trajectory Brand Consultants, is Sault Ste Marie, Ontario. This city of 73,300, until recently, suffered all the typical challenges of a former industrial center that morphed into a “rust belt” town. In the 19th Century, SSM was an early innovator in hydroelectric energy. As part of its brand strategy, the city embraced energy innovation as a central pillar of its positioning, backed by its commitment to wind, solar, hydro and geothermal technologies. Today, the area is a net exporter of energy and produces 1.6 times its needs in 100% renewable electricity. A compelling attractor for many types of businesses!

[Read more on Canada's performance as country, its brand strength and reputation](#)

## Masdar City, UAE

Masdar City in Abu Dhabi is an example of a place making great efforts in the right direction, and so are initiatives such as the Museum of the Future in Dubai, according to Hjörtur Smárason of Scope Communications.

[We recommend our interview with Vilma Jurkute on how Alserkal in Dubai is reimagining cultural spaces for urban sustainability](#)

## Further Reading

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**Place branding** is all about how to develop, manage, and communicate a community's identity and its reputation — and PlaceBrandObserver.com is the go-to place for useful insights, strategy advice and inspiration to help you get it done. Below are just a few pointers to resources which are among the most popular with TPBO readers.

No time to browse through our knowledge library? The TPBO team is happy to help you as **Information Scout**. You ask questions, we find answers. Please contact us for details.

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<https://placebrandobserver.com/place-branding-tutorials/>

### Place branding examples

Developing a place brand strategy which lasts, is accepted by internal stakeholders, and successful in attracting talent, visitors or investors is no easy task. A good way to start is to study place branding initiatives and strategies which have worked well elsewhere, many of which you will find in our collection of place branding case studies and examples.

<https://placebrandobserver.com/place-branding-examples/>

### Expert advice

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“Place branding as a discipline is just beginning to come of age. The Place Brand Observer pulls together insights and trends on this growing and flowering discipline incredibly well. It’s an important window into a growing phenomenon.”

**David Adam**

Founder & Principal at Global Cities

# Featured Contributors

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The following place brand researchers, advisors and managers have contributed their views to this white paper on how place branding can help to address the climate emergency.

(In alphabetical order – highlighted specialists are available for [consulting](#), [research](#), or as [speakers](#)).

## Bill Baker



Bill is considered one of the pioneers in place branding and is recognized internationally as an innovative strategist and thought-leader. He has worked in over 30 countries at the national level, as well as with hundreds of small cities and regions around the world. He is widely published and is the author of three best-selling books on place branding and destination marketing. His books, *Destination Branding for Small Cities* (2012) and *Place Branding for Small Cities and Regions – The essentials for successful destination branding* (2019) are considered essential reading.

[Bill's speaker profile](#)

## Ed Burghard



Ed Burghard is the creator of the Strengthening Brand America Project, a community of practice that provides knowledge and tools to help economic development professionals manage their place branding process. Ed's focus is on educating place marketers on how to successfully reapply private sector branding principles to place branding.

[More about The Burghard Group](#)

## Efe Sevin



Efe Sevin, Ph.D., American University, 2014, studies the measurement and assessment processes in place branding and public diplomacy campaigns. His current research focuses on identifying and analyzing social networks created on digital communication platforms. His works have been published in several academic journals and books including *American Behavioral Scientist*, *Public Relations Review*, and *Cities*.

[Efe's researcher profile](#)

## Heather Skinner



Heather is a Senior Fellow of the Institute of Place Management (IPM), a widely published author on place marketing and branding matters, and an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Place Management and Development*. She is a founding chair of the Corfu Symposium on Managing and Marketing Places (2014-2019), Chair of the IPM's Visiting Places Special Interest Group, and Co-Chair of the Academy of Marketing's Place Marketing and Branding Special Interest Group.

[Heather's researcher profile](#)

# Featured Contributors

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Hjörtur is a place branding expert focusing on story-telling, crisis management and local economic development. He has worked with governments and destinations all around the world, including Iceland after the economic collapse of 2008 and the volcanic eruption of 2010, Nepal after the earthquakes of 2015 and more recently countries in Africa and Middle East, following political and economic instability.

[Book Hjörtur as speaker](#)

## Jeannette Hanna



Jeannette is Chief Strategist at the Toronto-based brand agency, Trajectory. Writer, lecturer and podcast host. Jeannette's place brand work includes award-winning strategies for regions, cities and districts across North America.

[More about Trajectory](#)

[Book Jeannette as speaker](#)

## João Freire



João is a Professor and researcher in Lisbon, Portugal. His background in economics initially led him to work in the fields of finance and marketing for multinational companies in Brazil, Portugal and the United Kingdom. He has co-founded various companies and is an expert in the marketing and branding of consumer goods and places.

[João's researcher profile](#)

## Juan Carlos Belloso



Juan Carlos is an expert on the positioning, development and promotion of places and destinations, based in Barcelona. He helps places become more attractive, through strategic advice and innovative methodologies and tools.

[Book Juan Carlos as speaker](#)

## Magdalena Florek



Magdalena Florek is Associate Professor at the Poznan University of Economics and Business in Poland. She is the co-founder and vice-president of the International Place Branding Association, as well as co-founder and Member of the Board of Best Place – the European Place Marketing Institute. Magdalena is a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Place Management, UK.

[Magdalena's researcher profile](#)

## Malcolm Allan



Malcolm is the President of Bloom Consulting, which he joined in 2018 when it merged with Placematters. He has qualifications in town planning, civic design and development economics, has worked across the world for both central and local governments.

[More about Bloom Consulting](#)

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## Robert Govers



Robert is an international advisor, scholar, speaker and author on the reputation of cities, regions and countries. He is the author of the highly acclaimed book, *Imaginative Communities*, chairman of the International Place Branding Association, co-editor of the quarterly journal of Place Branding and Public Diplomacy and a contributor to Apolitical, the World Economic Forum Agenda and the Economist Intelligence Unit Perspectives platforms.

[More about Robert's consulting](#)

[Robert's researcher profile](#)

[Book Robert as speaker](#)

## Sebastian Zenker



Sebastian is a Professor for Place Branding and Tourism at the Copenhagen Business School (Denmark). He achieved his doctoral degree at the University of Hamburg (Germany) and gained further international experience as visiting scholar at the Erasmus University Rotterdam (Netherlands). In his current research, he concentrates on place brand management.

[Sebastian's researcher profile](#)

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Todd has worked as a place branding consultant and practitioner since 2011, when he happened upon the discipline by accident. He found place-branding infinitely more meaningful than product or corporate branding, and far more difficult. Todd is currently the CEO of Brand Tasmania in Australia.

[Book Todd as speaker](#)

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[More about Yellow Railroad](#)

[Book Tom as speaker](#)

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International place branding expert, passionate about strategy and cities. More than 20 years associated with territorial marketing and tourism consulting. Since 2010 co-founder and CEO of Best Place - European Place Marketing Institute – a boutique consulting organization that aims to help places, mainly in Central and Eastern Europe, to become attractive, sustainable, strong brands.

## Andrea Lucarelli

Andrea is an Associate Professor at Stockholm Business School, Stockholm University. His primary research interest is connected to the political dimension of branding places as cities and regions, as well as other public-private sector entities and sport sectors. He mainly adopts qualitative methodologies, using a vast array of socio-cultural and political approaches to analyze the socio-economic impact of branding.

## Aparna Dutt Sharma

Presently Secretary General of the Cement Manufacturers Association of India (CMA) and formerly CEO of India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF) of the Government of India, Aparna has established credentials as a Brand Strategist and a Transformation Leader over her 30 years of work experience. Her specialities include both nation and sector branding.

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Eduardo studies place branding and spatial planning processes, and the embedding of both in governance. His current research focuses on analyzing the effectiveness of place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument in supporting the social and economic development of urban regions, whilst assessing its effect on environmental sustainability.

## Inga Hlín Pálsdóttir

Inga has been an integral part of the branding and promotion of Iceland for over a decade and has been involved with all aspects of the tourism industry. She led successful changes for the brand as a place and destination, both in crisis and in times of growth. She was the Director for Visit Iceland and Creative Industries at Promote Iceland until the end of 2019.

## Gary Warnaby

Gary Warnaby is Professor of Retailing and Marketing, based in the Institute of Place Management at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. His research interests focus on the marketing of places (particularly in an urban context), and retailing.

## Jeremy Tamanini

Jeremy Tamanini is the founder of Dual Citizen LLC, a consultancy that advises clients on how to leverage data and strategic communications to address climate change and promote sustainability. To support this work, Dual Citizen publishes the biennial Global Green Economy Index™ (GGEI), currently in its 6th edition.

## Hila Oren

Hila is the CEO of the Tel Aviv Foundation - a driver of progress, elevating the city's quality of life through education, the arts, sports, social services, the environment, and innovative urban projects. Previously, Hila founded and served as CEO of Tel Aviv Global - an initiative started by the Mayor's Office in 2010.

## Jordi de San Eugenio Vela

Jordi is Associate Professor of Place Branding at the University of Vic-Central University of Catalonia (Spain). From 2013 to 2014 he was the Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Business and Communication. From 2011 to 2013 he was the Head of the Communication Department. He received his PhD (with honours) in place branding from Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona.

## Hong Fan

Hong Fan is the director of the National Image Research Centre (NIRC) at Tsinghua University in Beijing, China. She is a professor at the School of Journalism and Communication, and a lecture professor for the EMBA Program at the School of Economics and Management at Tsinghua. Currently she is a board member of International Place Branding Association (IPBA).

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## José Pablo Arango Calle

José Pablo is the former director of Brand Colombia. He specializes in marketing and reputation, with over 40 years of experience in advertising agencies, including Young & Rubicam, J.Walter Thompson and Sancho BBDO, where he has had the opportunity to work for most of the important brands in Colombia.

## Sonya Hanna

Much of Sonya's research at Bangor University in Wales, Great Britain, is focused on the theory and application of place branding, and more specifically in relation to the process of 'strategic' place brand management and its various components (ranging from brand communications to the co-creation of place brands and stakeholder engagement) and the inter-play between such components.

## Marta Hereźniak

Marta is Assistant Professor at the University of Lodz, Poland. She is the author of the first book about nation branding in Poland. In 2003-2010 she served as expert to the Polish Chamber of Commerce and the Institute of Polish Brand. Consultant in brand-related projects for companies, public institutions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Regional Development etc.) and local governments.

## Rebecca Smith

Rebecca is the Director of the New Zealand Story, a government-led business growth initiative to tell the story of what New Zealand has to offer and what makes the country unique. She is an optimistic, energetic and experienced marketer and brand builder, having previously worked for Wools of New Zealand, Fonterra, Bank of New Zealand and Telecom NZ. Rebecca is a frequent speaker at industry events and a contributor to *The Place Brand Observer* and the *City Nation Place Forum*.



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