UI Occasional papers
#21
OCTOBER 2013
PUBLISHED BY THE SWEDISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. WWW.UI.SE

NATION BRANDING AND RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The process of globalisation has made the concept of nation brand an important one in the current context. This ensures that there is intense competition among countries for attention, respect and trust in order to achieve their policy goals and objectives. One of the means to try and market a country in the international competition is via the use of nation branding.[1]

The concept of nation branding has become popular, but some have argued how can a nation be marketed like some kind of product?[2] A combination of the increasing competition between different countries and advances in new communication technologies is ensuring a much more interactive communication between governments and foreign publics.[3]

As pointed out by Ying Fan, nation brand and nation branding are two different things. A nation may already have a brand, regardless whether branding is taking place or not (Fan, 2006). This is formed by the nature of information generated about that nation, the stereotypes and opinions held by publics. Branding may take place to try and reform, repair, enhance or remake the existing image in order for the country in question to be viewed as being more attractive and competitive. Nation branding can be seen as a form of cure or panacea for something that is 'wrong' with a country's image.[4]

However, nation branding is not something that is easily undertaken. It needs to take the sum of all of a country's parts into account and get them aligned to a simple and appealing message that resonates with the target audience. Since the mid-2000s, Russia has joined the list of countries that seek to use nation branding to fulfil politically determined and directed national ambitions.[5] How does Russia use nation branding, and what ends is this intended to serve? What are the tangible resources that are exploited to brand the country?

Before embarking on answering this question, stock needs to be taken of the current debate on nation branding. This is an increasingly common term and practice, but is not necessarily commonly understood. The foundations of the concept and practice of nation branding are discussed. Soft power forms the subject of the next section. Issues of a definition and the significance of soft power are outlined. This is then connected to the 2013 Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation.

The ambitions and goals of the document are connected with the practice of nation branding and the desire for accumulating soft power. Different attempts at nation branding by the Russian Federation are detailed, and how these are connected with the understanding of soft power (and what purpose this serves).

NATION BRANDING AND INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION

Globalisation has stimulated an intense competition among countries, where the issue of nation brand is a central consideration. Two broad types of nation branding can take place – promise branding and re-branding. Promise branding involves the projection of a future desired state of being, and re-branding is the attempt to shed a negative image (Tatevossian, 2008: 189).[6] Countries compete with one another for the "attention, respect and trust of investors, tourists, consumers, donors, immigrants, the media, and the governments of other nations: so a powerful and positive nation brand provides a crucial competitive advantage."[7] This list provides a limited number of possibilities that motivate a country to engage in nation branding. Wally Olins writes of three areas where nations are in direct and overt competition with one another – brand export, direct foreign investment and tourism. He explains that the success of the endeavour relies upon the "clarity, emphasis and enthusiasm with which it projects its national brand".[8] Fan also describes how the communication should be delivered, in order to be effective.

> In nation branding the aim is to create a clear, simple, differentiating idea built around emotional qualities which can be symbolised both verbally and visually and understood by diverse audiences in a variety of situations.[9]

However, this does not explain this informational tool. This leads to the question, what exactly is 'nation branding'? Simon Anholt defines nation brand as being "the sum of people's perceptions of a country across six areas of national competence." These areas include – tourism, exports, people, governance, culture and heritage, investment and immigration.[10] Fan argues that "to work effectively, nation branding must embrace political, cultural, business and sport activities."[11] Thus providing a slight difference of opinion to what Anholt contends. Two differences exist, which separate nation branding from more traditional forms of public diplomacy.

- There is a greater depth of realisation among countries about the value of their brand as an asset. "Understanding valuation helps countries better understand the investments they make in their image." This helps to focus and make more efficient efforts to increase their brand value and attractiveness.

- An increasing focus to manage on the behavioural aspects of managing a nation's image. There is an increasing need for cooperation and collaboration among governments, non-profits and business in order to align messages and the "fundamental common purpose" of respective countries.[12]

Whether or not the nation-branding campaign is a success or not boils down to the basic factor of the nature and quality of the product a country is trying to sell. Additionally, it may take some time before the fruits of a campaign become apparent. In some cases, policymakers have neither the patience nor the time politically. Belgium abandoned one such branding campaign after failing to achieve rapid progress. Success is also linked to the need for a high level collaboration between and among senior figures in the government, civil society and business sector. Partnership, collaboration and communication must be effective and efficient between different governmental, civil society and commercial units in order to project the common sense of purpose and a unified (non-contradictory) message.[13]

The results of nation branding campaigns are very difficult to measure accurately, currently there are two high profile attempts to quantify the progress – the country brand index from FutureBrand consultancy and the Anholt GfK Roper nation brand index.[14] When competing and/or contradictory messages are communicated in to the public communication space, the effectiveness of nation-branding campaigns is severely weakened.

It is essential that a country to understand how they are viewed and perceived by publics around the world. National image and national identity are intertwined and linked in some regards. How a nation sees itself cannot be entirely divorced from the perceptions of others have about the nation concerned and how those people view others.[15] This includes "how their achievements and failures, their assets and their liabilities, their people and their products are reflected in their brand image."[16] Nation-branding cannot be used to promote poor policy or to substitute or mask bad policy, such efforts shall eventually become apparent and this ultimately impacts upon the intangible assets of the country concerned. Informational technologies permit the utilisation of "signs, meanings, symbols, signification" that allows for the projection of different forms of capital (civic, political, economic … etc.) that potentially inscribes a nation with meaning.[17]

Nation branding campaigns often employ a readily identifiable symbol (logo) that identifies the nation being branded and the partners involved in doing the branding. This is a visual tool to identify the nation concerned and project endorsement from the partner organisations. The symbol itself is not the real value, but those properties and values that are perceived as being behind it. One successful example of a nation branding symbol is Joan Miro's sun for Spain. [18] There are numerous considerations that need to be understood, planned and implemented. What is the core idea of the branding? What makes the country distinct from others? Does the branding projected match the actual situation (or in some cases perception)? Issues of coordination and management, audience segmentation and identification of key audience also need to be determined.

Simon Anholt defines the brand strategy as being "a plan for defining the most realistic, most competitive and most compelling strategic vision for the country, region or city; this vision then has to be fulfilled and communicated".[19] Therefore the brand essence is gained by countries and people that actually live the brand that is being projected. Any perceived or actual contradictions can destroy an existing brand or ensure attempts at projecting a new one shall fail. Acts of communication need support and reinforce the brand being projected. Some common daily means with which to engage in this include:

- Export brands of the country concerned;
- The way in which a nation promotes itself for trade, tourism, domestic investment, domestic recruitment;
- A nation's conduct in domestic and foreign policy, and how this is communicated;
- How a nation promotes, represents and shares its culture;
- The way in which a nation's citizens behave abroad and how they treat strangers at home;
- How the human-built and natural environments are presented to the visitor;
- Nature of coverage received by a country in the world media;
- Various bodies and organisations that a country is a member of;
- Other countries that it associates with;
- Nature of the competition with other countries in sport and entertainment;
- What a country gives and takes to and from the world.[20]

This list demonstrates the enormous task of trying to balance between projected brand image and the image communicated by individuals and organisations going about their daily business. What is observable above is that a nation's brand can be further divided into sub-brands. These are: political brand, economic brand and cultural brand.[21] Any country of a larger size and longevity of existence usually has an existing brand. This is the result of people having heard about them, and possessing certain images, associations and opinions. The result is that certain countries are not value free and may be weighed down with clichés, unbalanced or out of date images.[22] The value for the brand is found in the set of associations and values that are invoked by the brand identity, these associations can be transferred to the product itself. Thus the marker of brand identity serves as a means

to induce sets of values and emotions in a target audience.[23] In order for any kind of success to be likely, there needs to be a unitary sense of purpose, values and control among state bodies.[24]

Nation branding takes into consideration a number of different components, which should not be neglected or viewed in isolation. Felix Stock names and explains these parts.[25]

- National identity – the basic problem of weak national identities producing weak nation images. Based upon key elements such as common language, laws, historic territory, memory and myths. This is about creating an emotional bond between the citizens of a country. Needs to be a clear understanding and idea about communicating and promoting this identity to the outside world.

- Reference point – this provides a contextual frame from which to shape the image formation process. National identity becomes clear and meaningful through contrasts and comparisons with other nations.

- Construed image – this aspect refers to how a nation's population perceive their country and how others perceive it. This links back to issues concerning national identity, but also about the nature of the efforts that shall be required to modify the image.

- Actual image – the 'real' image of a nation that is held by another nation. This includes the set of beliefs and associations that are held about the nation concerned.

- Current project image – these are the efforts by a nation to project and communicate a desired image to another nation.

- Desired future image – a 'visionary perception' forms the point of reference to communicate the image that is desired by a nation to the outside world.

Some apparent contradictions do, however, take place. One would expect that if one country holds a negative opinion of another country that they are less likely to purchase their products. The relationship between China and Japan is a very strained one politically, yet Japanese products are popular in the Chinese market.[26] Therefore, political tensions and/or negative national stereotypes do not necessarily affect the decision to purchase the products from the country with a negative brand.

One of the drawbacks of a number of different public diplomacy campaigns (in the broad sense and understanding of the practice, which includes nation branding) is that they can be viewed as a 'smokescreen' to cover "ineffective or wrongheaded policy." If there is disconnect between what is communicated via public diplomacy and what is practiced in policy, PD shall not succeed. The two should work in tandem.[27]

SOFT POWER

The nature of power is also in the process of changing. According to Nye, power is capable of two things. An ability to get the desired outcomes, and to influence the behaviour of others in order to achieve the desired outcomes.[28] There are two alternative ways of wielding power – through fear and coercion or through attraction and co-opting. One needs to bear in mind that "power always depends on the context in which the relationship exists." If objectives seem to be legitimate and just, others may willingly assist without the use of coercion or inducements. [29] In order to proceed, there needs to be an understanding of power.

Power's definition is related to vested interests and values. Some argue that it is related to the ability to make or resist change.[30] A dictionary definition states that power is "the capacity to do things and in social situations to affect others to get the outcomes we want".[31] Nye contends that power is a two-way relationship, which is defined by who is involved in the power relationship (scope of power) and what topics are involved (domain of power).[32] In the context of this paper, power and influence are to be viewed as being related and interchangeable.

Hard power's basis is found in military and economic weight. This is in contrast to soft power that "rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others". [33] Soft power is about establishing the preferences, normally associated with intangible assets – attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies seen as being legitimate or having moral authority. If a leader represents values that others want to follow, it will cost less to lead.[34] In terms of a country, soft power can be found in its culture, its political values and foreign policy.[35] Fan has contended that nation branding can be an important component that is used to develop and maintain a nation's soft power. "Successful nation branding campaigns will help create a more favourable image among the international audience, thus further enhancing a country's soft power."[36]

Military or hard power assets are more government controlled/owned than soft power assets.[37] In this regard, there is a resemblance to the nature and practice of New Public Diplomacy. Nye also notes that "soft power is also likely to be more important when power is dispersed in another country than concentrated" (dictator for example).[38] Soft power is particularly relevant to the realisation of milieu goals. [39] A 'drawback' of soft power is the resources work more slowly, they are more diffuse in nature, and more cumbersome to wield than hard power resources". [40] This means that they are harder to use, easy to lose, and the results take a longer time to become apparent.

The system of "soft power resources work indirectly by shaping the environment for policy, and sometimes take years to produce the desired outcomes".[41] This leads to a point of criticism concerning soft power, which is that it has only a modest impact on policy outcomes.[42] The basis of soft power is dependent upon the credibility of the communicator, which is where the use of political marketing and New Public Diplomacy come in to their own. These communicational technologies are designed to build the necessary relationships that contribute to credibility. The policy oriented concept of power tells – who gets what, how, where and when.[43] How is power that is gained from accumulating soft power established and wielded in practice?

A first point to consider is that "information creates power, and today a much larger part of the world's population has access to that power".[44] It is about creating relationships and establishing the environmental (political and information flows) conditions between a state and foreign publics as a means to influence the relational power between these groups. Three aspects to relational power exist – commanding change, controlling agenda and establishing preferences.[45] I would argue that with the current state of information technologies it is difficult to control an agenda completely, however, it is possible to initiate or influence.

Soft power is openly sought and many countries are locked in a global competition for it. Some paradoxes emerge, such as the presence of PD and an absence of soft power and vice versa. For instance, Cull points out that North Korea has PD, but an absence of soft power. Whereas Ireland has soft power, but minimal PD.[46] Too much focus on the quest for soft power may ultimately prove counter-productive for an actor (it can be viewed with suspicion by publics). These examples serve to illustrate a point made by Fan. "The relevance and ultimate effectiveness of soft power depends on the perception and response of its target audience".[47]

There has been a great deal of discussion in Russia concerning soft power and public diplomacy, how these concepts currently relate and how to develop the potential further. One of the debates has been to look at the United States and see if there is anything that can be learned and applied for Russia. This not only includes the theoretical and conceptual levels, but the creation of institutions as well (such as the idea to create a Russian equivalent of the US Information Agency).[48] There are others that advocate that Russia should develop its own soft power concept (application techniques, development strategies, priorities and objectives).[49] Both of these sides see an urgent need to develop a viable soft power concept, otherwise Russia's international position and potential will be eroded.

A seeming consensus does exist on the need for Russia to engage in soft power, through effective global communications. This includes communicating what is termed as 'objective information' about Russia. The perceived reward is that Russia shall be more successful in attaining its stated foreign policy objectives and to protect Russian interests, however, the first step being to possess a resource of soft power.[50]

In July 2012, President Putin defined soft power as being "all about promoting one's interests and policies through persuasion and creating a positive perception of one's country, based not just on its material achievements but also its spiritual and intellectual heritage."[51] This is in-line with an earlier observation made by Georgy Filimonov from People's Friendship University (Moscow). He made strong connections between the accumulation of soft power and an effective and a functional system of public diplomacy.

I believe it is quite legitimate to treat the concept of public diplomacy as a system of strategic views aimed at forming a positive image of a country abroad through the implementation of multi-level information and advocacy policy. The main directions of this policy are foreign cultural policy, cultural diplomacy, information and ideological promotion, educational exchange programmes, the involvement of a wide range of non-governmental organisations and other civic institutions, the corporate sector … etc.. Moreover, in contrast to traditional diplomacy, public diplomacy is addressed directly to the public. Therein lies its strength and effectiveness.[52]

Efforts to develop Russia's public diplomacy and ability to accumulate soft power potential, as described above, rely on the use of mass communication with foreign audiences in order to explain official policy. This comes against a backdrop where Russia considers itself at a disadvantage on the international stage owing to a poor image and reputation that has been the result of 'lack of understanding' and 'bad' (non-objective) information in the global information space. There have been an increasing number of institutions created, which communicate and form relationships with an increasing number of people in foreign publics. Yet, the image of Russia has not improved. This has led to some stating that Russia is losing its soft power quest. An underlying reason given, is that this does not concern Russia's cultural or intellectual heritage and reputation, but more precisely a lack of popularity in its pursued policies.[53]

Fyodor Lukyanov, Editor in Chief of the journal Russia in Global Affairs, notes that Russia's understanding differs "radically" from the Western view. He characterises Russian soft power as being "too soft." There are three identified goals in the foreign policy area – the first is "to promote Russian culture, the Russian language and the Russian education system as attractive and competitive." The second goal is "to counter foreign media's negative depiction of the country's policies and the Russian way of life." Thirdly, is to "create a group of Russia's friends around the world." Lukyanov characterises this situation as attempting to revive reasonably effective Soviet-era practices. However, the Soviet Union as a generous patron to those countries that aligned with it, and the current Russia that places profit first, are incompatible.[54] There is certainly disconnect

between the ideologically driven soft power of the Soviet Union, and the more pragmatic approach of contemporary Russia. The question being, are those messages and values from the 20th Century still attractive in the 21st Century?

Although power is something that is greatly sought by many countries around the globe, it is something that is hard to observe and accurately measure. Power is something that is extremely difficult to measure and quantify.[55] It is an intangible asset, so it cannot be directly seen or touched, but it can exert an effect. It is much easier to measure activity than effect, which makes the temptation greater to try and show progress through showing what concrete activities have been carried out rather than trying to measure what preferences or opinions have been influenced. In this light, opinion polls are an imperfect, yet essential measure of soft power resources. At least it provides a good first approximation.[56] The BBC's annual Country Ratings Poll is an example of one such poll that can provide a yardstick.

2013 CONCEPT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Russia has attempted to balance the political character of its state and society with its history, which has resulted in a debate on its identity and foreign policy since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian Federation differs greatly from any of its predecessors in terms of its political system, state borders and geopolitical surroundings in its immediate neighbourhood. In June 2000, President Putin approved the Russian Foreign Policy Concept. A significant point of this document was that no matter how deep the internal changes a country makes, its foreign policy never starts from a clean slate. It is influenced and bears a measure of continuity based upon the geopolitics, history and culture of the country concerned.[57] To some extent, at least, a country can be trapped by their past. According to Ivanov, the above mentioned debate reached the conclusion that Russia's foreign policy should be based upon the drivers of national interests and not by political ideology. He concluded that "Russian diplomacy has always succeeded when guided by realistic, pragmatic considerations and failed when dominated by imperial ideology and messianic ambitions."[58] This seems to signal a departure from the Soviet past, where ideology played the central role, which was (according to this quote) replaced by more realistic and pragmatic approaches.

The latest foreign policy concept replaces the earlier version from 2008. On 7 May 2012, a presidential decree was issued that set out the terms and conditions for the new foreign policy concept. In mid-February 2013, President Putin unveiled the new concept to members of the Security Council at a meeting hosted in the Kremlin. During his address to members of the Security Council, Putin remarked that:

Russia will continue to pursue an active and constructive line in international affairs. Its weight and influence in the world will increase. […] The basic principles of Russian foreign policy remain the same. […] That means, above all, openness, predictability, pragmatism, and the pursuit of national interests without any confrontations in accordance with the role of the United Nations and the rule of international law. […] The concept focuses on modern foreign policy tools, including economic diplomacy, elements of so-called soft power, and careful integration into the global informational space.[59]

There are a number of points that emerge from Putin's address, the desire for Russia to be more active on the world stage, to be more engaged in the global information space, the active pursuit and accumulation of soft power, to peacefully pursue Russia's national interests within the existing international institutional and legal framework. He emphasizes that this needs to be done in a transparent and predictable manner. This seems to be an attempt to align Russia's foreign policy to an apparent narrative that emphasizes the country as a constructive force for good in international affairs.

The 2013 Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (here after "the Concept") states the priorities, goals and objectives. This new concept was precipitated by changing events and dynamics in the international arena.[60] After listing what are seen as various actual and emerging global problems, the document then sets out to describe Russia's priorities and role in addressing those problems. The highlighted problems are illustrated under various rubrics – Emergence of a New World Order, Rule of Law in International Relations, Strengthening International Security, International Cooperation in the Sphere of Economy and Environment, International Humanitarian Cooperation and Human Rights and Information Support for Foreign Policy Activities. In point 103 of the Concept, there is even mention of the possibility of public-private partnership in helping to realise the stated goals and objectives. If these goals and objectives in the Concept are to be realised, then Russia requires a good reputation and brand in order to be credible and effective. This is likely to be a long-term project given the current state of perception and the international image of Russia.

RUSSIAN NATION BRANDING IN THE GLOBAL ARENA

According to Anholt, the branding of a nation is an essential part of modern statecraft. "A nation's brand image is its most valuable asset: it is national identity made robust, tangible and communicable, and – at its best – made useful."[61] The image and branding of a country form the very centre and distinguishing features of a 'national product' for public relations to do its work. The link between soft power and nation branding is offered by Fan. "Nation branding can be an important tool in the development of a nation's soft power. […] Branding a nation is much more than just finding a catchy slogan or window-dressing but requires the study of a nation's soft power sources in order to exploit them effectively to promote the national image".[62]

Currently, Russia is somewhat locked between the past images and the current ones. The negative brands of the Soviet past prove to be very sticky images, associations and stereotypes to shake, before any tangible progress in rehabilitating the national brand can be made. Such well-known brands and products as Pravda, Bolshoi Ballet, Sputnik, Kalashnikov, Faberge and vodka tend to reinforce the symbols of culture and aggression. Julia Stonogina (Vice-President, International Association of Business Communications, Russia) explains to role and differences in symbols and brands.

Symbols and brands belong to different economic systems and different human consciousness. For instance, we might think the distance between symbols and brands is just about the same length as it is between propaganda and marketing. Symbols talk to us about politics, brands about economy.

Symbols do not need to compete for the people's emotional appreciation but brands do. Russia's symbols belong to the time of the industrial economy, controlled market and totalitarian society. Russian brands should demonstrate the country's economic transformation, post-industrial thinking and a new type of communication with the world.[63]

Russia's current international communications are aimed at attempting to influence a more positive global perception of their symbols. The image of the Soviet menace has reduced somewhat, although there is still a lot of association with the Russian threat in the aftermath of the various gas wars and the 2008 Georgian-Russian War. This is reinforced by the continuing use of some Cold War and aggression associations and symbols in the Western media – comparisons with some policy and events, such as the 2008 Georgian-Russian War and the 1956 Hungarian Uprising or the 1968 Prague Spring. Brand associations remain negative, such as Aeroflot and the presumed poor standard service and safety of Russian air transportation. Russia's reliance on oil is association with companies such as Gazprom and events, such as the various gas wars. There is a need to rehabilitate the brand image, which is difficult to achieve when Russian brands are not so common in the international consumer markets.

There have been attempts to try and influence a more positive perception, such as the gradual integration into the global economy membership of organisations such as BRICS and the WTO. However, this is offset by perceptions of rampant corruption and a hostile business environment for foreign investors. In a meeting with Russian Foreign Ministry officials in February 2013, Putin urged and reminded them of their duty, priorities and what lay ahead.

Obviously classic diplomacy is, if not particularly out of date, then seriously transformed. You and your colleagues have to deal with the economy, developing business relations, supporting various economic projects and opening new promising markets. […] The correct use of soft force mechanisms is a priority, such as a stronger position for the Russian language, promotion of Russia's positive image abroad and the ability of an organic integration into global information flows. […] Bearing in mind the successful hosting of the APEC Vladivostok summit, it is necessary to organise the events of the G20, the G8, BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation with equal attention.[64]

These different components that are detailed above make up the assets that could be exploited in order to generate soft power through projecting a positive brand of Russia. Many different cultural and political events have been held, many of these falls within the range of what can be regarded as being symbols, rather than brands. However, the views held about Russia are very diverse, from more positive to more negative in nature. In 2012 the Anholt GfK Roper Nation Brands IndexSM ranked Russia in 41st place (out of 50 places). This is the sum of the perceptions though, which ranged from 6th place for sporting achievements down to 42nd place (equal) for the government's contribution to international peace and security, protecting the environment, and for expecting a warm reception when visiting the country. There is variation according to country too, Turkish respondents rank Russia in 13th place and Poles rank it in 49th place.[65] This demonstrates that even one country can possess a very diverse and polarised set of opinions and perceptions, which makes the task of branding such an entity very difficult, although it does present some different possibilities of avenues to pursue.

Anholt offered Russia some advice on the issue of branding and soft power. In this regard, he ranked Russia as facing the same tests and trials as other countries. "So Russia's task over the next decades is identical to the task facing most other countries. It doesn't need to find ways of making people around the world feel in awe of Russia, impressed by Russia, or even envious of Russia: quite simply, it needs to find ways of making people feel glad that Russia exists."[66] Perhaps this is what the 2013 Concept is beginning to seek to address. Certainly bringing the world from the brink of war in Syria was a diplomatic coup by Russia at the perceived expense of the United States. However, this needs to be demonstrated as a long-term trend and not an isolated incident, which can take a long period of time to prove and ultimately re-shape perceptions of Russia.

President Putin recently addressed the Valdai Discussion Club and reinforced the message of Russia being a force for good in international relations from the point of historical continuity. Beginning with the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and the Yalta Conference in 1945 as success stories, the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 as a failure, the message was that with Russia's support and involvement led to a more stable international environment. In other words, "the world is not complete without Russia." Lukyanov added that "in order to continue to be an active player capable of offering creative approaches in foreign policy, Russia needs to foster an environment that promotes intellectual, social and, broadly speaking, human potential." He added that "intellectual and technological competition is becoming the main proving ground on the way to success and influence." The conclusion was that "people are now the main object of competition in the battle for minds, not only in the figurative sense of duelling images of soft power, but the literal sense of taking care of people who are creating innovative products, putting them to work, and providing opportunities for self-realisation."[67] The emphasis here is placed on the development and utilisation of human and intellectual capital, which gives the competitive edge in soft power. Certainly, the citizens of a nation, how they see themselves and how others perceive them, is a key component of nation branding.

Indirect experience is one matter, where it can be difficult to change opinions and perceptions. Direct experience of a people and its culture can be a more effective means of challenging stereotypes and images (if the experience is positive and challenges the negative image). Tourism is one of the spheres that a country can effectively brand, and many do just that. In Russia, tourism is considered to be one of the younger among other industries. In 2011 tourism accounted for 2.5 per cent of the national GDP. Information from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation ranked Russia at the 59th place, which implies it is an attractive global tourist destination.[68] However, for various reasons, Russian tourism has not received priority for financing, development or marketing. This means that international standards in transportation, hospitality, services and entertainment for tourists lag behind.[69] The tourist industry is a good means of introducing foreign publics (first hand) to those different cultural and heritage aspects of soft power and to project its civic and cultural capital. In some regards, this seems to be an opportunity lost.

However, there are some promising islands of progress in branding parts of Russia. The locality in question, which is seemingly serving as some kind of blueprint for other Russian localities, is Saint Petersburg. It is a city that is historically and

contemporarily close to Europe in terms of geography and symbolism. Under Tsar Peter the Great it served as a window to Europe. City authorities have set a clear number of goals: "developing the range of excursions, business facilities, cruises, sanatoriums and resorts in the region." St. Petersburg is considered as being ahead of Moscow in catering for tourists. Other localities in Russia that would be good objects for branding are the Republic of Tatarstan, where East meets West (blending Islam and Orthodoxy). Veliky Ustyug competes with the Nordic Countries as being the home of Santa Claus (Ded Moroz).[70] It is possible to add that the Golden Ring (ancient Russian towns and cities around Moscow) idea could be developed to showcase and sell notions and experiences of Russian heritage and culture.

Large scale international events hosted by a country can also present an opportunity (also some risks involved, should things go 'wrong') to showcase the country on the world stage whilst being the centre of media attention. The hosting of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games shall be in the Russian Black Sea city of Sochi, a resort area with the brand as being the Russian Riviera. This gives the locality its context and location within the different positions that can be occupied by cities. The only previous time that Olympic Games were hosted in the area occurred with the Moscow Games in 1980, which was boycotted by many countries in response to the Soviet engagement in Afghanistan. Therefore, this occasion is seen as having "created an unparalleled, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the country to boost its international reputation and reshape the "red bear" image".[71] The hosting of the Games in Sochi could also potentially put a focus and priority on the development of Russia in developing its tourism infrastructure and capacity.

Sochi 2014 has focused many Russians on what they want to see come out of the event. Polls conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre showed that 52 per cent of respondents wanted increased prestige for the country, 48 per cent boost for athletic activities and 26 per cent an increase in national self-consciousness. However, the dimension of international communication is rather low-key, such as the unveiling of the Sochi Games logo (a snowflake that is captured on the Russian state flag). The global outreach is too subtle.[72] The Games have their own website – www.sochi2014.com. Information is available in Russian, French and English. Logos of the international Olympic brand feature on the site, but the Sochi brand is harder to find. A lot more could be done to market and communicate the 'Russia' and 'Sochi' brand to the global publics in advance of the Games. During Putin's speech to Russian diplomats, he mentioned the importance of successfully hosting international key events, Sochi 2014 seems to hold a much greater level of potential than those that he mentioned.

One final case to be introduced here, as an example of attempt at creating a tangible brand (although not at the nation level), is the case of Skolkovo (http://community.sk.ru/). This was an attempt to tangibly brand the policy of modernisation under the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev. Also there is the intention to attract foreign investment and partnership. The project was dubbed the Russian Silicon Valley. This innovation hub took much time to be realised, and will focus on five research areas: energy, information technologies, communication, biomedical research and nuclear technologies. [73] However, various events have bogged down the process, including cases of embezzlement.[74] There has been some tentative optimism expressed by some as to the progress of this project. There is also a clear message about a break from the Soviet past. "Unlike secret Soviet-era science cities, or naukograd, where research and production facilities were hidden from the outside world, Skolkovo innovation city is on display for everyone to see."[75] This seems to be along the lines of the message that Stonogina said needed to be demonstrated to show the transformation of the economy and the way of thinking.

CONCLUSION

Olins warns that nation branding is a very complex and slow enterprise. It can take many years to implement, with results slow to come in and they are not easy to measure. This can contradict expectations and demands in the political world, which may demand quick and readily measureable results.[76] Russia faces a dilemma, on the one hand it has a new and ambitious set of goals and objectives in the 2013 Concept. However, the brand and reputation of the country are more than often containing sticky negative stereotypes and prejudices (regardless of the argumentations concerning their accuracy or otherwise). This does not exclude some kind of change, recent events surrounding Syria and the Russian Proposal indicate that opportunities do exist, which can be taken advantage of should the situation be acted upon.

Anholt stated that a country's total brand is related to the sum of perceptions across tourism, exports, people, governance, culture and heritage, investment and immigration. Added to this is Fan's contention that nation branding needs to "embrace political, cultural, business and sport activities," which contribute to the formation of the political brand, economic brand and cultural brand. The promotion of Russia (including nation branding) is directed at accumulating soft power, which is attempted as a means to more effectively 'sell' government policy and interests. The main message or idea being conveyed is that Russia plays a positive role in the world. In terms of positioning, Russia tends to try and position itself as an alternative/competitor to the West (understood as being the block of countries that are lead/influenced by the United States). The 2013 Concept tends to reinforce this notion.

Putin has emphasized the need to use "spiritual and cultural heritage" in addition to material achievements as means with which to help shape the Russian brand. This means that communications should not only convey the various scientific and sporting successes, but also softer aspects that are less political in nature. Attempted influence is being placed upon a much more pragmatic idea that is based upon interests and policies as opposed to the Soviet model that was based upon the use of a political ideology.

A limited number of empirical examples of branding in the different spheres (politics, culture, business and sport) have been given. The Sochi 2014 Games possesses great potential in branding Russia in hosting this international event, the potentially positive sets of emotions from the event could assist in reshaping perceptions and stereotypes. To date, this potential has not been adequately accomplished. It is a high profile event, but with a rather low profile global media coverage. Skolkovo is an attempt to attract international partners and to create a Russian 'Silicon Valley' and is based upon a set of logical and pragmatic notions. This could also be used, if successful, to create a brand that symbolises the transformation of the economy and the way of thinking in the business/research sectors. Tourism is another issued that was raised, once more there is much potential yet that has not been taped to its full potential to date. An influx of tourists could potentially allow for a more interactive and relational interaction with foreign publics, perhaps in some instances allowing for the emotional appreciation to develop (under the 'right' set of circumstances). This also provides the venue and occasion to showcase Russian culture, heritage and spirituality.

This ignores a very important factor that shapes national identity, the reference point, construed image and actual image. It also affects how the current projected image and desired future image can be approached. That factor is a country's population. During the September 2013 Valdai Forum, President Putin emphasized the role to be played by human capital in Russia in relation to the country's relations with the outside world, and the problems and contradictions within this segment of soft power assets.

Educated, creative, physically and spiritually healthy people, rather than natural resources or nuclear weapons, will be Russia's main strength in this and coming centuries. […] Unfortunately, little value was placed in an individual life in much of Russian history.

All too often, people were treated as just a means to an end rather than the objective and the mission of development. We no longer have the right or even the ability to throw millions of people into the furnace of development. We need to take care of everybody."[77] The cultural, economic and political brands have been subject to analysis and review. However, the 'people brand' (exemplified by external and internal stereotypes and prejudices) has been a relatively neglected factor, until recently. This may be about to change after Putin's speech at the Valdai Discussion Club. If relationships are to be formed, innovations created, it requires spiritual (in terms of character) and intellectual capital that only people can potentially give. They are the ones that can make or break the brand.

There have been a number of different barriers that have been noted by political, academic and policy circles in Russia, to achieving a 'good' brand for Russia. This includes global media, which have often been criticised for using out of date stereotypes and images, which has been one of the motivating factors for Russia to boost its ability to communicate to international publics. Admissions have also been made that Russia's current image is influenced by its past in terms of geopolitics, history and culture. This means that there is no 'clean slate', but a number of existing images that inhibit the projection of the current desired image. This has been noted with regard to the associations of culture and aggression. A final point to make is that there is a tendency for top-down policy and implementation in Russia. This contradicts, to some extent, what Putin said about the importance of people (at Valdai) compared with the speech about large scale international events being hosted to an audience of diplomats. Nation branding also requires a bottom-up approach to succeed as ordinary citizens convey as much, if not more, about a country than hosted international events.

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