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Conference stream(s):

- Explore and analyse the differences between major application fields (e.g. tourism vs. resident attachment vs. investment attraction) and/or major place scales (cities vs. regions vs. nations).
- Elaborate on the role of identity, history and heritage in the branding of places.

ABSTRACT

**Tensions in local and regional place branding: The mysterious
'disappearance' of Trenton, Ontario, Canada**

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Background - In the late 19th and early 20th centuries CE, the town of Trenton, located on the north shore of Lake Ontario approximately an hour east of Toronto, was a 'town of promise' (Mika and Mika, 1979) characterised by industry, enterprise and commerce. It was well-connected by water and rail transport, and drew resources from its hinterlands. Trenton's proximity to water has been a source of its competitive advantages both for its industrial prowess and for recreational activity. However as in other large and small urban places across the Great Lakes region, subsequent advances in technology, industrial consolidation, and forces of globalisation brought challenges and decline. Despite later developments such as the establishment Canada's largest military air force base and an imposed amalgamation with neighbouring, more rural municipalities, tensions in Trenton's place identity and place image have lingered and remained unresolved.

Aims - The purpose of this paper is to understand and explain the trajectory of place identity in smaller urban places, thereby expanding the scope of academic inquiry within the emerging field of place branding (Kavaratzis, 2004; Anholt, 2006). The paper unpacks evolving tensions in Trenton's contested place image as hub/gateway, urban/rural, and industrial/recreational. The place brand is further complicated by the military's presence, local vs regional aspirations, and local resident vs visitor needs.

Main approach - The paper follows a qualitative, interpretivist research approach. Data are drawn from interviews, field observations, policy document and council proceedings, promotional materials, cartography and media accounts. Specific physical sites of tension are used to illustrate the contested dynamics (e.g. monuments, site naming, and choice of infrastructure investment).

Key arguments/findings- The results suggest that regional interests can supersede local development interests where, as in this case, urban growth coalitions (Molotch, 1976; Logan and Molotch, 1987) are weak. Career self-interest in promoting the new regional identity at the expense of the traditional urban centre is also evidenced. Weak inter-urban competition emerges as a distinguishing feature of Canadian consensus politics, especially compared with

the stronger rivalries in the neighbouring USA. The research finds unresolved tensions between local and regional development objectives.

Conclusions/Significance- Trenton's image dualities of urban/rural and industry/leisure continue to linger since the 1920s. The research reveals structural (Innis, 1930) and agency (Porter, 1965) factors that drive the tensions over place identity and place branding. Foucault's (2004) notion of 'governmentality' (*gouvernementalité*) is used to explain how structures of governance, as mediated by political and social elites, are used to favour certain representations of place rather than others. Path dependency theory (David, 1994) is applied to explain the influence of historical circumstances on present conditions.

The case provides an intriguing example of how a place has been made to 'disappear', making this an unusual illustration of place de-branding. The findings will be of value to place-branding practitioners and academics researching small (especially post-industrial) urban places in the Great Lakes basin and beyond.

Keywords: *place branding; small cities; rural-urban continuum; urban revitalisation; Canada*

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