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Boomerangs and Creativity: Analyzing the Core Messages of the New 'Brand Australia'

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to describe the country brand for Australia released by the Australian Federal Government in May 2010, 'Brand Australia'. At the time of writing this paper, only the logo was available, and further details of the strategy (activities, targets, partners) were to be announced at a later date. This paper is focused on the available elements of the new Australian strategy; its antecedents in destination branding; the process conducted by the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade) in developing the new brand; the primary and secondary resource studies used by the Building Brand Australia program; policy aims; and the messages delivered by the brand's new visual resources.

My research method is based on website analysis and interviews. In addition to interviews with specific key respondents linked to the brand strategy, several interviews were conducted with researchers connected to tourism and cultural studies as an exercise in 'thinking together' about a phenomenon that is new, but also framed in a cultural sphere that is 'exotic' to the author. The main findings of this research can be summarized as follows: Australia enjoys the advantage of an outstanding perceived image, largely built on 'soft' portrayal items; Brand Australia focuses its core message in a couple of weak items (creativity and technology), probably considered strategic and undervalued by international audiences; the new program is not particularly worried about certain other weak issues (culture and environment); the new logo includes only a few elements (of the boomerang and the Australian map), mixing controversial and innocuous well-known icons.

Keywords: Country brand, Australia, creativity, technology, boomerang, map

Country brand

This paper describes and investigates the official brand of Australia. This empirical object is comprised by the theoretical object 'country brand'. The expression "country brand" was first used by the Catalan Josep-Francesc Valls in the early 1990s, defined as an "umbrella that helps to identify...[a] geographical denomination in the minds of consumers" (Valls, 1992: xviii, xi).¹

¹ All quotations from Josep-Francesc Valls' *La imagen de marca de los países* have been translated by the author.

The idea of a country brand is based on the combination of the concepts ‘country’ and ‘brand’. Valls conceptualizes the latter as “a name, a term, a sign, a symbol, a design or a combination of these elements, whose objective is to identify the goods and services of an organization and which is useful to efficaciously differentiate themselves in an environment where other similar products, services or organizations exist” (Valls, 1992: 16). In this sense, it is valuable to consider ‘official’ definitions in both Spanish (Valls’ book was first published in this language) and English. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘brand’ as “an identifying mark burned on livestock or...criminals or slaves with a branding iron” (Oxford University Press, 2011). The meaning of ‘*marca*’ in the dictionary of the Real Academia Española is a “mark made on a person, animal or thing to distinguish it from another, or to denote quality or ownership” (Real Academia Española, no date).² These definitions suggest the idea of a sign to identify ownership and differentiate something from other things of a similar type. I would rather say that a brand implies a mark that synthetically reproduces (or pretends to reproduce) meaningful features of the thing represented in order to shape a differentiating identity.

In the same way, Valls’ concept of ‘country’ is able to be enriched. He defines it as “any geographical element, with or without its own administration, identifiable under a denomination” (Valls, 1992: 28). In Spanish, ‘*país*’ is ‘officially’ conceptualized as a “nation, region, province or territory” (Real Academia Española, no date), and the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘country’ as “a nation with its own government, occupying a particular territory” (Oxford University Press, 2011). Although in Spanish ‘*país*’ is used in an extended sense in the same way ‘country’ is used in English – that is to say as a synonym for ‘the state’, including its sociopolitical component – Valls’ concept and the official Spanish dictionary reduce it to a geographical object.

Today, the category ‘country brand’ is understood, shared and used in both academic and governmental spheres, but only a decade ago it was widely unknown. Around 2004 a number of countries simultaneously launched their country brand strategies. Contemporaneously, intellectual activity around the category increased markedly. In a previous piece of work (Navarro, 2010b), I identified four stages in relation to the concept of the ‘country brand’: beginning (1992), growth (1998–2002), peak (2003–5) and consolidation (2006–today). Before 2002 – ten years after Valls’ publication – around fifteen books and articles developed different aspects of the ‘country brand’, but the original concept was not revised. Connected to this, Kotler (1993) defined ‘place image’ and Ham (2001) proposed a concept for the ‘brand state’. In this paper I point out the extended use of ‘country brand’ by different authors, in reference to theoretical objects as diverse as ‘built country brand’, ‘perceived country brand’, ‘perceived (spontaneous) country image’ and even ‘country brand strategy’. Related to these theoretical objects, it is useful to consider:

- A nation’s image can be a spontaneous or planned outcome: a ‘country brand’ coincides with the latter.
- Both unplanned and deliberate country images pass through three different stages: building, communication and perception. The perception of a country image is only one aspect of the whole object.

² All quotations from Real Academia Española’s dictionary have been translated by the author.

- A ‘country brand strategy’, led by a national government, includes several actions (building a message; developing traditional and alternative activities to promote the country) whose outputs coincide with the communicated country brand. When the theoretical object ‘*perceived* country brand’ is the object under consideration, a strategy can only measure and try to understand it.

COUNTRY or NATIONAL IMAGE	Built	Communicated	Perceived
Spontaneous	D	e	f
Planned (or country brand)	A	b	c

This paper focuses on the built country brand of Australia (‘a’, in the table above). I am attempting to shed some light on the conceptual category that lies behind this object. As I suggested above, a brand implies a sign – that is to say a graphic symbol, icon or index, depending on the level of abstraction (Debray, 1995: 59–60, 64–65, 68, 78) – which is also known as a logo, and this synthesizes an image. But an image is not the object itself: it is a group of messages, allegedly representative, of the object (Navarro, 2010a: 35–36, 40). Eventually, the sign results in a double process of selection.



A country is an object infinitely more sophisticated than a commercial good or service. Typically, a commercial brand is an object with a message behind it, but a country brand cannot help but include many diverse messages: it is a highly complex image. The idea of a brand is closer to a logo for simple objects and nearer to an image in the case of a country (although both kinds of brands involve an image and a logo).



A ‘built country brand’ is a set of messages that represent and synthesize a state (nation, territory or government), built in a process conducted by the national government and addressed to domestic, foreign and global audiences, in order to achieve international positioning (García and Seitz, 2005: 28). Such messages generally consist of projecting a given value from a country to an item (ownership) or from an item to a country (differentiation).

State		Value (Austrade, no date b)		Item
Australia	→	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vibrant • inclusive • confident • forward thinking • enterprising spirit • resilience • creativity 	→	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • natural elements and landscapes • material and immaterial cultural goods and landscapes • commercial products and services • outstanding individuals and communities
	←	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unquenchable desire to succeed • natural optimism • sense of untold potential 	←	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lifestyles and habits • laws and ways of organization

The empirical object of this paper is ‘Brand Australia’, a program announced by the Australian Federal Government. It is interesting to read on the official website that “a nation brand represents a country as a whole”, and that the “Brand Australia program is about providing an overarching, strategic approach to positioning Australia in the global marketplace” (Austrade, no date c). Most of the components of my concept coincide with the ideas expressed on the Brand Australia website.

Research aim and methodology

The main aim of this research is to describe Brand Australia. A qualitative methodological approach is followed and, within this frame, the overall strategy consists in:

- analyzing official leaflets and other printed material;
- analyzing official websites and other digital material;
- interviewing the Brand Australia team;³ and
- interviewing researchers connected to tourism and cultural studies.⁴

Some initial remarks should be made in regards to this methodological strategy:

- a built country brand can be studied by analyzing its formulating process (interviews with the brand team, ‘A’) and its tangible outputs (printed material, ‘B’; websites, ‘C’);
- a communicated country brand can be studied by analyzing its formulating process (interviews with the brand team, A) and its actions (registered by the media, ‘D’); and
- country brand messages can be studied through one’s own analysis (‘E’) and through other scholars’ analysis (interviews with researchers, ‘F’).

This paper includes the results of those methodological activities done *in situ* (A, E and F) and those necessary to introduce the empirical object (C). Tourism academics have been interviewed because tourism is a critical element within most country brands. Cultural studies academics were interviewed because cultural factors are often relegated behind marketing concerns, and I wished to more fully explore the cultural aspects of country brands (Navarro, 2010b). Interviews with scholars informed my overall thinking about these issues, and gave me foundational ideas for the construction of my argument. The remaining activities (B and D), completed after the experience *in situ*, are not included here.

³ In-depth interview on 14 December 2010 and further consultations with Caroline Bergman, project manager, Building Brand Australia.

⁴ Interviews in October and November 2010 with scholars from the University of Western Sydney (Gabriela Coronado, David Rowe and Russell Staiff), the University of Sydney (Luz Hincapié, Vek Lewis and Fernanda Peñaloza) and the University of New South Wales (Brett Todd).

The antecedents

Before this new comprehensive branding program, Australia had successful and failed experiences with tourist branding policies, as is the case with many other countries. Although some initiatives are remembered as disastrous ideas (for example, 'Buy Australian Made'), others were considered effective (the 1986–1998 'Advance Australia' program, for example) (Asociación de Directivos de Comunicación et al., 2003: 93–94). The campaign 'A Different Light' was considered successful, and used several alternative tools to address dissimilar audiences (Avellaneda and Sicari, 2009: 43). In any case, the tourist antecedent reflected and promoted a solid perceived country image primarily based on portrayals of natural landscapes and iconic buildings. Australian commercial and export production (goods and services) has not been internationally noticed nor advertised, and this point will be developed further (Anholt, 2005a: 5).

Australian logos



Reprinted by permission from Tourism Australia (2012).



Reprinted by permission from Australian Made Campaign Limited (AMCL) (no date).

Australia's warm weather, wild nature and surrounding vast ocean means that sports and adventures are popular in the country, and outdoor physical activities have been a strong element in such tourist brands. Swimmers, divers, water-polo players and surfers have frequently appeared in Australian tourist promotions (Rein and Shields, 2007: 81). The 2000 Olympics reinforced the image of Australia as the world's top (water) sports destination (Anholt, 2005d: 6–7), and this image also helped Sydney in its campaign to be the host city for the Games. But a consolidated image on its own was not sufficient to secure the Games for Sydney: a huge investment in sporting, telecommunication and transport infrastructure and facilities, combined with fine organizational abilities, was crucial for the campaign and resulted in instantaneous and massive tourist arrivals; foreign investment benefits; an increase in conventional business, and long-term effects for Australia's international perceived image and national self-perceived image (Rein and Shields, 2007: 81). Sydney was repositioned as a modern, global city, "propelled...from its former 'outback, Crocodile Dundee' image" (Berkowitz et al., 2007: 170).

The process

In August 2009, the former Trade Minister Simon Crean announced the four-year, \$20 million Building Brand Australia program, implemented by the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade). The first step of this program was to measure the country's perceived image ['f'], and the Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) Group was commissioned for this task. Secondary source studies by the Reputation Institute and Anholt-GFK Roper's Nation Brands Index were also consulted (Austrade, no date a). Only a year before, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade had been described by Brian Hocking as an organization with no "policy planning unit, relying instead on desk officers meeting the demand for research as and when it is needed" (2008: 69). The announcement of the Building Brand Australia program seems to respond to the implicit call for a stronger diplomatic performance in relation to this issue.

After gathering information about the country's perceived image, the next step was the development of a visual identity, a brand strategy, a brand architecture and associated creative resources. Sixty expressions of interest were received two months later, and four agencies were shortlisted by November. The proposals were evaluated by a commission led by Austrade, which also included representatives from Tourism Australia and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. One month later, shortlisted agencies presented their requests for tender. The then Trade Minister consulted the studies mentioned, as well as his fellow ministers and the Brand Advisory Board.⁵ Finally, M&C Saatchi was announced as the successful bidder in April 2010 (Austrade, 2010). M&C Saatchi is named after its founders, Maurice and Charles, who opened the company's first offices in five countries by 1995. Now the company's network includes 27 offices in 20 countries. Some of its major clients in Australia have included ANZ, the Australian Red Cross, Headspace, Optus, Sydney Attractions Group, Travelex, Everyday Money, Bell Direct, Sara Lee, Pizza Hut, the NSW Government, the British Council, IAG, Woolworths, Westfield, Qantas, Abu Dhabi Tourism, the Australian Cancer Research Foundation, Médecins Sans Frontières, Sydney Dogs Home and the National Gallery of Australia (M&C Saatchi, no date a, no date b, no date c). The agency is also experienced in place branding: "New Zealand – 100% Pure" is one of its remarkable creations.

A decisive first step was the identification of gaps between negative perceptions of positive attributes in order to devote special communication efforts. From a political viewpoint, country brand building is closely linked to the idea of national identity management, so in this respect its 'privatization' requires critical discussion.

⁵ Representatives from several organizations connected to different aspects of country branding took part in the Brand Advisory Board. The chair of the Board was David Mortimer, chairman of Australia Post; other members included Rob Murray, chief executive officer of Lion Nathan; Sandra Chipchase, chief executive officer of Melbourne Conventions + Visitors Bureau; Professor Margaret Gardner, vice chancellor of RMIT; Mark Johnson, chairman of the Australian Financial Centre Forum; Michael Luscombe, chief executive officer of Woolworths; and Peter Yuile, deputy chief executive officer of Austrade (Austrade, 2009).

The studies

Austrade investigated Australia's perceived image, mainly abroad, by consulting primary and secondary source studies. In this section, I also include Country Brand Index research, a worthy secondary source (especially for the Australian case) that was not considered, according to the official Brand Australia website.⁶

Taylor Nelson Sofres

The TNS Group is located in 80 countries and was founded in the 1960s when several companies from the USA, the UK, France and Australia joined together. This private custom market research specialist focuses on five fields: finance research, consumer research, automotive research, technology research, and political and social research. It has five offices in Australia, located in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Perth and Brisbane (Taylor Nelson Sofres, 2012). TNS conducted research to evaluate all four tenders in 14 countries (Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Russia, South Korea, the USA, the UK and Vietnam). The study was quantitative and qualitative: 14,000 people were surveyed and 130 stakeholders were interviewed. It was found that Australia was perceived as “a vibrant, friendly and welcoming nation, supported by values of positivity, energy and practical solutions” (Austrade, no date e).

Reputation Institute

Reputation Institute, founded in 1997, is a private firm located in 30 countries. It specializes in management advising and researching corporate reputation. In 2006 it launched the Global Reputation Pulse study, listing the world's most respected companies. It also publishes the quarterly journal *Corporate Reputation Review* (Reputation Institute, 2011). Reputation Institute measures the reputation of 34 countries in the world by surveying 22,000 consumers in the G8 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the UK and the USA). According to this research, Australia is perceived as an outstanding country, but there are still some key attributes which can be improved. Australia has the strongest reputation after Switzerland and Canada. Its main image assets are its “physical beauty, lifestyle and provision of enjoyment”. But although consumers associate the country with “a strong business environment”, some attributes close to this idea – such as “technology, quality products, and services and inventiveness” – recorded a lower level of association in relation to Australia (Austrade, no date e).

Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index

Simon Anholt is an English place-branding consultant who has built the brand of more than 40 countries and founded the journal *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* in 2004 (Navarro, 2009: 7). The yearly Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index (NBI), first issued in 2005, measures the perceived national images of 50 countries by surveying 20,000 key people from 20 different countries. The study follows the “Country Brand Hexagon” model, built on questions about exports; governance; culture and heritage; immigration and investment; people; and

⁶ Papadopoulos and Heslop also carried out a survey in 15 European, Asian and American countries about the perceptions of 18 countries. Australia attracted higher marks among the “ideal countries” for material aspects and quality of life, and third position in the cultural issues list (Noya, 2002: 68).

tourism (GfK Custom Research North America, 2012). The next chart shows the position of Australia in six recent NBI lists: Australia has always ranked in the top ten, and its highest result was achieved in 2006. It should be noted that the top ten always includes the same ten countries (except for the addition of Spain in the last position in 2009, sharing its place with Sweden).

Position	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
1	UK	UK	Germany	Germany	USA	USA
2	Switzerland	Germany	UK	France	France	Germany
3	Canada	Canada	Canada	UK	Germany	France
4	Italy	France	France	Canada	UK	UK
5	Sweden	Switzerland	Australia	Japan	Japan	Japan
6	Germany	Australia	Italy	Italy	Italy	Canada
7	Japan	Sweden	Switzerland	USA	Canada	Italy
8	France	Italy	Japan	Switzerland	Switzerland	Switzerland
9	Australia	Japan	Sweden	Australia	Australia	Australia
10	USA	USA	USA	Sweden	Sweden+Spain	Sweden

Sources: Anholt, 2005d, 2006b, 2007; GfK Custom Research North America, 2009, 2010.

In general, the solid perceived image of Australia is firmly based on beliefs about the quality of its people, its tourist assets and its attractiveness for immigration. As regards ‘people’, Australia was in first place in the second quarter 2005 NBI (in this ranking, the country was also first choice for the world’s most powerful perceived nation image) (Anholt, 2005a: 5, 2005b: 336). In 2008, Australia received its highest marks in this same category, but only after Canada (Austrade, no date e). The same result was repeated a year later (GfK Roper Public Affairs and Media, 2009: 9).

In the second quarter 2005 NBI, Australia was also in first place for ‘tourism’. Appealing attractions, landscapes and activities, combined with continued and efficient campaigns made Australia the world’s most desired tourism destination (Anholt, 2005a: 5, 2005b: 336). Australia was not an actual top tourist destination, however: that year, only 5,500 overseas tourists arrived in Australia and the country was 35th among other world tourist countries. Many people would love to go to Australia, but most of them end up visiting other countries and only some of them fulfill their dream, probably because of the distance-cost variable (GfK Roper Public Affairs and Media, 2008: 20; Anholt, 2005a: 6, 2005b: 337). In addition, Australians themselves positioned Australia first in the list of preferred tourist destinations during the third quarter 2005 NBI (Anholt, 2005c: 15) – a gesture of pride and probably evidence of a correlation between expectations and reality.

In the same way, world admiration for Australia’s living and working environment puts the country on the top of the ‘immigration and investment’ list in the second quarter 2005 NBI (Anholt, 2005a: 5, 2005b: 336). This result is particularly defined by the immigration variable, as Australia is the top preferred country for relocation by employees, who rate the country’s quality of life highly. The figures were slightly less favorable for investment. According to the A. T. Kearneys’ 2004 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Confidence Index – a survey of investment decision-makers, who are especially aware of aspects like “fiscal regime, transport infrastructure, government incentives and the cost of labor” – Australia was seventh on the list of FDI destinations (Anholt, 2005a: 6, 2005b: 337). The attractiveness of Australia for immigrants in 2005 was also confirmed by the Pew Research Center: Australia was the most recommended

country as a destination to live by interviewees in 16 countries (Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2005: 18–19). Five years later, Australia still showed an outstanding position in the NBI as a destination to work and live temporarily, placing second (Austrade, no date d). Finally, in terms of ‘governance’, Australia’s position was amongst the top five countries in 2008 (GfK Roper Public Affairs and Media, 2008: 14). Australians themselves ranked their government in third place in 2005 (Anholt, 2005c: 15).

Conversely, Australia’s perceived image is weaker in ‘products’ and ‘culture’. In fact, not many famous branded exports are connected to Australia, except for its national airline and a few beers (such as Foster’s) (Anholt, 2005a: 5, 7; 2005b: 336, 338; 2005c: 9). It should be noted that the ‘culture’ item includes contemporary culture and entertainment: an environment populated by a number of Australian celebrities, including Cate Blanchett, Elle Macpherson, Hugh Jackman, Keith Urban, Kylie Minogue, Mel Gibson, Natalie Imbruglia, Nicole Kidman and Russell Crowe. A possible explanation of Australia’s weaker cultural image, in spite of the country’s presence in the global entertainment marketplace, is that most of these stars suffer from what Anholt calls “the Hollywood effect”: “the tendency of non English-speaking audiences around the world...to assume that all English-speaking entertainers are American” (2005a: 5; 2005b: 337).

In summary, Australia is shown to have a powerful country image in the NBI, which is not the same as being a powerful country: the former suggests goodwill and potential, the latter implies fulfillment and reality (Anholt, 2005a: 6, 2005b: 337–38). This means that the world loves Australia and would like to consume Australian outputs, but there are not many available on the global stage (Anholt, 2005a: 14, 2005b: 345). In this sense, it is interesting to note that a number of respondents who have never visited Australia still awarded the country high marks: “people seem prepared to give Sydney the benefit of the doubt on a great many issues” (Anholt, 2006a: 29).

The findings of such research may not only be the result of a world which feels implicitly positive towards Australia. Variables chosen, questions asked and interviewees selected are some of the key aspects to check when considering these kinds of indexes. In this sense, Australia’s results for the second quarter 2005 NBI have been criticized by Noya, who suggested the sample was not representative of global opinion because respondents from only a few countries participated in the study. The Spanish scholar explains that the Australian success (first position in the general ranking) was the expected outcome of a survey carried out in a high number of Asian countries (Noya, 2005: 2–3). For example, Japanese respondents ranked Australian people second after themselves in the third quarter 2005 NBI (Anholt, 2005c: 7). Expectedly, results change when a sample is modified. In fact, the displacement of Sweden from first place in the first quarter 2005 NBI is attributed by Anholt to the addition of eight new countries to the surveyed panel (2005b: 4).

Furthermore, results can be more predictable (and favorable) for Australia if a significant part of the sample is composed of English-speaking countries. In fact, the UK, Australia and Canada choose themselves and the other two countries for the world’s top country images in the third quarter 2005 NBI (Anholt, 2005c: 3, 9). In the same study, the USA positioned Australia’s governance fourth and Australia’s people second, within a top four list exclusively comprised of

English-speaking countries (Anholt, 2005c: 5). In the same way, Australia won second place (after the UK) in the 2004 Gallup Institute survey about American perceptions (Noya, 2004: 1, 2). However, it can also be argued that proximity or sharing a language is not always a guarantee of comradeship: frontier conflicts have long been a cause of war between countries geographically and culturally close to each other.

Country Brand Index

FutureBrand is a brand consultancy with offices in 25 countries and main offices in the USA, the UK and Singapore (FutureBrand, 2009a, 2009b). In 2005 FutureBrand introduced the Country Brand Index (CBI), a model considering past (statistics), present (surveys) and future information (interviews). Several sources, organizations and publications were consulted to build the index, including the World Bank, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the World Travel and Tourism Council, the United Nation’s World Tourism Organization, the US Department of Transportation, *Condé Nast Traveler*, Deloitte, *Destination Weddings & Honeymoons* magazine, *Thoroughbred Times*, Singapore’s Department of Statistics and the Central Intelligence Agency’s publication *The World Factbook* (FutureBrand, 2009c: 83). Yearly, an increasing number of respondents answered the multi-country survey (3,400 people from 13 countries in 2010) Many international experts also participate in in-depth interviews about trends: there were 14 focus groups in 2010 (FutureBrand, 2010: 5). Although the CBI shows a better position for Australia, it is not included on the official Brand Australia website as being among those studies the Government consulted when building its country brand. Not only does Australia record a higher reputation here than in the NBI, it also records the best average in the world, and the first position for three consecutive years (2006 to 2008), as shown in the following chart:

Position	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
1	Italy	Australia	Australia	Australia	USA	Canada
2	Australia	USA	USA	Canada	Canada	Australia
3	USA	Italy	UK	USA	Australia	New Zealand
4	France	France	France	Italy	New Zealand	USA
5	Maldives	Greece	Italy	Switzerland	France	Switzerland
6	Greece	UK	Canada	France	Italy	Japan
7	Fiji	Spain	Spain	New Zealand	Japan	France
8	Thailand	New Zealand	New Zealand	UK	UK	Finland
9	Egypt	Maldives	Greece	Japan	Germany	UK
10	Bahamas	India	Japan	Sweden	Spain	Sweden

Sources: FutureBrand, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009c, 2010.⁷

Although in the beginning the CBI focused on tourism components, new areas are added each year to measure the key aspects of a country’s image. In the following chart, I indicate the situation of Australia in different subcategories during the period 2005–8:

⁷ Countries which are not included in the NBI are shown on the CBI table in blue.

Australia in the top ten list

	2005	2006	2007	2008
Outdoor activities + sport	1	2 (after NZ)	1	1
Extend a business trip⁸	-	2 (after US)	2 (after US)	1
Most like to live in	-	-	3 (after Canada, NZ)	1
Desire to visit + visit again	-	-	-	3 (after NZ, Italy)
Most impressive last year⁹	3 (after China, S. Korea)	-	-	3 (after China, UAE)
Families¹⁰	2 (after USA)	6	3 (after Denmark, Canada)	4
Resort + lodging options	-	9	3 (after UAE, Maldives)	4
Standard of living	-	-	-	4
Friendly locals	-	-	1	5
Natural beauty	-	7	2 (after NZ)	5
Beach	3 (after Bahamas, Maldives)	6	4	5
Ideal for business¹¹	9	6	6	6
Nightlife¹²	8	not in top ten	6	6
Easiest to do business in	-	3 (after US, Canada)	8	8
Political freedom	-	-	-	8
Authenticity	-	not in top ten	not in top ten	9
Safety	-	6	6	10

Sources: FutureBrand, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009c, 2010.

Clearly, sport and tourism are the strongest components of Australia's image abroad. The country's tourist assets include attractions (nature; beaches; authenticity) as much as services and infrastructure (accommodation; nightlife). Several indicators of human and social strength also characterize the perception of the country (desire to reside; families; standard of living; friendly locals; safety). Some business and political aspects are seen as second-line strengths by the CBI analysis. Nevertheless, Australia seems to be an ideal destination to visit and place to live.

Australia in former top ten lists

	2005	2006	2007	2008
Rest + relaxation	-	10	8	not in top ten
Conferences¹³	2 (after USA)	7	not in top ten	not in top ten
Rising star	6	not in top ten	not in top ten	not in top ten
Fine dining¹⁴	8	not in top ten	not in top ten	not in top ten

Sources: FutureBrand, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009c, 2010.

⁸ Since 2008; before "Extended business trip".

⁹ Since 2008; in 2005 "Most improved".

¹⁰ Since 2008; before "Family".

¹¹ Since 2007; before "Business".

¹² Since 2007; in 2006 "Nightlife + dining"; in 2005 "Nightlife".

¹³ Since 2006; before "Conventions".

¹⁴ Since 2008; in 2007 "Dining"; in 2006 "Nightlife + dining"; in 2005 "Nightlife".

In previous years, Australia had received higher marks in certain tourist categories, but by 2008 it was out of the top ten ranking in terms of culinary offerings, conferences and tranquility.

Australia out of the top ten

	2005	2006	2007	2008
Art and culture	not in top ten	not in top ten	not in top ten	not in top ten
History	not in top ten	not in top ten	not in top ten	not in top ten
Shopping	-	not in top ten	not in top ten	not in top ten
Value for money	-	not in top ten	not in top ten	not in top ten
Environmentalism¹⁵	-	-	not in top ten	not in top ten
Ease of travel	-	-	-	not in top ten
New country for business	-	-	-	not in top ten
Quality products	-	-	-	not in top ten
Advanced technology	-	-	-	not in top ten
Off the beaten track + exotic	-	not in top ten	-	-

Sources: FutureBrand, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009c, 2010.

Australia's weakest points are found in five fields: past and present culture; environmental protection; goods and services (accessibility, diversity, abundance, quality); latest technology; and inbound, outbound and internal transportation. In summary, Brand Australia enjoys the advantage of an outstanding perceived country image, mainly built on 'soft' items.

The aims

As with most country brands, the Australian brand is designed to better position the country in the international system, but also in the domestic sphere:

- international trade – attraction of foreign investment, growth of exports, and positioning Australia as a destination for business;
- inbound tourism – enhancement of quality and quantity of tourism;
- labor – attraction of skilled labor and improvement of opportunities for Australian citizens to compete on the world stage;
- cultural and diplomatic relations – increasing the chances of influencing decision-making on global issues (climate change; peace; security);
- values – achievement of respect and global understanding of Australia's way of life;
- national pride – strengthen the confidence of being Australian (Austrade, no date c).

Interestingly, these aims are introduced on the official website following the idea that “the way a nation is perceived internationally can have a substantial impact on the ability of that country to excel” (Austrade, no date c). But, as Papadopoulos and Heslop argue, fulfillment of the heavily proclaimed benefits of country brand strategies has not been truly studied and confirmed (2002: 294, 297).

¹⁵ Since 2008; before “Environmental”.

The message

According to the Brand Australia program, Australia's outstanding reputation is based on two groups of assets, which I will call 'soft' and 'hard'. Its soft assets, widely recognized by the studies consulted, are lifestyle and the beauty of its natural landscapes. The new strategy does not omit these soft assets but it clearly moves beyond the established and sensory ideas they involve, adopting a more innovative and sophisticated approach which includes the 'hard' issues of creativity and technology, a pair of assets which was not associated with Australia in the international perceptions analyzed. This new approach presents some risks from a tourism perspective. The following quotes illustrate the new strategy:

- "Australia Unlimited is a brand identity...designed to reflect the positivity of the nation and its people – a *creative*, confident, ambitious and globally engaged country";
- "Australia's development has been forged through its enterprising spirit; the resilience, *creativity* and unquenchable desire of Australians to succeed";
- "Australia makes enormous global contributions through science, *technology*, business, sport and *creative* pursuits";
- "Austrade showcased industry sectors...[that] included food and beverage, wine, financial and business services, corporate training and education, clean *technology* and green building, *creative* and consumer goods";
- "The brand provided a consistent platform for Australia as a nation to be recognised as a *creative*, confident, ambitious and globally engaged country";
- "Australian expertise and *creativity* in green building and water management are world class" (Austrade, no date c, emphasis added).

On one hand, the stress on 'creativity' is central in the new strategy. Furthermore, the only way that people can take part in the brand building process is by responding to a public invitation to share stories about innovative and creative Australians. In order to illustrate the call, several Australian inventions are mentioned:

- "In recent times Australians have invented Google maps and a vaccine for cervical cancer";
- "Australia's four major banks are among the world's best and Australia's economy has excelled amongst advanced economies through the global financial crisis";
- "Australia is a world leader in event management";
- "We have some of the world's best advanced manufacturers of highly specialised parts for defence and airline equipment";
- "An Australian invented the bionic ear, known throughout the world as the Cochlear implant";
- "Australian expertise and creativity in green building and water management are world class" (Austrade, no date c).

On the other, Australia is not perceived as a world leader in 'technology', but is not far from the top ten either. This is illustrated in the fourth quarter 2005 NBI, which asked how far respondents agreed with the sentence "This country makes a major contribution to innovation in science and technology" (Anholt, 2005d: 7). Close to Italy in terms of the number of votes

received, Australia ranked in 12th place. The program is aware of the country's unsatisfactory perceived image in this sense: "Australia...is not as highly regarded in relation to its technology, products and services, or inventiveness" (Austrade, no date c). So why has the Government chosen, among a vast number of positive national attributes, some unknown ones? Are these qualities merely under-perceived, or is it possible that Australia is not really qualified to claim them as 'attributes'? Does the Government's decision to promote these qualities reflect a wishfulness on its part, or is it an initiative that will redress an under-recognized aspect of the Australian character? Moreover, whether Australia is inventive or not, it is a fact that most (if not all) country brand strategies today are obsessed with the mandate of being creative. Should we all want to be charming, slim and good-looking? What if eventually it happens? Then all things of the same type will look the same, thanks to a brand strategy aligned to a homogenizing conservative ideology. But every country is creative in a certain way (art, science, technology, politics) and its promotion is a legitimate policy. The identification of such a specific field would help to build a differentiating strategy.

The program is also conscious of the negative 2010 NBI results: Australia's weakest items are "trade, business, investment and cultural heritage" (Austrade, no date c). It should be said, in relation to 'culture', that the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO)'s World Heritage List recognizes three Australian tangible cultural properties out of the 714 identified worldwide, and no intangible cultural heritage out of the 200 practices and expressions identified.¹⁶ But Australia's four mixed natural and cultural properties out of the 51 identified worldwide could help in improving this situation.¹⁷ In regards to negative perceptions, the disadvantageous qualification in 'environment' observed in the CBI research is not considered by the program: a perception that should be taken into account since Australia may well be one of the world's worst polluters. According to a recent study conducted by the Environment Institute at the University of Adelaide, Australia is the ninth worst polluter in the world (Saini, 2010). Based on the CO₂ Energy Emission Index, Australia is the world's top polluter per capita (Maplecroft, 2009).

The logo

In May 2010, the new Australian logo or 'visual identity' was launched (the logo is viewable on the 'Australia Unlimited' website via this [link](#); examples of [sample applications](#) are also available). According to Brand Australia's website, the logo entails several meanings: on one hand, it is an "outline of Australia"; on the other, it depicts "arrows" that embrace "the best of who we are and [speak] to the future-focused nature of our endeavors and our outward looking approach to global affairs", suggesting "growth and expansion". Deliberately, it was meant to be "simple" (abstract) and inclusive of a "variety of symbols" to "allow people to create their own perspective on Australia". Connected to the slogan which has been designed, the website says that "the interpretations are unlimited". The whole composition expects to encapsulate "current

¹⁶ The three tangible cultural sites listed by UNESCO are the Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens; the Sydney Opera House; and Australian convict sites (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, no date).

¹⁷ The four mixed sites listed by UNESCO are Kakadu National Park, Willandra Lakes Region, the Tasmanian wilderness and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, no date).

image[s] and perceptions...whilst at the same time allowing for the incorporation of more assertive and dynamic elements” (Austrade, no date e).

Boomerangs

Although they are not explicitly mentioned (arrows are announced instead), the logo ostensibly consists of two boomerangs. Undoubtedly, boomerangs are today one of the most powerful symbols of Australia, but behind the symbol lies a set of values. Firstly, boomerangs were associated with primitivism and strangeness in colonial days (Errington, 2010: 76). This is not their strongest association today, but this Eurocentric perspective is not completely eradicated. Secondly, from the nineteenth century boomerangs were used as a sign to market many different commercial goods as they became distinctive Australian objects, including ant exterminator, brandy, butter, tonic, glass and metal wares, cigarette papers, harmonicas, beers, bottle openers and drink coasters (Errington, 2010: 75, 79–80). On one hand, the symbol of ‘Aboriginality’ was appropriated as a symbol of ‘Australianness’ by the new inhabitants, “often with no reference to their Aboriginal origin” (Errington, 2010: 79). On the other, the precursor idea displayed in the new Brand Australia logo can be found in this practice. Connected to this commercial use, boomerangs are also one of Australia’s most popular souvenirs. But their application in a tourism context extends even further: in 1961, the “Buy Australian” campaign was called “Operation Boomerang” (Errington, 2010: 75, 80). This is a clear example of a tourist icon transformed into a national symbol: a phenomenon that speaks of the strength of tourist images in the building of a country’s image. Thirdly, already consecrated as a nation symbol, boomerangs have been included in military emblems since World War I, and were even used for the Australian contingent of the United Nations peacekeeping forces in Cambodia in the 1990s. Their representation of weaponry and the concept of return was functional for military purposes (Errington, 2010: 80).

In a globalized world made up of multicultural societies where symbols of the present do not belong to particular countries, distinctiveness is frequently found in the past. Former colonies tend to look for icons within their Aboriginal materiality, as Jan Kociumbas argued: “it is as if only Aboriginality can provide a meaningful, significant and unifying resonance in the otherwise diverse cacophony of local multiculturalism and global cosmopolitanism” (quoted in Errington, 2010: 77). But a dilemma arises when the symbol is used while the symbols’ owners are disempowered. As Felicity Errington puts it for the Australian case: “The embrace of Aboriginal symbols as symbols of nation in the public arena took place alongside the ongoing marginalization of Aboriginal people themselves: symbolic display co-existed with enforced invisibility” (2010: 80). In other words, “there is the danger that Aboriginal people can easily be constructed in their absence” (Errington, 2010: 81). With the new Australian logo, it might be suggested that the modern Australian state is appropriating an Aboriginal symbol once again; but it is also a sign of inclusion. It might also be argued that foreign perceptions have been taken into account in the selection of a boomerang, rather than domestic self-perceptions. In this sense, would it be useful to have a national symbol that does not represent a national identity? Is there a symbol that could reflect a multicultural community as the Australian community? And finally, considering the international projection of any country brand, would it be useful to have a symbol that is not recognized abroad?

Australian map

The boomerangs in the logo are placed in a way that suggests a map of Australia. A low cut in the boomerang on the right, indicating Tasmania, helps to identify this geographical intention, but it might not be so obvious for a foreigner at first sight. In any case, the shape of the Australian territory might be among the most well-known country maps in the world only after, for example, the paradigmatic case of Italy. A simple outline and an isolated situation makes the Australian map a highly distinctive visual symbol.

The category of ‘the state’ comprises the idea of a government, a nation, and a territory. The latter constitutes the only component with a unique stable physical image: a materiality that facilitates its visualization and thus its conversion into a symbol. Taking a territory as the source of a national visual identity was a common practice in the former colonies which were becoming modern nation states during the nineteenth century (Romero, 2004). It was also a safe decision, as the category of the territory is based on a geophysical (material, natural, objective) component which is more difficult to associate with political problems. In regards to the cartographic side of nationality, the words of Premier John Forrest in 1888 are worth remembering: “The map of Australia...must be familiar to all persons who claim Australia as their home” (Atkinson, 2010: 39). It soon became a recognizable figure thanks to a schooling system concerned with creating “cartographically literate” citizens (Atkinson, 2010: 40). More than a century later, Australia’s map “is so familiar that the vaguest approximation – the merest abstraction – is easily picked up” (Atkinson, 2010: 43). The new Brand Australia logo proves this assertion.

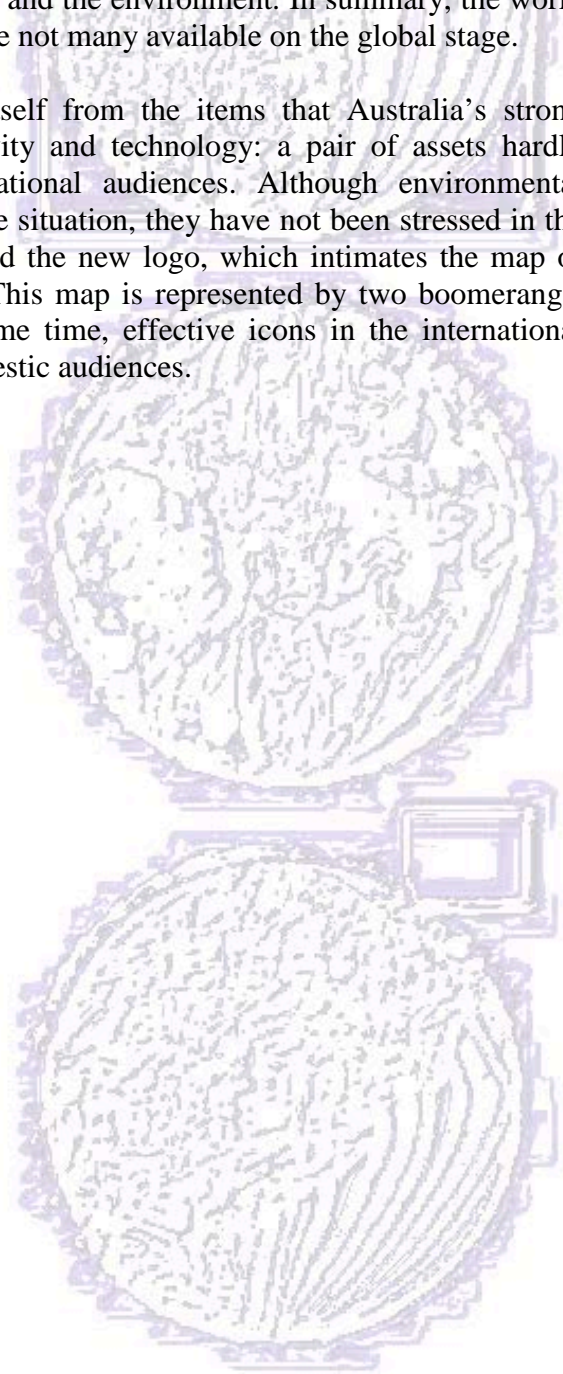
In the same way, a country brand logo designed around the country map is a non-controversial decision. It might be claimed that the nation is the key component of the state, and nations are represented by their flags. But the Australian flag is not “a national symbol that is meant to unify...in reality [it] exposes divisions within the Australian community” (Kwan, 2010: 100). The inclusion of the Union Jack makes it a disruptive and conflictive ensign. According to a series of Morgan Polls, the number of Australians wanting a new flag has constantly increased since 1967, climbing over 50% by 1998 (Kwan, 2010: 99). Instead of the flag, it is the country map that is the effective national symbol for Australians: “It was taken up in the late nineteenth century as a symbol of themselves. Now it is much more than a symbol. It has become part of what they are” (Atkinson, 2010: 43).

Conclusion

After conceptualizing the theoretical object ‘country brand’, I introduced the distinction between a spontaneous and a planned country image. Both of these images pass through three moments, so that they present a built, a communicated, and a perceived dimension: six different categories that are frequently confused. This paper describes the new country brand of Australia: a Government program whose antecedents can be found in previous campaigns promoting Australia as a tourist destination, particularly for the 2000 Olympic Games.

The Government's new and more comprehensive approach towards its country brand was based on several primary and secondary source studies carried out by TNS Global, Reputation Institute, and Anholt-GfK Roper (the Nation Brands Index). FutureBrand's Country Brand Index was not considered by Building Brand Australia, but its results have been included here. In general, Australia enjoys an outstanding world reputation, primarily based on two groups of 'soft' items: firstly landscapes, tourism, enjoyment and sports, and secondly lifestyle, people, family, safety and immigration. Some public and private categories such as business, investment and governance have recorded an intermediate status. The weakest results are in the fields of technology, innovation, goods and services, culture and the environment. In summary, the world is ready to consume Australian outputs, but there are not many available on the global stage.

Evidently, the new Australian brand distances itself from the items that Australia's strong reputation is built on to focus instead on creativity and technology: a pair of assets hardly connected to Australia in the minds of international audiences. Although environmental protection and cultural heritage are also in the same situation, they have not been stressed in the recently released program. Finally, I have analyzed the new logo, which intimates the map of Australia: a safe and non-controversial decision. This map is represented by two boomerangs: symbols of inclusion and appropriation at the same time, effective icons in the international arena and signs decided by foreign rather than domestic audiences.



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