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# Guest editorial: Introduction to the special issue: a place for provocation, stimulating theories of market spatiality

Guest editorial

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Over several decades, marketing theorists and practitioners have studied a smorgasbord of spaces and a plethora of places (Giovanardi and Lucarelli, 2018). Yet, despite the insights these studies provide, or perhaps precisely because of the growing awareness they have collectively brought, it is clear that there remains so much more to learn (Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2018). Research in this area has long been unconventional. For one, the literature on place branding was founded on a base of practitioner texts – contrasting sharply with other topic areas that are usually critiqued for being esoteric, ivory tower pursuits – but is now a crucible of highly critical pieces in an era where impact is an imperative (Warnaby and Medway, 2013). However, studies of spaces and places extend far beyond those that are managed as brands, with the term “market spatiality” emerging in recent years to encompass an ecumenical collection of phenomena, processes and perspectives (Bjerrisgaard and Kjeldgaard, 2013; Castilhos *et al.*, 2017).

Drawing together these diverse and often disparate bodies of knowledge, my colleague and I recently used the metaphor of the Möbius Strip to organize different conceptualizations of market spatiality along a single, circular continuum (Coffin and Chatzidakis, 2021). To draw on the terminology of Sandberg and Alvesson (2020), the Möbius Strip is an ordering theory that helps to make sense of a messy and mutable episteme and lay the foundations for future theories seeking to comprehend, explain, and enact market spatiality in various ways. We were not the only authors to attest that ordering was the order of the day in the multidisciplinary, more-than-academic, field of market spatiality. Another case that can be pointed to is the edited collection by Medway *et al.* (2021). They sought contributions that would help to “reset” place branding by (a) reflecting on extant achievements and (b) carefully considering which research questions and problems should be taken forward.

While ordering theories can reflect on past research and comment on future possibilities, the call to “reset” is somewhat more provocative in tone. Indeed, a fifth category of theory outlined by Sandberg and Alvesson (2020) is that of provoking theories, those that challenge taken-for-granted patterns of thought and practice and enable new possibilities. Similarly, through the Möbius Strip, Chatzidakis and I hoped to challenge a number of conventional contradistinctions at work within the field of market spatiality: theory versus practice, qualitative versus quantitative, meaning versus materiality, human versus nonhuman, agency versus structure and so forth. Yet, I came away from that publication with a lingering feeling that more provocations were possible – indeed, sorely needed.

After several publications seeking to order the literature on space, place, and market spatiality (Castilhos *et al.*, 2017; Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2018; Coffin and Chatzidakis, 2021; Giovanardi and Lucarelli, 2018), there has now been a period of consolidation, several opportunities to “reset” (Medway *et al.*, 2021), or reorder. What is needed now are attempts to “reboot” – to revitalize and relaunch in new directions, less fettered by the dictations of



Qualitative Market Research: An  
International Journal  
Vol. 25 No. 5, 2022  
pp. 553-556  
© Emerald Publishing Limited  
1352-2752  
DOI 10.1108/QMR-10-2022-198

tradition, best practice or habituation. It was in this spirit that I wrote the call for papers and, with the support of the QMR editorial team, sent out a request for shorter pieces that would pose more questions than answers provided. Several answered the call, stimulating thought with provocative positions *vis-à-vis* a series of sacred spatial bovines.

Gary Warnaby and Dominic Medway begin with the popular practice of “popping-up”, where ephemeral retail stores and other event-like market spaces can take place almost anywhere and whenever. While most theorists and practitioners celebrate the pop-up as a powerful tool to capture the attention of easily distracted, online-first consumers, Warnaby and Medway are provocative in asking whether it is a good idea to earmark everywhere as a potential market. Instead, might it be better to consider economic and social value together?

Anthony Samuel and colleagues also touch on the topic of sociality by investigating the Forest Green Rovers as a case study of how football teams can create economic value whilst living up to social or cultural values as well. In an era where many lament the loss of local community feeling amongst football fans in an increasingly commercialised game, Forest Green Rovers show how engaging with social issues (e.g. sustainability) can rebuild a sense of solidarity around a sense of place. In doing so, this paper proves to be practical, policy-relevant, but also theoretically provocative in cutting through many assumptions about the relationships between profitability, places, sociality and sport.

Moving from the local to the global, Bernard Cova provides a stimulating theory of diasporic consumers and their displaced relationships to brands. By moving and removing, by being moved and removed, diasporas distort the traditional territories of branding theory, where each logo is linked to a country of origin and moves strategically into new markets at the behest of a brand manager. In contrast, Cova’s theorising shows how brands move and are moved, invisibly, adding that marketing scholars should look to spatial concepts beyond their comfort zone of space and place.

A more inclusive epistemic culture may also encourage scholars to take inclusivity more seriously in their theory-building. Andrea Lucarelli shows how inclusivity, as an axiology, can be challenging for those who see place branding or marketing as a primarily economic enterprise. Rather than seeking to attract and retain the best tourists, residents and organisations through painting a purely positive picture of a particular place, Lucarelli looks to (bio)political thinking to reframe place brands as a nexus of spatio-political practices. Challenging the (often implicit) trope of consumerism, Lucarelli links place to the concept of civism to chart out an alternative approach to stakeholder “management”.

If place marketing is understood to be a highly choreographed form of spatial politics, might it be possible to identify other ways in which consumers and other market actors dance around one another? Minni Haanpää suggests that scholars think of market spatiality as choreography. Although this line of thinking resonates with those who draw on phenomenological theories of place and non-representational theorisations of space, it is provocative in a field where many still think of spatiality as something somewhat static. Conventionally, space is understood to be a three-dimensional container within which places may be located and demarcated. In contrast, choreography considers how spaces, places and other market-geographical entities emerge and evolve through their entanglements with one another. This, in turn, stimulates a new approach to knowledge creation more attuned to affective movements rather than stationary representations.

On the topic of presenting places differently, read Stephen Brown’s psychogeography of Belfast. Or, is that Narnia? There theorising and practicing spatiality meld in style of writing that seeks to subvert staid representations and say much more whilst explicating much less. Indeed, it is perhaps best to stop and simply ask readers to follow the trail themselves.

Practicing place-making and theorising these practices are often seen as separate activities. Yet, for Massimo Giovanardi, the figure of the craftsman looms large in that interstitial zone between theory and practice. As noted earlier, many parts of the market spatiality literature are practitioner-led, while in others academics lead away from practice, but Giovanardi seeks to encourage a mode of creating knowledge based on the “gateways” between these two worlds. This is not simply for the sake of completeness or to better compete in an academic industry where novelty is valued almost for its own sake. Rather, Giovanardi posits that engaged research may allow spatial scholars to improve society through teaching, public engagement and other physical, virtual or metaphorical spaces and places where societally minded persons can ply their craft.

Lest we begin to put too much emphasis on the spatial scholar, Chloe Steadman and Steve Millington seek to remind us that places, too, have some agency in the process. While many articles can be defined as studies *about* places, they seek to stimulate an alternative spatial preposition – research *with* places. While some have turned to sometimes esoteric philosophies to make sense of spatial agency (mea culpa!), Steadman and Millington focus on the ground of real-world, “wicked” problems. Their example of the high street shows how the topical can be both theoretical and transformative, as well as frustrating and fraught with difficulty. Taken together, their insights provoke a different relationship between places and the scholars who study them, one that may help to redress and redraw the “gap” between theory, practice and policy.

Finally, and perhaps most provocatively of all, Charles Spence provides the journal of *Qualitative Market Research* with a paper that considers a more quantitative approach to market spatiality. In recent years many scholars have argued that spaces, places and other manifestations of market spatiality are often experienced through the medium of atmosphere, a difficult-to-describe but keenly felt phenomenon that has inspired many qualitative conceptualisations based on embodiment, affect and the like (Coffin and Chatzidakis, 2021; Steadman *et al.*, 2021). While these provide detailed, nuanced accounts, Spence challenges scholars of market spatiality to consider how these in-depth descriptions of particular senses may be combined to better understand the ways in which senses combine, or fail to combine. While this paper may be incredibly useful to qualitative market researchers, at many points it reminds us that numbers need not be a nemesis, that measurement may mobilise insights rather than militate against them, and that the quantitative/qualitative divide need not be as wide as doctoral training programmes often present.

When writing the call for papers I noted that some might suggest that, after several decades of interest, the topic of market spatiality may have reached a state of theoretical saturation. What more can be said about the relationships between spaces, places, markets and consumption? Yet, the contributions to this special issue have shown that many more possibilities lie beyond the current horizon of thought. While the existing territory has been mapped out by the Möbius Strip (Coffin and Chatzidakis, 2021) and other ordering frameworks (Castilhos *et al.*, 2017; Giovanardi and Lucarelli, 2018), this special issue provides a series of theories to provoke (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2020). Each paper stimulates new trajectories of development, casting away from the well-worn theoretical territory of the past, but each also runs our hands across the grain of established thought, finding new textures of spatial philosophy, practice, policy and pedagogy in spaces and places we thought worn out.

Still mobilised by a provocative spirit, I conclude this introduction with the questions that I posed in the call for papers. Some of the papers included here certainly addressed aspects of these open-ended inquiries. However, it is my view as these questions remain

unanswered to a large extent, able to stimulate the next iteration of spatial scholarship. As such, I leave them here as puzzles to provoke further thought and research:

- Place Branding Is Dead, Long Live Place Branding?
- Beyond Phenomenology: Understanding Places without Meaning
- Taking “Genius Loci” Literally: An Object-Oriented Ontology of Place
- Back to Basics: The Impact of Distances, Arrangements, and Directions on Marketing and Consumption
- Placing Qualitative Research with Situated Epistemologies
- Feminist, Post-Colonial, or Marxist Theories of Space and Place
- Empty Space: Does Everywhere Need to Become a Marketplace?
- Terra Incognita: what questions have not been asked, articulated, or even apprehended?

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