
BRANDING AND BEGORRAH: THE IMPORTANCE OF IRELAND'S NATION BRAND IMAGE

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The concept of a nation brand image is attracting increasing importance in recent years as globalisation has made the world more interdependent and all nations are in competition for investment, tourists, exports, education and talent of all kinds. The essential elements of Irish national identity, established and disseminated by the writers and artists of the 'Celtic revival' over a hundred years ago – and still recognised affirmatively by a diverse range of international commentators – represent a natural storehouse of positive imagery that transcends current economic difficulties and is particularly apposite for the twenty first century. The article considers how best to capitalise on this extremely valuable asset, and build a nation brand image through the work of the Industrial Development Authority (IDA), Tourism Ireland, Bord Bia, and Culture Ireland, supported by an imaginative coordinating effort at national government level.

Introduction

Look at the covers of the brochures in any travel agency and you will see the various ways in which countries present themselves on the world's mental map. Singapore has a smiling beautiful face offering us tasty appetizers on an airplane whereas Ireland is a windy island full of freckled red-haired girls. In this way Ireland and Singapore are no longer merely countries one finds in an atlas. They have become 'brand states' with geographical and political settings that seem trivial compared to their emotional resonance among an increasingly global audience of consumers. In today's world of information overload, strong brands are important in attracting foreign direct investment, recruiting the best and brightest and wielding political influence.¹

Ireland, in common with other nations, evokes a series of ideas, associations, attributes and opinions in the minds of a proportion of people in other countries, which together form an overall image of the country. When that proportion is high a country's nation brand image can be considered strong and when the images, associations, opinions and ideas are favourable that image is not only strong but constitutes an important asset for the country in question. This is because nation brand images affect a country's ability to attract foreign direct investment, to attract tourists, overseas students and academic and managerial talent and can have a significant impact on exports. People have always had ideas, impressions, opinions and associations about other countries, therefore the concept of a nation brand image is an ancient one, but the subject has attracted increasing importance in recent years as globalisation has made the world more interdependent and all

nations are in competition for investment, tourists, exports and talent of all kinds.

Nation brand images are often driven by caricature: efficient Germany, passionate Spain, spiritual India, not because people are inherently racist, but because they naturally seek to simplify. However, stereotypical images can be harmful to a nation's economic progress in a global world, which is another reason why the subject of managing that brand image has been attracting greater attention in many countries.

Ireland's nation brand image has come to the fore in recent discussions about how to recover from the economic recession and financial crisis but nations have been actively managing their identities for centuries.

Nation Branding and Moliere's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*

Like Moliere's bourgeois gentilhomme who discovered that he had been speaking prose all his life, most nations have been engaged in some form of nation brand management throughout their history, fully conscious of what they were doing and why but not making any connection with the world of marketing and branding.

Wolf Olins (1999)² illustrates this point in relation to France, making the argument that the First

¹ Van Hamm, P. (2001), 'The rise of the brand state', *Foreign Affairs*, Sept./Oct., p. 2.

² Olins, W. (1999), *Trading Identities*, Foreign Policy Centre, London, pp. 7–10.

Republic in the late eighteenth century engaged in a massive rebranding exercise by changing the national flag from the Fleur de Lys to the Tricolore and by launching a new national anthem, the Marseillaise. In Hobsbaum and Ringer's *The Invention of Tradition* (1982),³ the authors discuss the number of countries that have created a mythical past to perform a social or political function in the present day.

Brand Ireland: A Brief History

I have argued earlier⁴ that Ireland's brand image emerged in its present form as far back as the end of the 19th century and that although the terms 'brand' and 'image' were not in use at the time, it emerged as a result of deliberate and conscious effort on the part of a group of intellectuals, at the time the most active and influential being W.B. Yeats. Roy Foster's definitive biography of the poet makes it clear that Yeats wanted Ireland to:

lead the way in a war on materialism, decadence and triviality, as well as affirming her own individuality – Ireland's spiritual idealism must be forged into a new world outlook for the dawning century.⁵

The late 19th century was a time of nation building all over Europe and Yeats and his colleagues were not alone in seeking to define a nation as much in relation to what it was not as to what it stood for itself, or, as Samuel Huntington more eloquently expressed,⁶ 'We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know who we are against'. However difficult it might have been to define the first part of that statement, the Irish have never had any difficulty with the remaining two, especially towards the end of the 19th century when they had been consistently lampooned in the English media, in particular the influential magazine *Punch*, as a

feckless, dim-witted people incapable of organisation or hard work. Even Britain's dominant political leader in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, Benjamin Disraeli, felt moved to make a considered, if a trifle indiscreet distinction between the Imperial Power and its unruly colony:

The Irish hate our order, our civilisation, our enterprising industry, our pure religion. This wild, reckless, indolent, uncertain and superstitious race have no sympathy with the English character. Their history describes an unbroken cycle of bigotry and blood.⁷

Not surprisingly, the talented literary generation of the time sought consciously not only to reassert the dignity of the people, but to position them more favourably than the British:

This opposition, archaic, peasant but spirited Ireland versus modern, urbane and materialistic Britain, became an article of faith among the literary revivalists. The Irish countryman would never fall victim to the idolatrous materialism which afflicted the unfortunate Englishman because his race, memory, imagination, even his very landscape, was saturated with the ideas of an alternative world.⁸

Foster makes it clear how deliberate the construction of this identity was, referring to Yeats, 'concentrating on hard-headed marketing'⁹ and arguing that 'inventing tradition came easily to WBY'.¹⁰ A century later there is a broad consensus among cultural theorists that the efforts of the late 19th century nation-builders were successful. Declan Kiberd summarised their success:

That enterprise achieved nothing less than a reno-
vation of Irish consciousness and a new under-
standing of politics, sport, language, philosophy
and culture in its widest sense. It was the grand des-
tiny of Yeats' generation to make Ireland once
again interesting to the Irish, after centuries of
enforced provincialism following the collapse of the
Gaelic order in 1601. No generation, before or

3 Hobsbaum, E. and T. Ringer (1982), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

4 Fanning, J. (2004), *W.B. Yeats: Nobel Laureate, Brand Guru*, Irish Academy of Marketing Annual Conference 2004.

5 Foster, R. (1997), *W.B. Yeats: A Life Part 1*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 162.

6 Huntington, S. (2004), *The Clash of Civilisations*, quoted in the *Financial Times*, 17 April.

7 Kearney, R. (1980), *The Irish Mind*, Wolfhound Press, Dublin, p. 7.

8 Watson, G.J. (1979), *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival*, Croom Helm, London, p. 97.

9 Foster, R. (1997), *ibid.*, p. 69.

10 Foster, R. (1997), *ibid.*, p. 104.

since, lived with such conscious national intensity or left such an important legacy.¹¹

But Kiberd went further and suggested that the psychic attributes that the Irish had been forced to adopt by the circumstances in which they found themselves might be more suitable to the twenty-first century than to the past;

Arnold's theory was that the Celts were doomed by a multiple selfhood which allowed them to see so many options in a situation that they were immobilised, unlike the English specialist who might have simplified but did not succumb to pitfalls which he did not have the imagination to discern. Wilde knew that in such Celtic psychology was the shape of things to come.¹²

Following the War of Independence and the subsequent Civil War the country settled down to a more mundane existence, but Yeats' legacy was enthusiastically picked up by the new political rulers and in a national radio broadcast in 1936 Eamon de Valera echoed the poet's sentiments;

The Irish genius has always stressed spiritual and intellectual rather than material values. It is these characteristics that fit the Irish people in a special manner for a task, now a vital matter, of helping western civilisation. The great material progress of recent times, coming in a world where false philosophy already reigns, has distorted men's sense of proportion.¹³

The fact that an election was imminent would not have escaped the attention of the supreme politician anxious to divert people from the economic hardship of the time, but it is interesting to note that a historian who quoted the above cited extract used the words; 'creation of an *Irish national image*' (my italics) in his title.

Art historians have also noted how the deliberate construction of a national identity or image was something that the post-independence generation

of Irish political leaders were very conscious of, and in particular the need to draw as clear a distinction as possible between the newly independent Free State and its previous colonial rulers:

In the decades of Free State government, Ireland's overwhelming desire to envision itself as uniquely different from its erstwhile ruler Great Britain led to the construction of a national identity: the new nation was to be viewed as a pure unitary race, rural based, Irish speaking and Roman Catholic.¹⁴

Irish artists were conveniently at hand to fulfil this role, favouring the West of Ireland as the essence of the new nation. If W.B. Yeats was the copywriter for the Irish nation brand then Paul Henry was the art director. His iconic 1925 painting *Connemara Landscape*, designed for the London Midland and Scottish Railway, marked a turning point. Using a range of muted colours he achieved an authentic result and his ability to 'express the universality of our relationship with the land' struck an immediate chord with Irish people all over the world who could immediately identify with the unique translucent lighting of the west of Ireland:

The distant masses, deep lakes and still lakes produced abstractions which seemed to answer his greatest needs as a painter. His revelation of their terrifying presences was an address to the very soul of Ireland – Henry's images come to symbolise Ireland as a kind of nirvana.¹⁵

Account planners are meant to begin the process of articulating a brand proposition but it's not exactly unknown for the planner to be called in to intellectualise a good idea and, sure enough, a generation after Yeats and Henry had completed their creative work, Dr Richard Kearney was on hand to provide a philosophical rationale for the Irish psyche:

From its earliest times the Irish mind remained free, in significant measure, of the linear, centralis-

11 Kiberd, D. (1995), *Inventing Ireland*, Jonathan Cape, London, p. 3.

12 Kiberd, D. (1995), *ibid.*, p. 58.

13 Dowling, M. (1987), 'The Ireland that I could choose: de Valera and the creation of the Irish national image', *History Ireland*, Summer, pp. 37–41.

14 Bhreathnach-Lynch, S. (2007), *Ireland's History: Representing Ireland 1845 to Present*, Creighton University Press, Omaha, NE, p. 73.

15 McConkey, K. (1990) *A Free Spirit: Irish Art 1860–1960*, Antique Collectors Club in association with Pym's Gallery London, p. 65.

ing logic of the Graeco-Roman culture which dominated most of Western Europe – could it be that the Irish intellectual tradition represents something of a counter-movement to the mainstream of hegemonic rationalism – in contradistinction to the orthodox dualist logic of either/or, the Irish mind may be seen to favour a more dialectical logic of both/and; the intellectual ability to hold the traditional oppositions of classical reason in creative confluence.¹⁶

The Remarkable Resilience of the Celtic Revival Vision of Irish Identity

Work by contemporary cultural theorists shows that the image defined and accumulated by Yeats and Henry resonates as powerfully as ever in the 21st century. The preface of the recently published *Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture* contains the following paragraph:

Ireland has long nurtured a romantic rural self-image calculated to appeal to those in flight from the complexity of the modern world. In one of the many paradoxes of modern Irish culture the country has come to represent both the romantic pleasures of solitude and seclusion and the traditional virtues of conversation, sociability and tight-knit communities.¹⁷

Thomas Friedman, the influential *New York Times* columnist, noted in 2001:

People all over the world are looking to Ireland for its reservoir of spirituality hoping to siphon off what they can feed to their souls which have become hungry for something other than consumption and computers.¹⁸

An American Professor of Literature who did notice that 21st century Ireland was a changed place still maintained that the Yeatsian imagery held sway:

In spite of the changes I am still drawn to a set of qualities – a combination of hospitality and sociability of laissez faire acceptance and relaxed good-naturedness – an Irishness that is genuine, palpable

and real, an Irishness genuinely suffused with warmth and conviviality, a commodity that has proved itself time and time again and long before the concept of globalisation was ever dreamt of to be remarkably portable, far and away Ireland's most valuable marketing export.¹⁹

There was also a recent book, *The Irish in Us* (2006) which discussed Irishness as an 'idealised identity' with which 'large numbers of people around the world and particularly in the United States choose to identify':

Virtually every form of popular culture has in one way or another, presented Irishness as a moral antidote to contemporary ills ranging from globalisation to post-modern alienation, from crises over the meaning and practice of family values to environmental destruction.²⁰

Even during the current recession a *Financial Times* report on Ireland less than a year ago²¹ had the headline: 'This charming land: on a journey across Ireland Jan Morris finds a sense of community and spirituality undiminished by the country's recent trials'.

Management of the Irish Nation Brand Image

Since the late 1950s, in the aftermath of the severe economic crisis of that decade, the management of Ireland's nation brand image has effectively been in the hands of Bord Failte (now Tourism Ireland) the government agency responsible for the attraction of tourists to Ireland and the IDA, the government agency responsible for the attraction of fixed direct investment. Bord Bia, the agency responsible for promoting Irish food exports, has also become more active in overseas markets as it seeks to capitalise on Ireland's 'green' heritage and image. To date, however, its promotional campaigns have concentrated on the retail trade, so, like the IDA, it addresses a business audience.

16 Kearney, R. (1980), *ibid.*, p. 9.

17 Cleary, J. and C. Connelly (2005), *The Cambridge to Modern Irish Literature*, Cambridge University Press.

18 Friedman, T. (2001), Op-Ed Article, *New York Times*, 3 August 2001.

19 Mays, M. (2005), 'Irish identity in an age of globalisation', *Irish Studies Review*, vol. 13, no. 1.

20 Negra, D. (ed.) (2006), *The Irish in Us*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, p. 3.

21 Morris, J. (2010), 'This charming land', *Financial Times*, 10/11 July 2010.

During the past decade Culture Ireland, the agency responsible for promoting Irish culture abroad, has become increasingly active and its work is also designed to promote the Irish brand image.²²

The economic recession and financial crisis have begun to see calls from a variety of sources for a more coordinated effort to manage Ireland's nation brand image in an attempt to repair the reputational damage it is assumed to have suffered as a consequence. I want now to take a brief look at the arguments for and against a more centralised management of the nation brand.

Is There a Case for a More Coordinated Nation Brand Management?

Proponents of a more centrally coordinated management of the nation brand argue that the reputational damage suffered by the nation brand as a result of the continuing severity of Ireland's banking crisis, the need for the ECB bail-out, and the arrival of the IMF means that a centralised nation branding campaign is required to restore the nation brand image to its former lustre.

There is no doubt that the Irish financial crisis has attracted an unprecedented amount of unfavourable coverage in the world's financial press over the past year. The following extract from an extensive article in the US edition of *Vanity Fair* by a leading financial commentator and journalist, Michael Lewis, is an example:

Left alone in a dark room with a pile of money the Irish decided what they really wanted to do was to buy Ireland. *From one another*. In retrospect now that the Irish bank losses are known to be historically huge, the decision to cover them appears not merely odd but suicidal. A handful of Irish bankers incurred debts they could never repay, of something like 100 billion euros. They may have had no idea what they were doing but they did it all the same.²³

But it could be argued that the damage to Ireland's nation brand image began to emerge during the apex of the economic boom, some-

where around the turn of the millennium. The *Economist* magazine, which has often cast a cold eye on the country, was quick to spot some of the unwanted side-effects of the economic boom:

A country that lovingly portrayed itself as uniquely oppressed is rich – an average 7 per cent growth over the last decade – the result – ugly bungalows, seedy businessmen, American investors, flexible politicians, low corporate tax – a wholly centralised government with wholly un-ideological politics, skilfully marketing its business-friendliness which was facilitated by cash in brown envelopes handed over with a nod and a wink.²⁴

A more sympathetic observer, Michael O'Sullivan (2006), came to a not dissimilar conclusion about the new Irish business class;

Fast, aggressive and shiny, not unlike the newly monied classes of other emerging countries.²⁵

This was a far cry from the vision of a spiritually-minded non-materialistic people developed by Yeats and eagerly appropriated by politicians in the newly independent state almost a century earlier. But we have to accept that if countries, like individuals, have personalities which make up their respective brand images, then they also have their Jungian 'shadow' or 'dark brother'; 'the thing a person has no wish to be'. The Irish 'shadow' could be described as a preference for dealing with cronies rather than through the proper channels and an obsession with tax avoidance leading to a tendency towards impropriety in financial affairs. If there is to be a more coordinated attempt to manage the nation brand image, these issues will have to be taken into account.

A further reason for considering a more coordinated approach is that a number of other nations appear to be having some success with this approach, e.g., New Zealand and Spain; it appears to be the logical way forward.

The Case for the Status Quo

The first point to be made in defence of the status quo is that the different state agencies currently

22 Culture Ireland has recently launched a digital campaign, www.imagineireland.ie

23 Lewis, M. (2011), 'When Irish eyes are crying', *Vanity Fair*, March.

24 Anon. (2007), review of Roy Foster's *The Luck of the Irish*, *Economist Magazine*, 18 October.

25 O'Sullivan, M. (2006), *Ireland and the Global Question*, Cork University Press, p. 83.

involved in the management of the nation brand are trying to influence very different target groups. The IDA's target is the smallest and most homogeneous in terms of its potential interest in Ireland: senior business executives in the developed world, especially the US, who are looking for qualified, committed and flexible personnel and a 'business friendly' environment. Tourism Ireland, the agency with by far the biggest marketing communications budget for branding purposes, has a much bigger, less discrete, target audience – middle-class men and women in the developed world especially Britain, America and Continental Europe who are interested in sight-seeing and culture. Culture Ireland's audience would be broadly similar to that of Tourism Ireland, but with a very limited marketing communications budget there is a concentration on opinion leaders in the cultural institutions and the arts media in the US and Europe.

Bord Bia could be in a similar position to Tourism Ireland. It has a potentially large middle-class target audience in Europe and the US but budgetary constraints have so far confined marketing communications to the retail trade in these markets.

The second reason for maintaining the status quo is that, contrary to what one might expect, there are many similarities in the marketing communication messages of the four agencies and no dissonance whatsoever.

The two agencies with the longest track record of nation branding and largest marketing communications budgets, Tourism Ireland and the IDA, both put Irish people at the core of their communications: the former features the friendliness of the Irish as a key tourist attraction and the IDA features their education, innovativeness and creativity. It could be argued that creative people are also at the heart of Culture Ireland's campaigns and although Bord Bia concentrates on a 'green' positioning for Irish food, this message is fully consistent with the scenic attributes of Tourism Ireland's campaigns.

I believe that the essential elements of the Irish national identity, established and disseminated by the writers and artists of the 'Celtic revival' over a hundred years ago and still recognised by the

diverse range of commentators quoted above, represent 'a natural storehouse of positive imagery' that transcends our current economic difficulties and is particularly apposite for the twenty-first century. I want to conclude by considering how best to capitalise on this extremely valuable asset.

The Case for 'Both/And' Rather than 'Either/Or'

All responsible governments, on behalf of their people, their institutions and their companies, need to discover what the world's perception of their country is, and to develop a strategy for managing it.²⁶

In terms of the debate between continuing with the status quo and having a more coordinated approach to Ireland's nation brand image, we should do both. The two agencies with the main marketing communications budgets have different target groups and, because the Irish economy is more dependent than most on the continuing influx of FDI, there is a strong case for a separate IDA campaign directed at the world business community.

It is also worth mentioning that the IDA and Tourism Ireland were born in similar dire economic circumstances over fifty years ago, have more experience than their counterparts in other countries and have demonstrated considerable commitment and flair over the years.

In organisational terms this would mean that the existing agencies that currently have responsibility for managing aspects of the nation brand image should continue their work and that a separate group, possibly under the auspices of the Department of the Taoiseach or the Department of Foreign Affairs, should be charged with responsibility for regularly reviewing the nation image through market research surveys, and proposing initiatives for enhancing that image.

Thus the brand architecture of the nation brand would look something like the graphic in Figure 1.

²⁶ Anholt, S. (2007), *Competitive Identity*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, p. 2.

Figure 1**Irish Nation Brand**

Defining the Nation Brand for the Twenty-First Century

The first task of the coordinating group would be to define the core proposition of the nation brand following a review of available market research in the main markets carried out by Tourism Ireland and the IDA to assess current attitudes towards Ireland among key target groups. The process of defining this asset has been described as more akin to mining than foraging; 'it needs to be dug out of the history, the culture, the geography and the society of a place'. I believe that this exercise was undertaken by the writers and artists of the late nineteenth century and that what is required now is a redefinition of what it is Ireland stands for that could distinguish it from competitive locations, for the twenty-first century. I have argued earlier in this paper that the results of the 'natural storehouse of positive imagery' from the first revival are still very much in evidence today, and the exercise of mining the different strands of Irish history, geography, culture and society in the light of many of the ideas discussed in this paper might end up with a brand proposition along the following lines:

Ireland is an island nation whose people have had to overcome tremendous adversities from a colonial past before taking their place among the nations of the world. Being forced to continually define their identity in relation to more powerful neighbours provided them with a distinctively holistic world view – a belief that the pursuit of material prosperity must be accompanied by the pursuit of spiritual prosperity in such a way that they enhance each other. A natural gift for conversation and storytelling inspired by a rich oral and written literary tradition and a vibrant contemporary literary scene make them ideal hosts for the tourist, and a natural affinity for counter-intuitive thinking make them ideal participants in today's business world. The Irish look at the world and see it whole, which gives them not only a more balanced perspective on life but a more 'green' perspective on the planet.

The three agencies responsible for the sub-brands will already have their own individual brand

propositions worked out, but it is highly unlikely that these propositions will diverge significantly from the above. I would not envisage the co-ordinating group being involved in marketing communication campaigns. There have been calls to confront directly the negative coverage in the world's financial press, but I believe this would be counterproductive. The most helpful response to this issue would be a subtly orchestrated public relations campaign involving internationally known and respected Irish business figures who would host private meetings/dinners among relevant influential business and business media commentators in the main world markets.

The primary task of a more coordinated attempt to capitalise on the inherent assets in Ireland's national brand will be internal actions designed to align strategy with substance rather than any external communications campaign. Because we cannot ignore the seriousness of the current situation, two separate series of initiatives may be required under the heading of a more coordinated attempt to manage the national image.

The first will be initiatives designed to restore the damage created by the financial crisis and Jungian 'dark shadow' aspects of our identity that have come to the fore in recent years. This should involve measures designed to ensure that Ireland is ahead of the rest of the world rather than behind in relation to corporate governance transparency and accountability. What was once referred to sarcastically by a senior government minister as 'The goddess OTA' (openness, transparency, accountability) should now be officially embraced enthusiastically.

The 'dark shadow' is obviously more difficult to control but at the very least the political and civil service establishment should be aware of the importance of portraying the correct image, unlike the senior civil servant who at the height of the boom when asked by a reporter to account for our success replied: 'We're not bureaucratic like the French and Germans, we're opportunistic future-grabbers'.

The second, more long-term initiative will be designed to enhance the positive aspects of our image by adding contemporary substance to what in spite of our current difficulties is a very valuable national asset.

The counter-intuitive thinking which is natural to the Irish mind is now regarded by leading business theorists as a critical ingredient for business success in the twenty-first century. A leading American commentator has even suggested that a poetic disposition, an attribute firmly associated with Ireland, may now be important for business success:

Poets are our original systems thinkers. They contemplate the world in which we live and feel obliged to interpret and give expression to it in a way that makes the reader understand how the world turns. Poets, those unheralded system thinkers, are our true digital thinkers. It is from their midst that I believe we will draw tomorrow's business leaders.²⁷

Equally it could be argued that the space that the Irish identity occupies could be of particular interest to the developed world at a time when there is a renewed questioning of the pursuit of ever increasing GDP as the sole societal goal. Leading marketing thinkers have also been pointing to a different type of brand positioning;

The acid test for marketing now is not whether it adds value to products or services by giving them a more appealing image but whether it adds value to the lives of the people it is aimed at.²⁸

Marketers who aspire to the highest level of meaning will create marketing that significantly improves people's lives, helps people realise their dreams, or enables them to positively change their community and the world.²⁹

John Armstrong, Philosopher in Residence at Melbourne Business School, believes that there is

a growing mismatch today between the pursuit of material prosperity and our spiritual competence to deal with it:

Many of the large and urgent problems today can be traced to this single underlying issue. What do the following have in common? Global economic insecurity, the environment and climate change, the ugly sprawl of cities, the painful balancing act between the demands of work and meaning in life. Ultimately each one points to a mismatch between two things we want; material prosperity and spiritual prosperity.³⁰

He goes on to argue that successful businesses in the future will be those that enable people to understand their real needs. Ireland could be ideally positioned to capitalise on these emerging trends.

Possible Initiatives to Add Substance to a Redefined Nation Brand Identity

A key task of the coordination group would be to produce initiatives that would reinforce Ireland's brand image both internally and externally.

For this exercise imagination is more important than resources: the more ideas the group can come up with, the better. Without wishing to pre-empt the results of such an exercise, the following are a few modest thoughts and proposals that might serve as examples.

- 'Slim Vol' Initiatives – a South African initiative aimed at the attendance of the Davos conference in 2010 which created considerable interest was the delivery of the very colourful national scarf to all delegates – we could have given a signed copy of Seamus Heaney's new volume of poetry for this year's event; insignificant in terms of cost but a statement of intent to an important and influential audience of world opinion formers.
- More Ambitious Infrastructural Initiatives – the town centres of Britain and Continental Europe are often dominated by First or Second World War memorials. In Ireland one is more

27 Harman, S. (2003), *Mind Your Own Business*, Currency Doubleday, New York, p. 10.

28 Grant, J. (1999), *The New Marketing Manifesto*, Texere, London, p. 99.

29 Gilbreath, B. (2010), *The Next Evolution of Marketing*, McGraw-Hill, New York, p. 34.

30 Armstrong, J. (2009), *In Search of Civilisation*, Penguin, London, p. 189.

likely to encounter a memorial of some kind to a writer or musician. A practice that has grown up spontaneously might benefit the nation brand image by being more formally organised. An audit of current practice would be made with a view to enhancing some of the existing structures and recommending similar memorials in towns where there are none.

- Educational Initiative – there are proposals currently on file in the National Curriculum Development Agency for a ‘philosophy and history of ideas’ module in secondary schools. This should be implemented immediately.
- Tourist Literary and Artistic App – proposals for an iPhone app that provides a commentary on the life and work of writers, musicians and artists associated with any part of Ireland have already been discussed – they should be brought to conclusion.

These initiatives wouldn't be announced as part of a master plan but the nation brand working group would have such a plan in mind. They wouldn't

be advertised internationally but selected public relations campaigns in key markets would be implemented to ensure that they were all contributing to the desired nation brand image.

There's an interesting example of literary memorials in Listowel where in addition to a statue of John B. Keane there is a shop front dedicated to a large photograph of Bryan McMahon accompanied by a quote from the writer: 'I harboured the absurd notion of motivating a small town in Ireland, a speck on the map, to become a centre of the imagination'. Perhaps we might appropriate that notion for the entire country. Richard Kearney has made a very similar point in relation to Irish history:

Culturally and historically we have made a point for better or worse of occupying that territory called the imagination – this passion for the possible that imagination represents, where you have to take a leap of the imagination or of faith, is so deeply rooted on the Irish psyche that given our history and set of choices, in response to what seemed like a repetitive series of impossible obstacles, imagination became at once a mode of compensation for suffering but also of creation.³¹

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Dr Fanning recently completed a doctorate examining a 'Second Irish revival' that took place between 1958 and 1966 and that has much in common with the original Celtic revival at the end of the nineteenth century. The work focuses on three men at the heart of this revival, T.K. Whitaker, civil servant and economist, Sean O'Riada, musician, and Thomas Kinsella, poet, and the at times curious interconnection of their lives and the economic, social and cultural fortunes of Ireland.

³¹ Kearney, R. (2008), *The Irish Mind*, Director Alan Gilsenan, Promotional Film Series, IDA.

Nation branding aims to measure, build and manage the reputation of countries (closely related to place branding). In the book *Diplomacy in a Globalizing World: Theories and Practices*, the authors define nation branding as "the application of corporate marketing concepts and techniques to countries, in the interests of enhancing their reputation in international relations." Many nations try to make brands in order to build relationships between different actors that are not restricted to nations. It... Branding and begorrah: the importance of ireland's nation brand image. John Fanning. The concept of a nation brand image is attracting increasing importance in recent years as globalisation has made the world more interdependent and all nations are in competition for investment, tourists, exports, education and talent of all kinds. The essential elements of Irish national identity, established and disseminated by the writers and artists of the "Celtic revival" over a hundred years ago and still recognised affirmatively by a diverse range of international commentators represent a natural st... A nation has a brand image with or without nation branding. This paper examines the concept of nation branding, focusing on the central question of what is being branded. It differentiates nation branding from product branding, and draws comparisons between nation branding and product-country image. Paradoxical issues around the concept and the wider context in which nation branding can be applied are also discussed. More research is needed to find out if and how nation branding could help the economic development in a country. As many other non-marketing factors also affect a nation's image t... It differentiates nation branding from product branding, and draws WHAT IS NATION BRANDING? comparisons between nation branding and product- A nation generally refers to a large group of country image. Paradoxical issues around the con- people of the same race and language,4 while cept and the wider context in which nation a country means an area of land occupied by branding can be applied are also discussed. More a nation. Although nation and country are research is needed to find out if and how nation used interchangeably in the literature, there branding could help economic development in a is a subtle difference between nation brand/ country. Branding and Begorrah: The Importance of Ireland's Nation Brand Image. UCD Smurfit Business School. Irish Marketing Review.Â The nation branding branding of the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Poland, and Hungary - Constrasting approaches and strategies. Temple University. International Conference of Brand Management. 2009. Hospers Gert-Jan. Lynch, Urry and city marketing: Taking advantage of the city as a built and graphic image. Radboud University, University of Twente. Place Branding and Public Diplomacy.