# CITY MARKETING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT POLICY

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## Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed an immense acceleration in the processes of globalization. Globalization involves a phenomenology of 'contraction' i. e. the shrinking of the world. The compression of distances and time scales made possible by modern transportation and communication technology are the two most important features of globalization (Harvey, 1989; Giddens 1990; Robertson, 1992). The world now feels smaller and distant places can now be reached in a split second. Harvey (1989) in particular, has observed that the progressively 'shrinking world' as a result of the 'compression' and transgression of 'time and space' have implications for the development of city marketing – a key theme of this paper.

In the context of global economic restructuring and the intense struggle between cities for investments, visitors and residents, it seems that globalization does not constitute a threat to 'place' but strengthens its role as a 'product' to be marketed. Cities resort to changing their image for external consumption (Ashworth and Voogd, 1995; Kearns and Philo, 1993). This applies to any cities caught in a web of global economic restructuring. Thus one important consequence of global economic and spatial changes is the intense competition between cities for investment, both public and private,

resulting in cities resorting to market themselves in the hope of securing investment, visitors and residents.

Cities market themselves by creating a positive image and environment conducive for business, pleasure and residence. Cities are marketed through their generalised images – hence the term 'Image Marketing'. Image marketing is an important aspect of city marketing, placing image initiatives as the central element. City marketing has become an important element in British urban policy during the 1990s (Ashworth and Voogd, 1995; Loftman and Nevin, 1992; Squires, 1991; Wilkinson, 1992; Smyth, 1994).


## Theory of City Marketing

A persuasive theory of city marketing involves the merger of marketing and planning theories. There are two processes to city marketing – first, the selling and, secondly the restructuring process. The former intends to improve on the image and the latter, to restructure the product. In this context, restructuring refers to improving the morphological framework of the place to live up to the projected image. Central to the practice of marketing is the projection of a good city image primarily through advertising. The hope is that an area's negative image can be transformed as desired and this can be significant for influencing perceptions and locations decisions of the targeted audiences. City marketing is now high on the political and professional agendas associated with economic development not simply in the western world but globally. Cities often search for new competitive positionings and the images of cities being the central element of marketing, are being reviewed, recreated or revised as part of the city marketing strategy adopted.

Some have argued that city marketing strategies, even if achieving their objectives have resulted in social and cultural injustices to local people. It has been argued by many that flagship projects as a strategy of place marketing in general, fail to address issues concerned with social equity. The city marketing process with its flagship and prestige projects have ignored 'the

other people' and their social and cultural aspirations of living in cities. Their cultural and identity, it is alleged, are slowly being phased, giving way to the rich (Smyth, 1997). Places are physical locations imbued with social meaning and Thomas et al (1996) argued that struggles over the question of who belongs in a place relates not only to the nature of the place, but also to the identity of those who lay claim to belonging to it.

Consequently, the 'transformation' and 'reshaping' of cities as part of global economic restructuring partly through city marketing strategies may have grave consequences for local people. Cultural shifts have been central in the processes involved. The processes whereby cities market themselves through the projection of particular images are culturally 'encoded' and frequently based on sanitised representations of the past or imagined futures. Culture is mediated through the arts and historic preservation. The raw materials of the natural and built environment are invested with symbolic as well as material value. But the notion of culture used in these strategies is, it may be hypothesised, defined by elites. It is about their conception and ideas of what culture should be and this certainly affects the way places are being represented, by who and for whom. One important aspect of this cultural shift has been the process of 'redefining' and 're-presenting' cities.

In the realm of 'redefining' and 're-presenting'cities, it is the image which assumes the key role and in consequence it is the image creators who hold a special responsibility. The decisions made by the key image creators are highly contingent upon their identity, aims and cultural foundations. The process of image creation is indeed very much a political activity and is a contested process. Images of cities have been interpreted in the context of the massive economic and social restructuring reshaping urban spaces and these modern city skylines and skyscrapers are the images produced by the powerful.

City marketing has had, at best mixed results. Its impact is selective on both people and places. Research undertaken to date has focussed on the social and economic impact of city marketing on people and places but little has been done on the extent to which the local people are being disadvantaged in terms of the disruptions caused to their ways of life, the

breaking up established patterns of life and social relations, and particularly the threat posed to their local culture and their community life.

The process of image marketing is a political activity. The images created and projected more often than not reflect the 'lived practices' of the local people. In general, most accounts of the representations of places have a fascination with the images produced by the powerful i. e. focussing more on the hegemonic representations. The creation of images (representations of place) associated with marketing are not necessarily (indeed, are unlikely to be) congruent with representations/ images held by those who live in the area. The latter are based on the 'lived reality' of every day life – so the question of how the local people react to these images and the impact on their day to day life and self image is of utmost importance.

The word 'image' also refers to a 'fabricated' or 'shaped public impression' created with the help of visual techniques. The gap between reality and images projected are the by product of the very important activity of promotion and advertising. Often, images constructed and reinforced do not reflect the true colours of the places. This is the case because place marketers may feel that an audience will only be attracted to places which are glorified. One other problem with regards to place image promotion is that place images may prove particularly unresponsive to change once established, resulting in disharmony between the image and the place.


## Globalization and Local Culture

Globalization has also brought changes to the cultural dimensions of society. One aspect of globalization has been a homogenization of culture which has been argued to be destructive to local culture and distinctive ways of life (Robins, 1992; Amin and Thrift, 1994). A local culture is perceived as being a particularity of a place in which the individuals who live there engage in daily face to face relationships. The common sedimented experiences and cultural forms which are associated with a place, is crucial to the concept of local cultures and also community life.

It is argued that the dissolving of time and space may jeopardise social relations and local cultures which can only be sustained through face to face interactions may also be affected. This in turn will weaken the social bonds between individuals – hence weakening the sense of community. Globalization thus pose a threat to local culture via global culture where the latter is said to be 'contextless' and is 'tied to no place'. In this sense, global culture is rootless and inauthentic. Because of these qualities, global culture is often deemed to be inferior to that of more traditional local cultures. This further implies that sense of community can be affected by globalization.

It can also be argued that even though today's society is highly mobile, most people retain a strong sense of attachment and belonging to key places. This is termed as 'topophilia' (Tuan, 1974) which refers to the effective bond that develops between people and place. Places and people are indeed inseparable. 'Sense of place' (or lack thereof) may be increasingly important for understanding why people move, resist moving, or stay in a place despite 'rational' economic incentives to do otherwise. The social webs that communities provide, in neighbourhoods – the webs that bind individuals together and these feelings of interconnectedness and attachment to places, in all their various forms combine to create a sense of place. These feelings are important because they foster a sense of caring for places. In short the stronger the sense of place the stronger the sense of community. Lack of attachment to places is a factor that discourages local residents from getting involved in local growth politics and development thus diminishing the sense of community value. This implies that if places are destroyed via physical restructuring, this will weaken/ destroy the sense of community and so will the local community.

The focus of this paper is on the socio cultural dimension of a livable environment which is a 'good sense of community' that is under threat. City marketing may or may not involve physical restructuring to conform to the type of images adopted. Where physical restructuring is inevitable, the implications of physically transforming the built environment on the community are tremendous. In cases where no physical restructuring is required, the practice of city marketing will still commodify places and

people. Commodification of places has certainly reduced and perhaps in some places destroyed completely local social relations hence weakening the sense of community. In this context, city marketing is said to be 'destructive'.

The following case studies undertaken by the author illustrate how some communities in diverse cultural contexts are exposed to the processes of city marketing. Particular attention has been directed to the position of those local people who are at disadvantaged by the processes of globalization via city marketing strategies.

## Case Study 1: The Marketing of Cardiff Bay, Wales

The case study illustrates the marketing of Cardiff Bay in the United Kingdom. Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (CBDC) was given the task of regenerating the Bay area. Its specific brief is to 'regenerate' the prescribed area through working in partnership with the private sector predominantly, though also with the local authorities. The prime objective of CBDC is to establish Cardiff internationally as a "superlative maritime city, which will stand comparison with any similar city in the world, enhancing the image and economic well being of Cardiff and of Wales as a whole". CBDC thus set out their stance to fully realise the potentials of the area. CBDC believes that a ten mile waterfront, properly landscaped and serviced would be a magnet for homes, commercial properties and visitors.

The primary function of marketing for Cardiff Bay is to change the popular conception of the place, which has developed over the last century. CBDC uses the image of lifestyle, leisure and recreation as the main promotional tool, whilst the traditional image of 'life associated with the docks' must be refashioned to tune in with the futuristic development of the Bay. As will be demonstrated through the case study, the type of images created for Cardiff Bay are those which ignores or at odds with the existing ways of life of the local people and seek to change or marginalise them. These newly created images evoke reactions from the local people.

The present day Cardiff Bay is essentially the product of the 19th century Industrial Revolution that gave the impetus for the development of the area. The area was once famous for its docks and the development of the docks and the associated industry led to the growth of Butetown which sits in the heart of the Cardiff Docklands. Butetown and particularly the place known as Tiger Bay was home to the various communities – the Arabs, West Africans, West Indians, Spaniards and several other nationalities drawn from many parts of the world. The racial harmony of the area was usually held as an example to the rest of Britain.

For some, the area has been constructed as 'dirty, violent, diseased and immoral and others look in a different light, saw the place as a 'mecca of racial harmony'. For the locals i. e. the residents of Cardiff Bay, the area is still a cosmopolitan community where everybody knew each other and cared for each other. These are the positive images generally held by the local people of the area. There is not much in the new imagery that promotes a multi cultural identities. In general, the local community has high regards towards their community life. Findings from the survey carried out by the author regarding residents' perceptions towards development in Cardiff Bay have shown that a clear majority of the residents (89%) stated that there is a good sense of community in Butetown and Cardiff Bay in general. However, CBDC in its attempt to promote Cardiff Bay has ignored the positive images held by the local people but concentrates on reversing the negative images of Tiger Bay as perceived by those not resident of the area thus justifying the rationale for the new image of Cardiff Bay.

The study undertaken by the author further illustrates how the new images created have no regards for past images. Positive images held by the local people with regards to their community life as the essence of their local culture and identity were labelled as 'negative' by the image creators. One significant finding from the study is that the local people have mixed reactions of how others defined their places. Portraying past histories of the local people as negative images to legitimize the CBDC's regeneration strategy was indeed a bad move.

Positive images held by the local people could have been incorporated into the new image. The new image of the Bay should reflect some of the old image i. e. incorporating positive aspects of the old image. That could really be a big plus point. The local people could see themselves in those images and that would have been a better strategy. The images created and projected are at odds with the local ways of life and culture and as such have created feelings of resentment among the locals towards the development of the place. The images created have destructive effects on the social fabric of the local people. They dreaded the thought of being displaced and marginalised – physically and culturally. This sort of climate does not create a conducive environment for future development.

The negative perceptions towards the new images however do not represent the whole local population of Butetown. There are several communities such as the local business community (i. e. those who have benefited from the whole regeneration process) who welcome the new image as a boost to their businesses. The Somali and Yemeni communities see the new image as a good move for the area as this will give the residents better facilities in the once 'run-down' area. However, the local people from diverse cultural communities do have one thing in common and that is the need for them to have a focus - the need for community halls to strengthen their community ties and to evoke stronger sense of community.

It is also evidenced from the case study that the local people had no part in the image making processes and the imaging of the place continued to be moulded and constrained by others who are not residents of the area. Contestations do occur which manifest themselves in the media but the feeling of not being heard has left the local people to fend for themselves. For the local community, the images created and projected for Cardiff Bay do not reflect the multicultural community that the local community feels is the essence of their culture and identity. The newly created images of Cardiff Bay are seen by the locals as constituting a deliberate attempt by the officials to obliterate past images. The new image of Cardiff Bay which symbolises 'success' is a deliberate attempt to disguise the lived reality of the multi ethnic communities living in the area. CBDC is not helping in promoting the positive

images of the old Cardiff Bay held by the local people. In fact it is downgrading that image which is already weakening. The images projected do not have any effect in strengthening the local culture and the community of that place.


## Case Study 2: Malaysian Experience
## – The Marketing of Labuan, East Malaysia

The study on local peoples' perceptions towards development in Labuan was conducted recently in August 2000. Although the focus of the study was not specifically on city marketing, but a part of the findings of the survey can be used as a case study material for this paper.

Labuan Federal Territory comprises of Labuan main island and six smaller islands. The focus is own the main island. Labuan was declared as a Federal Territory on 16 April 1984. It has many notable accomplishments and is dubbed as the "Pearl of the Orient" and "The Most Beautiful Garden Island in the World". The island is now poised to become a dynamic centre that will spearhead the transformation of the nation into a fully industrialised country by the year 2020. The Labuan Development Plan (1997-2015) has laid out the development thrust for Labuan as follows:

- Labuan as an International Offshore Financial Centre (IOFC)
- Labuan as a Free Port and a Duty Free Island
- Labuan as a Tourist Destination and a Centre for Meetings, Incentives,
- Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE)
- Labuan as the Most Beautiful Garden Island in the World

As Labuan develops as an IOFC, its free port and duty free island status will come as complementary functions. The tourism sector is also deemed to be another supportive sector especially when its potentials are carefully exploited. Such is the vision/ image set for Labuan and the marketing for Labuan is done extensively. Many new developments have been scheduled

for Labuan in order to achieve its status as an IOFC and other visions as laid out in the Plan. Restructuring of places is now taking place in order to live up to the images projected. The visions and images set for Labuan are certainly geared towards development of international standard.

The physical restructuring of Labuan will inevitably restructure the lives of the local people who are in general kampung folks (villagers) with low educational attainment, lacking skills and knowledge and would certainly lose out in competing for future employment and opportunities requiring high tech knowledge and skills. Such is the background of the local villagers within which the future development is to take place. The villagers (kampung folks) are generally farmers and fishermen. Findings from the survey show a high level of social interaction/ networking of neighbours, friends, and relatives living in the villages selected randomly for the purpose of the study. This culture of social networking may be an essential ingredient for establishing a good sense of community. This strong sense of community as revealed by the survey findings show that most respondents would still choose to live at their present residence. The research findings have also shown that informal networks comprising mainly of neighbours, friends, kins etc is an integral part of quality living. These are positive facets which should be further nurtured and such strength is also an element of economic vitality.

The overall impression gained from evidences collected almost exclusively from interviews with key people and the local community selected randomly in the villages chosen, suggest that the local people supports the development of Labuan which they feel will uplift their standard of living. The findings also show that one of the reasons for the respondents to continue living in their present residence is because of their confidence in the economic potential derived from development. The local communities perceived the socio cultural impacts as relatively minor as evidenced in the survey findings and the locals tend to have high hopes and expectations from the development.

However, there are instances where tensions do arise involving individuals/ groups regarding the question of the cost and benefits of the development scheme accruing to the local people. Influences from individuals

or groups involved have helped sensitize the whole issue about the role of the local people and others directly involved in the emerging scenario. Issues on local perceptions drawn from primary data sources suggest the following key dimensions of conflicts/ tensions that have emerged amongst the local community.

## A Breakdown of Trust?

There are pieces of evidence which suggest at least some of the local people have come to mistrust the officials involved in the development of Labuan in general. Based on information gathered almost exclusively from interviews, the local people perceived the development and other grandiose schemes as quite clearly, to create a physical and socio economic transformation of their area. The new development is likely to have little benefits in the short and long term for the local people. Although this study does not specifically look into the cost and benefit of the project, but the socio economic impacts have implications on peoples' attitudes. Consequently, the attitudes of the local people to the officials and others are certainly not one based on trust. Tensions were building up between the officials and the local populace. The locals made claims about … *"the jobs being created are taken by people from outside; small local business will be taken up not by the locals and that the new development will push the cost of things all the time"*.

## The Extent of Local Community Involvement

The survey findings have shown that the locals are aware of local development but they are not involved in the decision making processes. Local community involvement and support does not empower the locals and that consultations with the general public is a 'fait accompli'. Presently the local communities encounter many difficulties in involving, controlling and gaining benefits from the development. Their participation in the

development is very limited. They should be involve in decision making process which will influence their quality of life and the bottom up approach should be encouraged, rather than be dominated by decisions made solely by the government agencies. There is also a lack of appropriate training and educational programmes to minimise the socio cultural impacts of development. The assistance from the government is often necessary in guiding, educating and training the local communties on the various aspects of development.


## Conclusions and Recommendations

This concluding section brings together the various strands of arguments developed in earlier sections. The shrinking of the world has led to the development of city marketing and also the flow of global culture (which is deemed inferior to that of local culture which is the essence of community life) making its impact on societies caught in the web of globalization. The processes of image creation (as part of city marketing) are the starting points of any development processes, and findings from both the studies have shown that the local communities are not involved in the process. The process of city marketing have led to the actions and aspirations of the locals being overlooked, reflecting the dynamics of power relations surrounding the image making processes. The image making process is essentially a process of claiming power, where the official images created by the powerful tend to marginalise the less powerful which generally are the local residents. Images constructed by the powerful have resulted in urban landscapes that reflect and help reproduce their culture thus undermining the local communities.

Performance of a city is now gauged by its capability to reverse negative images to generate external interest. The Cardiff Bay study demonstrates how two sets of contrasting images share an uneasy coexistence. For Cardiff Bay, the positive images held by the local people with regard to their community life as the essence of their local culture and identity were labelled as negative by the image creators. The positive images held by local people are seen as a

threat by non locals, who see a need to reverse them. The case study has illustrated that the images created seemed to have little relevance to the local people. The feeling that the key decision makers had highlighted a synthetic culture at the expense of the local culture was shown to have had material expression in terms of the landscapes of the development that follows. This is clearly the case for Cardiff Bay. The landscapes of cities can be seen as a reflection of the prevailing ideology of the dominant groups. The process of image making entails physical restructuring of places, usually to the detriment of local residents, as evidenced in the study. In relation to the image building strategies, these strategies have been extended to become the government rhetoric on the health of the local economy such that the narrative of Cardiff Bay's regeneration was suggested to have inscribed itself onto the urban landscape in the form of a number of 'icons of development'.

As for Labuan, the development that follows to live up to the images projected have meant physical restructuring of Labuan. The local villagers/ communities face difficulties in coping with development because they are not brought along with the development that takes place. The locals ended up selling pieces of their land for short term profits to make way for development. This would certainly result in the breaking up of local communities which took generations to grow up. The environments built are conducive for the outsiders who have moved in and thus established their culture. The destruction of elements in the built environment imbued with social meanings much treasured by the locals, would destroy the sense of place and hence weakening the sense of community as elaborated earlier. On the other hand, this is considered as a success because performance of cities and places are now gauged by its capability to project images to attract foreign investments and tourists.

Local culture are (in part) about people making sense of their lives and of the spaces in which they live their lives. This making sense of places cannot be done on behalf of people. It can be facilitated and influenced, but people's cultures must be, can only be, made by and appropriated by, themselves. So if social and economic changes are to be consistent with the retention of (though, inevitably, perhaps also the evolution of) local cultures; then the

people must have some say over, some influence over, the pace and direction of the changes – at least as they impinge on their lives. Otherwise the changes will simply appear as alien and threatening forces extending to the local culture. This is especially so in the image making process. Image determines and guides the future development of cities. Once an image is established, all policies and strategies of development growth would follow suit.

What is needed is a devolution of cultural power which brings greater autonomy to the people. People have the right to have a hand in the production of their own cultural meanings and identities in the construction of their places. This can only be brought by the development of a new set of power relations which enable the people to be more of an audience but to become an actor as well. This paper argues that to bring in coherence to urban development policy, radical community empowering initiatives are needed. There is increasing evidence provided by the studies that the approach to development has been dominated by principles of profitablility and image which have been of utmost importance. This paper contributes to the emerging debate about community empowerment – confirming the consensus that urban development policy should refocused to involve local people. The following section recommends some of the ways to empower communities.

## Proposition 1

It is important that key representatives from local community organizations and local groups be involved in the decision making process from the beginning. For those groups who are otherwise not represented, passive instruments such as surveys may be used to gather views and perceptions from these groups. The following conditions must be created to realize the full potential of community involvement:

- Local community organizations require physical spaces for existence and therefore such facilities are required and must be provided for organizations to exist.
- Create 'situations' to enable the locals to make both formal and informal face to face contact with officers and among themselves.
- The locals must develop skills and knowledge to be able to establish networks and contacts in the community. This is referred to as 'capacity building'. Every actor involved in the decision making must be made aware of the high degree of interdependence between the various groups and their decisions made may have repercussions on others - hence the importance of collaboration.
- There is need for a coordinator or a liaison team charged with the responsibility of ensuring effective information and consultation with the local community. The officer must take the role to convene diverse views and must be able to initiate and facilitate collaboration between the various groups. The role as a convener must have the legitimacy, the expertise, authority, and the resources. This role is crucial and the person must have the capability to identify and bring all issues and interests together. The study however, warns of the potential danger of the role of convener. Local government could be particularly suitable when the issues would directly have an impact on the community's future growth and development. However, they themselves are unlikely to be natural conveners. They are more likely to be purposeful, goal oriented actors that use their power for their own purposes. With the shift of local governance and authorities assuming the role of entrepreneurialism, this study argues that their role as conveners are now questionable. Therefore there is a need to identify suitable candidate to assume this role if collaboration is to work.

**Proposition 2**

There is a need for the recognition for mutual benefits to be derived from the decision making process. The mutual benefits as in the case here is to avoid conflict. Benefits will be observed in more effective representation for groups, more resources for some groups to influence decisions made and greater residents' satisfaction. The study proposes that the conditions below must be present for collaboration to work.

- Perceptions of benefits to be derived from collaborative planning
  An organization participates because of its interest in the outcome. Therefore, each participant must have a clear idea of the potential benefits accrue to them in the future development.
- Recognition of the importance of the issues
  Community organizations may be compelled to join in the collaboration due to the importance of the long term impact of the future development on their community. There is therefore the need for each participant to be made aware of the implications of the future development.
- Interactive communication to build local involvement
  Interactive communication must be the approach used to open up debate which encourages people to become involved. Local authorities, public and private agencies must share and explain information addressing all the issues, options and problems involved in any development. Clear information on potential opportunities and constraints of future developments must be detailed. It is also important that all issues are communicated using simple 'language' understood by those involved.

**Proposition 3**

The issue of empowerment is crucial here as participation is only possible unless the potential participants perceive that the collaborative decisions will

be implemented, and that their views will be taken on board – influencing strategies that can make a difference.

- Time and resources
  There is the need for a perception that adequate resources in the form of material resources and professional expertise are available to ensure collaboration to run smoothly.

The propositions outlined provide the guidelines for an effective mechanism for community involvement . In the light of rapid urban changes, there is the need to find new ways for communities to be more active in influencing their lives.

## Summary

It can be inferred from both the case studies that the best way to avoid people developing a sense of alienation towards the development in their places and from a sense of anxiety about their future is for them to be able to influence what happens. Community based organizations also have important roles to play in the development of a city. The diverse community attitudes towards development and growth have raised some concern for an unachievable ideal. Nonetheless, the case study also showed that the local community wes sufficiently close in overall community interests, suggesting tradeoffs and compromises in the future may be achievable (so long as community values are not affected).

The research in this study yielded interesting and novel experience on the exclusion of local people in the image making processes. The studies suggest that the needs and aspirations of the local people were ignored in the image making processes and there is the need for local inclusion in the process in order to maximise the potential that exists in the area. The case studies illustrate that the policies adopted were criticised for taking place without proper public consultation. The local people were promised benefits but the feeling of being betrayed has made the local feeling lose trust in the decision

makers. The views of the people were not taken into account. Power was highly centralised, vested in the hands of the key decision makers.

The non local involvement in the image making processes for both case studies and the reactions of the locals toward the images created have implications for future image making processes which could be an essential part of urban development policy. Urban policy must be capable of sustaining and fostering a good sense of community, and the paper concludes by recommending several propositions which might offer ways forward in this regard.

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