



City Branding in Western Europe

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Leaving academe in 1990, John went on to set up and lead destination marketing organisations for Sheffield, Coventry and Warwickshire, Birmingham and Nottinghamshire. He left his post as Chief Executive of Experience Nottinghamshire in June 2009, setting himself up as Best Destination Marketing. <http://www.bestdestinationmarketing.com/>

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1 Introduction

Brand as a term originated as a mark of identity, as notoriously in the medieval punishment. As a business discipline, its origins go back to the Industrial Revolution and the rise of national and then global consumer markets. By the early 1880's, Procter and Gamble in the USA was branding its products in recognisably modern ways, starting with Ivory soap and its 'it floats' slogan. In Britain, Lyle's Golden Syrup with its green and gold packaging is reckoned to be the country's oldest brand, boasting of a continuous history stretching back to 1885. By the late 1950's, product branding had emerged as an advertising-led business activity, with logos encapsulating the offer and with 'above the line' advertising being utilised to create customer awareness and generate sales. Audiences were targeted crudely but often effectively by reference to broad socio-economic groupings.

Fashioned by the Internet and the World Wide Web, the advent of Marshall McLuhan's 'global village' in the last decade of the 20th century transformed branding, moving it – as [Olins](#) (2008, p.6) succinctly puts it – 'from the periphery to the centre of corporate concern'. He describes how branding has latterly come to permeate contemporary business organisations by reference to four vectors, viz:

1. What they make and sell;
2. The environment within which they operate;
3. How they communicate; and
4. How they deal with their employees and multiple outside stakeholders, e.g. media, community groups, and governments.

Across the four vectors, the brand – be it Orange, Nike, Waitrose, Heinz, Microsoft or Google – is literally the business and is palpable enough to form part of the balance sheet. On this basis the world's most valuable brand is thought to be Coca-Cola, worth an estimated £45 billion. As a rule, brands account for the majority of a company's market value.

The branding of nations, cities and regions – so called place branding – is a relatively recent affair. As [Anholt](#) (2007, pxi) remarks, it is only since the 1990s that it has become a discrete domain of activity and study 'with its commercial and academic communities, consulting firms, publications, conferences, research, and a rising number of full-time professionals in national, city and regional administration'. The origins of city branding, however, go back a little further and may arguably be fixed in time and place. In 1977, the New York State Department of Commerce hired an advertising agency to develop a marketing campaign which would accentuate the positives of the area. A graphic designer, Milton Glaser, was engaged on a pro bono basis to provide a logo and slogan with which to front the campaign, and 'I love NY' was borne. It went on to inspire several more campaigns and all manner of merchandise. It is a city brand which endures to this day, passing the longevity test where countless others fail. It influenced Europe in the sense that two cities wanted to do something similar. In 1883, Amsterdam and Glasgow introduced their 'Amsterdam has it' and 'Glasgow's miles better' city brands. They did so independently of each other, but in both cases 'I love NY' served as the role model. Nowadays, city branding is a much discussed topic throughout Europe, and it has 'moved on' conceptually and substantively from the pioneering examples referred to above.

Against such a backdrop, this review examines how the business discipline of branding is being applied to cities in Western Europe. Its approach and content is shaped by the author's experience over a 19 year period (1990-2009) during which time he set up and directed destination marketing organisations in four provincial British cities – Sheffield, Coventry, Birmingham, and Nottingham. In three of these places he found himself in the position of introducing and championing a city brand project, viz. 'Sheffield Shines', 'Coventry Inspires', the 'Birmingham B', and last but not least in Nottingham 'the Big N'. In each case the author was struck by what is later on in this review referred to as the problematic nature of city branding, which in a nutshell is the tremendous challenges attendant upon creating and sustaining a city brand concept so that it really does 'make a difference'.

The wider, Western European outlook in this review derives largely from the author's close association since 2002 with the European Cities Marketing network.

The remainder of this introductory section defines and delineates city branding, and against its inherent promise will be set the constraints which currently limit its practical application to only a handful of Western European cities. Even here – as we shall see in subsequent sections of the review – the value of city branding exercises remains problematic, though the 'I Amsterdam' city brand is lately emerging as an exemplar of best practice and is therefore worth taking a long, hard look at.

Defining and delineating city branding and city brand

City branding may be seen from both producer and consumer perspectives. As an example of the former, [Kavaratzis and Ashworth](#) (2005) define city branding as 'the self-conscious application of branding to places as an instrument of urban planning and management' (p 507). From this perspective, city branding is a process; an applied business discipline, centred upon marketing and communications activities. Its end-product is a city brand.

These deliberately 'engineered' city brands may be contrasted with what are sometimes referred to in the literature as 'natural' or 'organic' city brands. Here the city brand is viewed from the consumer/audience/market perspective. As such, it may be defined as 'the totality of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings that customers hold about a place' ([Baker](#) 2007, p 26). In a similar vein, [Moilanen and Rainistro](#) (2008, p 6) choose to define city brand as 'an impression perceived in a client's mind of a product or a service. It is the sum of all tangible and intangible elements, which makes the selection unique'.

Unsurprisingly, the popular conception of city brand is rooted in the consumer perspective. When, for example, on the official Barcelona Metropolis web site a travel journalist Nick Rider describes 'Brand Barcelona' as 'a global trademark of refined urban life, advanced design and Mediterranean hedonism', he is referring to a natural/organic city brand as opposed to one of the engineered kind. Similarly, the annual City Brands Index measuring the relative brand strengths of 50 major cities throughout the world is an assessment derived from consumers rather than producers ([Anholt](#) 2007, pp 59-62). It is based on a survey in which people's perceptions are assessed. Respondents are asked to rank the 50 cities in terms of status, physical attributes, quality of basic infrastructure, economic and social potential, lifestyle, and the local residents. On this basis, the 2009 results showed Paris as the world's leading city brand, followed by Sydney, London, Rome, and New York.

The link between engineered as opposed to natural/organic brands is that the former are premised on changing (for the better) the perceptions which underpin the latter. The challenge for some cities lies in the fact that the natural/organic brands do not communicate the desired marketing messages so that they resonate positively with residents and with prospective visitors, investors and students. Where it does, then the paradox arises that cities with strong and highly positive natural/organic brands may see a city branding process as defined from the producer perspective as a pointless exercise. It is suggested below that the organic/natural concept of city brand is best referred to by the terms 'image', 'identity', and 'reputation', and to confine use of the term brand to the consciously engineered exercises of the type referred to above by Kavartzis and Ashworth. In this way, the "I love NY" city brand can be distinguished from the reputation, identity and image of New York, albeit that the brand is ultimately seeking to modify that reputation, identity and image.

The promise and potential of city branding

The rationale for introducing city branding programmes is that in an increasingly globalised world urban areas are competing against each other for scarce resources in marketplaces which are critical to their prosperity and survival. These marketplaces and audiences may be external to the city - students, tourists, migrants, investors, and events, but they may also be internal, notably local residents, companies and other institutions. City branding is seen by its proponents as a means of differentiating a place from its competitors, and of systematically communicating and distributing its advantages to the key audiences. It is 'an organising principle that involves orchestrating the messages and experiences associated with a place to ensure that they are as distinctive, compelling, memorable, and rewarding as possible' (Baker 2007, p26).

The potential and promise of city branding is viewed by its proponents as huge; get it right and 'the results can be far more comprehensive, economically significant and socially important than for virtually any other branding exercise' ([Whitfield](#) 2005). A 'co-ordinated approach can significantly increase the competitive advantage' (Moilanen and Rainistro 2008, p1). [Morgan and Pritchard](#) (2004, p60) assert that branding is 'perhaps the most powerful weapon available to contemporary destination marketers'. The ultimate promise of city branding is to create enhanced awareness in key marketplaces which in turn increases customers, generating business, employment and prosperity.

So say the protagonists. The actual practice of city branding in early 21st century Western Europe belies its promise and potential.

The application of the branding discipline to cities

While city branding is topical and its practice has gathered some momentum in Western Europe over the last decade, it would be a mistake to exaggerate the extent of its application. Contrary to the impression conveyed by its topicality, it is not a mainstream tool of urban policy. Surveying the large number of cities in Western Europe – Portugal alone has 51 – the practice of city branding remains the exception rather than the rule. The majority of the members of European Cities Marketing - the official consortium that networks city tourist organisations throughout Western Europe – do not have an explicit city branding strategy in place. It is also the case – as

[Pike](#) (2008), [Govers and Go](#) (2009) and others have pointed out - that place branding is characterised by a lack of published research and case studies. Scarcity is a feature of the literature on city branding and this is especially so in respect of contributions of an applied/practitioner kind – a deficiency which this review hopefully begins to address.

Topical, but far from universal, and ill researched, city branding is also the source of considerable misunderstanding, and is rife with confusion and controversy. There is the terminological confusion referred to above, with definitions of city brand falling into two mutually exclusive groups. Over and above terminological confusion, however, there is confusion on the part of the principal players as to the purpose, structure and modus operandi of city branding – from politicians, business people and other leaders, through to the community at large and the local media that reports on its affairs. Baker is right when he says city leaders ‘don’t understand the benefits and concepts involved in place branding’. (Baker 2007, p27). Amidst the misunderstanding and confusion, the delivery of city branding projects is nearly always difficult and controversial. There is a wider debate, too, bordering on the philosophical/ideological, about the local socio-economic benefits attendant upon city branding programmes. Some commentators see it as an irrelevance and go as far as to argue that city branding precludes urban renewal rather than stimulates it ([Monclus](#) et al, 2006).

In reality, the application of branding principles and techniques to the selling and repositioning of cities has so far met with only limited success. The ‘Glasgow’s Miles Better’ logo and slogan (Figure 1) introduced as we have seen as far back as 1983 has been widely but erroneously seen as an exemplar and exaggerated claims have been made on its behalf (Heeley 1987, pp49-54). In fact, the launch of “Glasgow’s Miles Better” was low key, and it never attracted significant levels of resourcing. To be sure, the clever use of the Mr. Happy children’s character as the logo and the double meaning in the bold ‘cocking a snoot’ at Edinburgh slogan did engage some Glaswegians and become effective as a rallying point for the local public and private sectors. While it may have symbolised the beginnings of Glasgow’s post-industrial renaissance, much more fundamental factors brought about the city’s regeneration – from sustained environmental improvements to townscape through to high profile festivals (notably the 1988 Glasgow Garden Festival and the 1990 European Capital of Culture) as well as the opening of major new facilities such as the Burrell Collection (1983), the Scottish Conference and Exhibition Centre (1985), and the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall (1990). As a campaign, “Glasgow’s Miles Better” was deemed to have run its course in 1989, and was replaced by “Glasgow’s alive”, only for it to briefly resurrected in 1994.



Figure 1

The truth is that no urban destination in Europe has so far transformed itself through a city branding programme so as to deliver fully on all the promise and potential alluded to earlier. Nowhere has the rhetoric been justified. The author reaches these conclusions from the vantage point of someone who has been close to how cities market themselves for the best part of forty years; first as an academic and then as a practitioner. While in appropriate circumstances city branding is capable of delivering important gains, and as we shall see the ‘I Amsterdam’

city brand is emerging as a role model, the starting point for any city branding exercise should be an awareness of its limitations when as a business discipline it is applied to cities.

Broadly speaking, over and above the confusion and misunderstanding which surrounds city branding, there are four main factors constraining what in practice can be achieved by city branding projects:

- 1** The complexity of cities and the branding authority's lack of influence and control;
- 2** A weak relationship between city branding and other aspects of city marketing;
- 3** The difficulty in evaluating city branding;
- 4** The the reluctance to fund city branding.

The complexity of cities and city branding's lack of influence and control

To understand the issues of complexity and lack of influence and control, it is instructive to turn to Olins's seminal work on branding entitled 'Corporate Identity' published in 1994. In this, he contrasted 'explicitly engineered identity or brand' with 'socially constructed image and reputation':

'Every organisation carries out thousands of transactions every day: it buys, it sells, it hires and fires, it makes, it paints, it cleans, it promotes, it informs through advertising, the web and other media - and so on. The totality of the way the organisation presents itself can be called its identity. What the different audiences perceive is often called its image' (1994, p1).

The goal of every corporate branding or identity programme, according to Olins, was to arrive at a situation in which 'everything the organisation does, everything it owns, and everything it produces should project a clear idea of what it is and what its aims are' (Olins 1994, p1).

The organisational contexts for Olins distinguishing between 'image/reputation', on the one hand, and 'identity/brand' on the other, are the product-based marketing communications campaigns routinely being undertaken by large, private sector corporations. Corporations such as Asda and BT and products such as Ibuprofen, Nivea and BMW.

Unlike the corporate context, however, city branding projects are faced with a larger and more complex, multi-dimensional set of products. By their very nature cities are large, heterogeneous, and pluralistic. As a consequence, what cities do and how they are perceived is a vast and ever changing landscape, anarchic and fragmented. Whichever part of the urban bureaucracy is charged with planning, co-ordinating and managing a city branding programme,(referred to henceforth as the city branding authority), it will struggle to:

- ◆ Influence and control the countless things that a city does, owns, produces and markets – the very same factors which are integral to shaping a city's image and reputation; and
- ◆ Reduce the inherent complexity of cities to a handful of brand messages and advantages.

Because of this complexity and associated lack of influence and control, there is substance to the argument that cities cannot really brand themselves with anything like the same level of impact as a corporation can with respect to, say, a chocolate bar or a packet of cornflakes ([Matson 1994, pp35-41](#)).

The weak relationship of city branding to other aspects of city marketing

Although it goes largely unrecognised in the literature, city branding is only one part of city marketing as a whole. As well as city branding activities, city marketing includes all those sectoral marketing activities where the place alongside the product itself is important in shaping perceptions and/or generating leads and/or determining sales. Typically, citywide sectoral marketing activities target students, visitors, investors, and resident audiences. The city branding executed by whosoever is the branding authority therefore supplements the sectoral marketing activities undertaken by the local authorities, universities, tourist organisations, inward investment agencies, and others. City branding is in effect a generic, promotional 'umbrella' under which these targeted sectoral activities can take shelter and be made more cost effective. The argument runs as follows: city branding creates heightened awareness of places as favorable destinations in which to live, visit, invest and study, so that sectoral marketing is facilitated and/or can be concentrated on generating leads and their subsequent fulfillment, viz. conversion to sales.

Although the distinction between city branding and sectoral marketing is crucial, it is unfortunately ignored or misunderstood in much of the literature and in practical deliberations. We can here exemplify this distinction by a consideration of city marketing in the German city of Hamburg where a brand authority - Marketing Hamburg - was set up in 2004 specifically to provide an umbrella city brand for sectoral city marketing programmes relating to inward investment, transport, business development, and tourism. Figure 2 illustrates the city brand 'umbrella' in Hamburg, showing how the Hamburg city brand provides a framework within which 25 other agencies undertake sectoral marketing activities aimed at a variety of resident, investor/business, and visitor audiences.

Two important factors significantly constraining city branding are that:

- 1** Funding for city branding tends to be relatively small and difficult to assemble when compared with sectoral marketing activities; and
- 2** Sectoral marketing will tend only fitfully to reflect the 'wider' city brand.

We elaborate further on the difficulty of assembling funding for city branding below. As for point 2) above, the reason why city brands tend only weakly to be reflected in sectoral marketing activities lies in the fact that few of the agencies concerned will elect to become fully-fledged sub-brands - refer section 3. For instance, place brands for Nottingham and Leeds which we shall be considering later on in this review engendered just three and four sub-brands respectively. The reason for this is that most (if not all) of the agencies conducting sectoral marketing activities retain their own carefully constructed bands and identities. In such a situation, the only way these agencies demonstrate commitment to the official place brand is by the much looser process of alignment in which the logo, straplines and other aspects of brand platform are incorporated on literature, websites, letterheads and the like (refer section 3 below).

The difficulty in evaluating city branding

As we shall see in section 4, city branding projects prove resistant to evaluation and the establishment of precise rates of return on investment. It is easy to demonstrate activity, but difficult to quantify outputs and gauge success. Although claims of high and palpable returns on brand

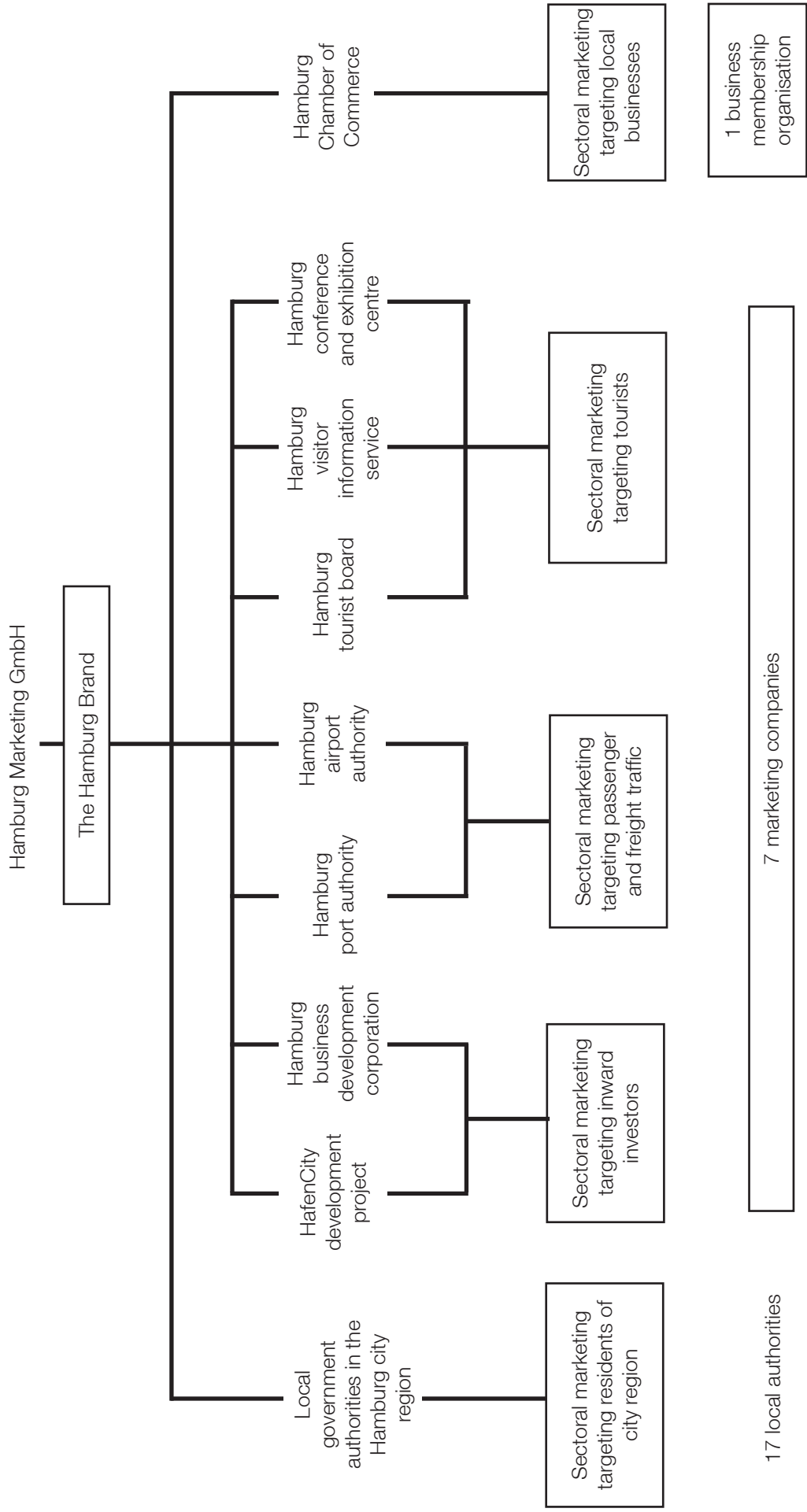


Figure 2: City marketing and city branding in Hamburg

marketing investment are made by city branding authorities and even some academics, these should be treated with caution, as we shall illustrate in section 4. Hankinson's review of city branding in 12 English cities concluded that it was little understood and rarely applied effectively, and one of the principal reasons for this was the inability to measure success ([Hankinson 2001](#), pp127-142).

The reluctance to fund city branding

The development costs of an engineered city brand vary widely. Budgets for the recent re-brandings of Toronto and Melbourne, for example, were £2.4 million and £121,000 respectively. The twenty Western European examples in table 1 had development and launch budgets ranging from £115,000 to nearly £1 million – see section 3. Grant funding from national government and the ECC has figured extensively in the development and launch of the brands featured in table 1. Resourcing to implement city branding post-launch requires base level funding of approximately £150,000 per annum in order to achieve a minimal level of visibility and impact. In general, both capital and revenue funding for city branding are difficult to secure, especially on an ongoing basis. As far as the local public sector is concerned, it may decide to take this on, but more often than not there is caution and hesitancy about funding it wholly or in part: other statutory obligations may take a higher priority; the benefits are difficult to quantify; and, crucially, there may be a desire to avoid supporting an activity seen as wasteful by sections of the local, voting population. For companies and other private sector institutions, city branding is clearly not their core business and in the author's experience it is difficult (though not impossible) to persuade them to invest in it.

Where these funding obstacles have been overcome, as with the 21 cities in table 1, some city branding projects have been financed wholly by the public purse (e.g. the Edinburgh and Belfast city brands), but in the majority of cases a mixture of public and private sources is evident. Where monies from the private sector have been garnered, then recourse is made to membership or corporate donor schemes. The Berlin Partner organisation, for instance, have one hundred and thirty companies in membership, while corporate donor schemes have been used by Experience Nottinghamshire, Marketing Birmingham and Marketing Leeds to help fund brand applications. Amsterdam Partners, the branding authority for the I Amsterdam city brand, is noteworthy for an effective blending of public and private sector support. Its annual budget is currently in the region of £2 million, and is split more or less equally between the city government and forty five private sector companies and institutions, each of whom provide an annual donation in excess of £20,000. The donors include Heineken, Philips, KLM, and Schiphol airport, while others are drawn from the ranks of banking, insurance, real estate, the universities, and energy.

Cities who aren't branding themselves

The four sets of constraints summarised above severely dilute the impact and relevance of branding when it is applied to cities. A further factor to bear in mind is that many cities find themselves in the position of having either little or no need to introduce a city branding programme, or else choose to adopt an alternative approach to repositioning themselves in image terms.

In the first set of cases, the image and reputation of a city may be sufficiently strong and positive to render the introduction of a formal citywide branding exercise irrelevant or unnecessary. For instance, Paris has an image redolent with romance, style, cuisine, art and culture – a ‘moveable feast’ as Hemmingway famously referred to the French capital. Almost all of Europe’s ‘great’ cities are great precisely because they have highly positive images with strong and favourable associations.

In the other cases, cities have regenerated and repositioned themselves by developing iconic landmarks and/or hosting high profile events, marketing themselves extensively and effectively on the back of these assets, but without recourse to the organising principle of a city brand. The event-led tourism and image strategy of Barcelona is an example of a city using high profile sporting and cultural events to position itself on the world stage. The celebrated instance of an approach based upon an iconic landmark is the so-called ‘Guggenheim effect’ whereby the Frank Gehry designed museum of contemporary art and design in Bilbao has been credited with the city’s economic revival following the collapse of its iron and steel industries at the end of the twentieth century. Opening in 1997, the Guggenheim Museum’s striking exterior stimulated an upsurge in tourism to the Basque city and helped soften its former reputation for pollution and political violence. Other cities have sought a similar transformation of their tourism and image by creating what they hope will become an iconic mega attraction, though such an approach is high risk and brooks controversy. Valencia has endeavored through both icon (the City of the Arts and Science complex) and events to fashion a new image for itself and to become a first choice European tourism destination.

Cities in Europe which are currently branding themselves

The factors and constraints discussed and exemplified above mean that during the first decade of the twenty first century engineered city branding exercises have so far been introduced in only a minority of Europe’s major cities. As table 1 shows, the leading examples are Amsterdam, Berlin, Copenhagen, Dresden, Gothenburg, Hamburg, Lyon, Maastricht, Madrid, Riga, Rotterdam, Stockholm, and The Hague. In the UK, such brands have been developed during the past decade for Belfast, Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leeds, Liverpool, and Nottingham. By engineered, the author means the explicit development of a place brand platform – see section 2 below – and its subsequent launch and implementation – refer section 3. In this respect, the branding programmes of the twenty cities mentioned above contrast sharply with mainstream urban experience where typically one searches in vain for what we have referred to as an engineered city branding project.

The branding authorities and their role

Table I details the lead organisations responsible for brand application in each of the 21 cities mentioned above, alongside the title of the city brand, the year of its launch, and the principal audiences being addressed.

Of the 21 branding authorities, four are a part of the local city council (Belfast, Madrid, Rotterdam, and The Hague), while another is part of a government funded economic development agency for the city region ((Lyon). The remainder are public: private partnerships. Of these, seven are effectively the local tourist board/city imaging agency (Birmingham, Cardiff, Dresden,

Glasgow, Gothenburg, Nottingham, and Riga), while another is a city imaging agency (Leeds). Yet another is the public/private partnership responsible for the city's overarching social and economic strategy (Liverpool). Six more comprise ad hoc partnerships set up specifically to co-ordinate implementation of the city brand (viz. Amsterdam, Berlin, Hamburg, Copenhagen, Edinburgh, and Maastricht). Last but not least, Stockholm has vested custodianship of its city brand with the Sockholm Business Region Board whose two operating subsidiaries are the Stockholm Visitors Board and Stockholm Business Region Development.

The setting up of ad hoc city branding partnerships reflect the need both to attract private sector commitment and funding and to take forward brand implementation in a co-ordinated and focused manner. The first such agency of this kind was Marketing Hamburg. As mentioned above, it was set up in 2004 to introduce and guide the subsequent implementation of the Hamburg brand. Its management board is chaired by the Mayor of Hamburg and is a mix of local authority and chamber of commerce representatives.

Another example, Amsterdam Partners is officially the city branding authority for the Amsterdam metropolitan area. Constituted as an independent public: private foundation, its five strong management board is currently chaired by the head of corporate affairs for the Schiphol Group. The other members are senior level appointments drawn from Wolters Kluwer, the Amsterdam Chamber of Commerce, and the city councils of Amsterdam and Almere. Reporting to the management board is a team of twelve employees who on a day to day basis take forward the 'I Amsterdam' city brand.

A British example, the Destination Edinburgh Marketing Alliance has its activities overseen by a 16 strong steering group chaired by the Leader of Edinburgh City Council and includes representatives from higher education, events and the arts, tourism, science, and the private sector (www.edinburghbrand.com). A management board directs implementation of the 'Edinburgh Inspiring Capital' city brand, while day to day management of the project rests with four permanent, full-time staff. Similarly, work on the Lyon city brand is discharged by a five strong team of officers employed by the Lyon Area Development Agency (www.onlylyon.com).

As custodian of the brand, the activities of a branding authority will inter alia embrace 'policing' of the brand; city dressing; a proactive approach to brand adoption; execution of marketing campaigns and the production of supporting marketing materials; market intelligence to track the impact of the brand; and the maintenance of ambassador's networks – see section 3.

The rest of this review will examine the practice of place branding in those Western European cities where it is being consciously applied as a tool of urban renewal and regeneration, drawing on case materials from the 21 cities listed above and reviewing the academic and other literature as appropriate. Sections 2 and 3 will set out an explanatory framework within which to understand how western European cities are currently seeking to differentiate and reposition themselves through city branding exercises. The focus will be on city branding as both a structure and a process – sections 2 and 3 respectively. Section 4 comments on the difficulty of evaluating city branding, and section 5 presents some concluding reflections and observations.

Table 1: Brand campaigns in 21 European cities

City	Brand Title	Launch	Brand Authority	Visitors	Residents	Investors/ Businesses	Students
Amsterdam	I Amsterdam	2004	Amsterdam Partners	✓	✓	✓	×
Birmingham	The Birmingham b	2003	Marketing Birmingham	✓	✓	✓	✓
Berlin	be Berlin	2008	Berlin Partners	✓	✓	✓	×
Belfast	The Belfast B	2008	Belfast City Council	✓	✓	✓	×
Cardiff	The Cardiff brand	2008	Cardiff & Co	✓	✓	✓	✓
Copenhagen	Copenhagen: open for you	2009	Copenhagen Brand Secretariat	✓	✓	✓	×
Dresden	The Dresden brand	2009	Dresden Marketing Board	✓	✓	✓	×
Edinburgh	Edinburgh Inspiring Capital	2005	Destination Edinburgh Marketing Alliance	✓	✓	✓	✓
Glasgow	Glasgow: Scotland with style	2004	Glasgow City Marketing Bureau	✓	✓	✓	×
Gothenburg	The Gothenburg brand		Gothenburg & Co	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hamburg	The Hamburg brand	2004	Hamburg GmbH	✓	✓	✓	×
Leeds	Leeds. Live it. Love it	2005	Marketing Leeds	✓	✓	✓	×
Liverpool	The Liverpool brand	2009	Liverpool Vision	✓	✓	✓	×
Lyon	Only Lyon	2007	Lyon Area Development Agency	✓	✓	✓	✓
Maastricht	Everything points to the Maastricht region – to work, to live, and to love	2008	Maastricht Region Branding Foundation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Madrid	The Madrid brand	2005	City of Madrid	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nottingham	The big N	2005	Experience Nottinghamshire	✓	✓	✓	✓
Riga	Live Riga	2009	Riga Tourism Development Bureau	✓	✓	✓	×
Rotterdam	Rotterdam: world port, world city	2008	Rotterdam City Marketing Office	✓	✓	✓	×
Stockholm	Stockholm - the Capital of Scandinavia	2008	Stockholm Visitors Board Stockholm Business Region Development	✓	×	✓	×
The Hague	International city of peace and justice	2006	Hague City Council Marketing Office	✓	✓	✓	✓

2 The structure of city brands – the brand platform

All city brands have a more or less similar structure, henceforth referred to as the brand platform. One of the weakest facets of the literature on city branding is the lack of attention afforded to the seven components or building blocks of a city brand, viz. core values, logo, straplines, font, language, colour palette, and signature shots. Together, these elements comprise the brand platform. They are literally the ‘bricks and mortar’ of a consciously created place identity.

After initial deliberations leading to the decision to embark on a place branding exercise and to the identification of appropriate funding, the usual starting point for a city branding project is to secure externally the assistance of a design/identity consultancy. Whosoever is the designated branding authority charged with overseeing the creation and implementation of the brand will typically draw up a brief-to-tender. On the basis of responses to the brief-to-tender,

a preferred design/identity agency will then be appointed. The agencies may be global (e.g. Landor and Interbrand) or regional/local. Working with and reporting to the branding authority, the agency deploys its creative talents to develop all aspects of the brand platform. For instance, the 'Edinburgh Inspiring Capital' brand platform was developed over a 3 year period before its launch in May 2005. The branding authority in this case was the Edinburgh Partnership Group, serviced by the economic development department of Edinburgh City Council. (After the brand launch, the brand authority became the Destination Edinburgh Marketing Alliance referred to above, and next year it will become part of Marketing Edinburgh – an amalgamation of the Alliance, the Edinburgh Film Office, and the Edinburgh Convention Bureau). Interbrand, a division of Omnicom, was appointed as the preferred design/identity agency in June 2004.

Core values

The first aspect of the brand platform - core values – is a central part of corporate and product brands, and is sometimes referred to as brand essence. For example, the Volvo brand is underpinned by values of quality, safety and environmental care, while the Boots brand stands for trust and staff knowledge. In the case of some city brands, defining core values may prove to be more elusive and go by default, mainly due to the difficulty of achieving consensus as to what core values should be uppermost. This, in turn, reflects the complexity and pluralistic nature of cities. In most instances, however, core values are explicitly defined. For example, the core values identified in the 'Edinburgh Inspiring Capital' place branding programme comprise three clusters:

- ◆ 'inventive visionary, rich diversity';
- ◆ 'striving for excellence, understated'; and
- ◆ 'sincere warmth'.

Homing in on a past redolent with passion and a future which is focused, the core values of the Madrid city brand are 'focused passion' ([Seisededos and Vaggione](#) 2005). The Belfast city brand has 12 core values ranging from 'witty' and 'genuine' through to 'determined', 'vibrant', and 'inspiring' (www.belfastcity.gov.uk).

Unsurprisingly, the core values identified for city branding initiatives are in general those deemed to be rooted in the people past and present of the city. For 'the Big N' in Nottingham this meant 'genuine', 'independent' and 'ambitious'. The starting point for the 'I Amsterdam' city brand were three core values held to be characteristic of Amsterdammers, viz. 'creativity', 'innovation' and 'spirit of enterprise'. 'Glasgow: Scotland with style' is noteworthy as a city brand for being underpinned by a single core value ([Clark](#) 2006, pp 1-81). The symbol of the style core value is the Glasgow born architect, painter and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868 – 1928). Ambitious claims were made at the time of the brand's launch in 2004 that what Gaudi had done for Barcelona, Rennie Mackintosh could do for Glasgow. Arriving at this particular core value was the end-product of meticulous content analysis of travel reviews which indicated a Glasgow competitive advantage clustered around style. A travel piece published in Time magazine, for instance, portrayed the city as follows: 'Brimming with style and culture, Scotland's biggest city is a revelation.'

Logo and marque

Components two and three of the city brand platform – logo and slogan – are the highly visible parts of the city brand. Figure 3 is the logo and slogan associated with the ‘Edinburgh inspiring capital city’ brand. Usually the logos (or mottos and marques) are reinforced by slogans (or straplines or taglines). In Figure 3, the slogan is ‘Edinburgh inspiring capital’.



Figure 3: The logo associated with the current city branding programme in Edinburgh.

Lyon cleverly uses an anagram of Lyon to come up with an ‘Only Lyon’ strapline. The place brand for Copenhagen has the strapline ‘Copenhagen – open for you’, intended to emphasise the diverse opportunities available in the Danish capital (www.opencopenhagen.com). Sub-sets of the main strapline follow such as ‘open for dialogue’, ‘open for science’ and ‘open for inspiration’ – see ‘open for meetings’ in Figure 4. The Hague logo – known popularly as ‘the kite’ is remarkable for the absence of slogan.



Figure 4: The Copenhagen logo

As the visible end of the city brand ‘iceberg’, logo and slogan(s) are critical to its success or otherwise. If they are not well received and liked, then self-evidently the marketing undertaken by the branding authority is compromised and weakened, and local organisations will be wary of adopting the city brand, so that its usage across both alignment and sub-branding will be fitful. The potential for logo and slogan to engender controversy lies in part on the mistaken, but widely held belief that they represent the entire cost of the city branding campaign. In fact, the cost is usually a marginal one. It also reflects the intrinsic difficulty of collapsing a city and its people, with all its facets and achievements, into one symbol and a handful of words. For these reasons, city logos and slogans at and around their launches are nearly always criticised for being costly and bland. For instance, the launch of the current Liverpool place brand platform in March 2009 led to criticisms from some residents that the city skyline logo was predictable, simplistic and a waste of money. The ‘be Berlin’ city branding exercise, for instance, was castigated for large amounts of money being used to come up with two words!

Overcoming criticism such as this and achieving visibility - in formats as diverse as aeroplane fuselages, websites, posters, label badges, and carrier bags and across community, tourism, business, events and cityscape - represents no mean challenge!

If the logo and strapline are the visible tip of the branding iceberg, then font, language, colour palette and signature shots are its less recognised and equally misunderstood underbelly.

Font, language, and colour palette

Font, language, and colour palette build on core values and logo/straplines so that the city brand becomes ever more coherent, substantial, recognisable and distinctive. In the case of 'Edinburgh Inspiring Capital', for instance, the font or typeface is Myriad Roman to facilitate communication which is 'clean, modern, and stylish'. The language - the words and the associated tone to be used in marketing materials - links to the three clusters of core values referred to above and is 'imaginative, vibrant,' 'determined,' 'authentic' and 'confident'. Finally, there are 10 colours forming the palette, half of them 'warm and rich' and the remainder 'lively and vibrant'.

Signature photographs

The final and often most expensive element of the place brand platform are the signature photographs. For the 'Edinburgh Inspiring Capital' brand campaign, there is an image library grouped under seven headings, viz. abstract, buildings and skyline, people and lifestyle, festivals and events, study, and business/investment. Figure 5 illustrates a 'giggle' signature shot developed for the 'Edinburgh Inspiring Capital' campaign.



Figure 5: A 'giggle' signature shot from the 'Edinburgh Inspiring Capital' campaign.

Signature shots are meant to reflect core values and home in on competitive strengths, so presumably the giggle image is designed to counter the perception of Edinburgh folk being somewhat reserved and stuffy! The signature shots go on to figure in marketing materials produced by the brand authority and by brand adopters. Media and other communicators are also encouraged to make use of this imagery.

All of the seven elements forming the brand platform are usually brought together by the brand authority in guidelines to facilitate extensive and high quality adoption of the city brand. A link to the Edinburgh brand guidelines is provided through www.edinburghbrand.com

Once the elements have been constructed as a brand platform, the city brand itself can then be introduced. Having looked at the structure of city branding, it is to the process that we now turn in section 3.

3 City branding as a process – development, launch and application.

As a process, city branding comprises three distinct phases – development, launch and implementation.

The development phase

The development of a city brand platform requires significant resourcing though as we have said already budgets vary widely: development costs for the ‘Edinburgh Inspiring Capital’ and ‘big N’ Nottingham city brands were £800,000 and £115,000 respectively. As mentioned before, development of a city brand platform usually begins with the issuing of a brief-to-tender. Preparation of the brand brief itself is a challenge. Its scope and content may become diluted and parochial, influenced by ‘the sensibilities of a multitude of stakeholders, to embrace vast compendia of previous strategic background and be informed by every imaginable study, relevant or not, conducted over the past five years’ (Whitfield 2005).

For the ‘big N’ city brand, a local design agency, Purple Circle, was appointed to advise the branding authority, Experience Nottinghamshire. This ushered in a 16 month period of research, design, and refinement. Experience Nottinghamshire, an independent public/private partnership, with a tourism and image remit, managed that process, guiding and coordinating all the relevant parties and players. To this end it established an Image and Branding Panel drawing upon communications specialists from the local authorities, universities, local media and the private sector. The Chief Executive of Nottingham City Council and the Managing Director of the local newspaper – the Nottingham Evening Post – also sat on the Panel. The Panel reviewed the various aspects of the brand platform put forward by the design agency, including the N logo (Figure 6) which as we shall see later turned out to be so controversial.



Figure 6: Nottinghamshire's N logo

Both the Panel and the board of directors of Experience Nottinghamshire gave wholehearted and enthusiastic sign-off to the new city brand for Nottingham in February 2004. So when the brand was formally launched in the following month – see below – substantial support and ‘buy in’ had already been secured across the local public and private sectors. In particular, great care had been taken to ensure that the new brand, especially its N logo, was acceptable to both the political leadership and senior management of Nottingham City Council.

The launch phase

The second stage – the formal launch of the city brand – is self evidently intended to create initial awareness and acceptance. The usual format is to stage a high profile event, to which the branding authority invite stakeholders, the appointed design company and – crucially - media. For example, for the launch of the ‘I Amsterdam’ brand on 23rd September 2004 the ‘good and great’ of the city assembled at the Amsterdam Concert Hall to take in presentations, a book and exhibition featuring specially commissioned photographs of Amsterdam, and the brand website www.iamsterdam.com. The Mayor of the city delivered a keynote address.

Launch events are often fronted by radio and TV personalities as well as locally born ‘celebrity’ backers of the new brand. While widespread awareness and acceptance might be the intent, in practice this is rarely achieved. A city brand at the end of the day is an intrinsically parochial matter, so that its launch is usually of little or no interest to regional, national and international media. Local media on the other hand are interested, but are prone to focus on ‘negative’ (or potentially negative) aspects of the brand, viz.:

- ◆ Its cost to local residents;
- ◆ The alleged banality of the logo and strapline, and
- ◆ The characteristics of the place overlooked or underemphasised in the new brand.

Three cases exemplify the ambiguous nature of the media coverage associated with the launch of city brands.

The launch of ‘Glasgow: Scotland with style’ in March 2004 used Scottish television personality Sarah Heaney and Glasgow born actor Billy Boyd. Shortly after the launch, statistics were published showing Glasgow had the highest per capita murder rates in Europe, and no less than 8 homicides were recorded in the month following launch of ‘Glasgow: Scotland with style’. Extensive media reportage of the ‘Glasgow is Europe’s murder capital’ variety spotlighted how a rising tide of homicides stood awkwardly by the side of a campaign which was reducing the essence of the city into ‘style’. In so doing, the reportage conjured up the very ‘No Mean City’ images of gang violence and urban squalor that city leaders had been carefully seeking to eradicate over the past thirty or so years through regeneration schemes, major events such as the hosting in 1990 of European Capital of Culture, and the much celebrated ‘Glasgow’s Miles Better’ logo.

For the launch of ‘Leeds Live it Love it’ in September 2005 a champagne party was organised by Marketing Leeds, the branding authority, along with a film in which Leeds born celebrities eulogised their city. The media coverage focused on the superficiality of the slogan and the high cost of the launch event - reputedly £15,000. Shortly afterwards, local media picked up on the fact that Hong Kong was already using the ‘Live it Love it’ slogan. Confronted by all of this, the Chief Executive of Marketing Leeds was obliged to resign.

A final example is provided by the launch of the 'big N' city brand for Nottingham. This was staged at Newstead Abbey – the ancestral home of Lord Byron - in March 2004. Press and PR coverage of the launch was extensive and, unusually for a city brand, was national as well as local. BBC Radio 5 Live conducted five separate interviews, syndicated across BBC Radios 2, 3 and 4. Radio 4 featured the brand launch on its morning news programme 'Today', and BBC1 organised 4 live feeds on its UK breakfast television show. Newspapers from the Daily Telegraph to the Sun reported on the launch. Two days later the media interest became international – from CBS Radio to the Tawain News.

The coverage - local, national and international - was uniformly critical, coalescing around the view that the former Robin Hood based brand was to be displaced by an N. Successive features in the Nottingham Evening Post called for the discontinuation of the new place brand platform (Figure 7).



Figure 7: The Evening Post's reactions to the N logo

The implementation phase

The third phase – implementation – lies at the heart of city branding as a process. Co-ordinated by the branding authority, an integrated programme of brand applications is developed. The applications themselves fall into two main categories.

The first is city dressing aiming to create a ‘sense of place’ for residents, and for visitors, students and inward investors alike, as exemplified in Figure 8 taken in Glasgow in 2004 at the time of the launch of ‘Glasgow: Scotland with style’. Infrastructural applications such as these are expensive, and typically consist of banners, pennants, posters and billboards, screens, bus backs and sides, and floral displays. The second group of applications comprises marketing materials – brochures, guides, videos/DVDs and websites, fact sheets, image libraries, ‘pop-up’ stands and branded car stickers, t-shirts, pens and badges. An example – again drawn from ‘Glasgow: Scotland with style’ – is shown in Figure 9.

The marketing materials mentioned above are then used to support campaigns internal and external to the city. These are of varying degrees of intensity and sophistication, conditioned inevitably by the level of financial resource available. Following the launch of ‘Glasgow: Scotland with style’, for instance, the Glasgow Marketing Bureau mounted a £1.5 million campaign over a two and half year period which included city dressing, local and national advertising, and PR activity designed to secure international media exposure. In the case of ‘Only Lyon’, there is currently an annual promotional budget of approximately which is used on a range of applications, including a 5,000 strong ambassador network of brand supporters and an ‘Only Lyon’ award scheme.

The brand-related marketing undertaken directly by Amsterdam Partners is creative and innovative. For instance, a recent campaign sought to exploit the annual Queen’s day holiday by inviting residents and visitors to ‘party’ in the city, utilising posters depicting world leaders seemingly representing Amsterdam, e.g. American Secretary of State Hilary Clinton sporting an orange afro wig! Promotional activity makes use of Amsterdam icons – from Rembrandt through to Ajax football club and a popular Dutch disc jockey. Guerrilla marketing has cleverly utilised striking Amsterdam-related ‘It takes 25 words to change the world’ testimonies. Bannering is evident in the city, and three dimensional ‘I Amsterdam’ letters are placed in high footfall locations. A range of eye-catching ‘I Amsterdam’ merchandising has been developed which is now turning over in the region of €500,000 per annum. There are ‘meet and greet’ city stewards at Central Station, and ‘ambassadors’ have been recruited from the ranks of journalists and the creative industries. A sizeable chunk of Amsterdam Partner’s marketing budget (32%) is devoted to giving visibility to the ‘I Amsterdam’ city brand at major events both in and outside of the Netherlands – festivals, congresses and sporting championships. In this respect, forty events were linked to ‘I Amsterdam’ in 2008, including Amsterdam International Fashion Week and Dream Amsterdam. Amsterdam Partners targets its international communications and marketing activities on eleven cities – New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, Berlin, Barcelona, Bombay, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Tokyo. The aim is to position the city region as an ideal location for companies to base their European headquarters. In a collaboration with the inward investment agency (Amsterdam in Business), a glossy ‘quality of life’ magazine *Proud* is published for distribution to opinion formers and decision makers, and media campaigns are undertaken to profile Amsterdam internationally – a recent one majored on a ‘good ideas grow big in Amsterdam’ theme.



Figure 8: City dressing in Glasgow, 2004

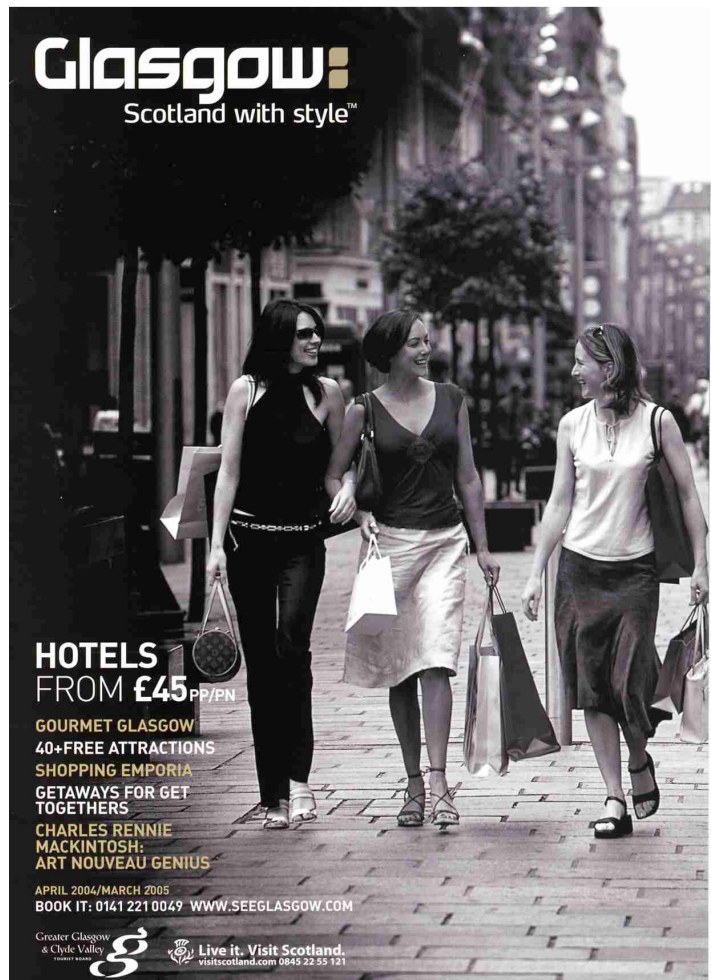


Figure 9: Marketing materials, Glasgow, 2004

I amsterdam.®

Figure 10: The 'I Amsterdam' image

To achieve maximum impact for a city brand, the branding authority invariably seeks to reinforce campaign activities by seeking partners from across the public, private and voluntary sectors, encouraging them to become brand adopters. The latter arise in three main ways. First, city leaders and residents are encouraged by the branding authority to use the logos and straplines in the form of badges, stickers, t-shirts and the like. Secondly, local organisations with a citywide remit are invited by the branding authority to become fully-fledged sub-brands of the city brand. The promotional brochure in Figure 11 shows how the Vision Nottingham inward investment agency adopted the 'big N' as its own corporate identity, thus becoming a sub-brand.



Figure 11: Brand adoption in Nottingham

Thirdly, local councils, companies, and voluntary bodies can be persuaded to align themselves to the city brand by carrying the logo/straplines and other aspects of brand architecture without diluting their own corporate identities. Alignment typically occurs in departments and sections of the city council, as well as embracing individual operators from the tourism, retail, transport, festivals, real estate, education and other sectors. Figure 12 shows the home page of the Nottingham Trent University website, carrying 'the 'Big N' logo as well as two brand sig-

nature shots. Two years after its launch, Experience Nottinghamshire reported that a total of 3 sub-brands and over 150 alignments had been recorded. The Copenhagen “Open for you” city brand has secured an impressive range of brand adopters, ranging from the city government and the Confederation of Danish Industries; through to leading companies, retailers, hotel chains, and transport providers, to the University of Copenhagen and the Microsoft Development Centre. Opposite the iconic Little Mermaid statue, the cruise port authority has emblazoned the B&W building with a huge “Open for you” banner, while the city’s underground is about to flow through the logo on new rolling stock



Figure 12: The home page of the Nottingham Trent University website

When set against the universe of possible adopters, the extent of sub-branding and alignment tends to be relatively small. Indeed, across many of the twenty one cities surveyed in this review, sub-branding and alignment tend to be fairly weakly articulated, with the exceptions of Amsterdam Berlin, Glasgow, Copenhagen, Lyon and Stockholm, and Amsterdam as discussed below. Even where the branding authority does establish a clear process, the number of sub-brands is usually small for the reasons already outlined in section 1, viz. that city organisations are reluctant to give up their own corporate identities. Alignment typically flounders on the absence of a widespread awareness of the city brand amongst city organisations and a genuine commitment to it.

The ‘I Amsterdam city brand’ is remarkable for the degree of sub-branding and alignment it has attained. A second version of the www.iamsterdam.com site went live in 2008, representing a remarkable partnership achievement in that it embodied and combined the strengths of seven ‘sectoral’ marketing organisations:

- ◆ the Amsterdam Tourism and Convention Board
- ◆ the Amsterdam Uit Bureau
- ◆ Amsterdam Top City (a clearing house and facilitator of inter-agency collaboration)
- ◆ Amsterdam in Business (the city region investment board)
- ◆ The Expat Centre (the regional service bureau for expats and foreign residents)
- ◆ the Communications Department of the municipality
- ◆ Amsterdam Partners (the CMO and branding authority)

Effectively each of these organisations became a sub-brand of 'I Amsterdam', giving an impressively joined up 'look and feel' throughout their various marketing endeavours. The portal itself is nowadays receiving monthly in the region of 200,000 unique visits.

Arguably even more impressively, brand adoption soon became evident within the municipality. Amsterdam City Council systematically employed the city brand to fashion a uniform house style across forty four urban districts and forty five municipal departments - from museums to tax offices. As a result, 'I Amsterdam' is now evident on trams, vans, signage, posters, stationery, brochures, presentations and factsheets.

In the case of 'I Amsterdam', there is also significant degree of alignment taking place, and this merits some comment. A small, but important portion of the marketing budget (4%) comprises networking expenses. This activity is co-ordinated by the Network Project Manager of Amsterdam Partners who seeks through meetings, an annual outing, and other informal contacts to maximise partner commitment to the city brand. In part, this is about maintaining and expanding the local authority subvention, as well as the 'bite size' funding contributions from companies and other institutions referred to above. Equally, if not more importantly, it is about strengthening relationships with the various partners so as to deliver additional 'off the balance sheet' activity in support of the 'I Amsterdam brand'. Networking encourages public and private sector partners to themselves utilise the city brand in their own media and marketing activities. Alignment by partners takes many forms: deploying the logo and brand images on canal boats, screens at Amsterdam airport, and JCDecaux outdoor display cases, and at high profile venues such as the Amsterdam Arena and the Ajax football ground. It leads Heineken to align its Amstel 'One Dam Good Beer' advertising campaign to the city brand. In this co-operation with Amsterdam Partners, the 'I Amsterdam' logo appeared prominently in commercials and at the New York launch of the campaign on Amsterdam Avenue. In these and many other ways, the city brand becomes ever more impactful at no or little cost to Amsterdam Partners. Effectively, adoption of the brand enables it to expand marketing activity beyond that expensed from within its own relatively modest budgets.

In contrast to Amsterdam, the difficulties of sustaining a city brand post-launch are well exemplified by the 'Birmingham b' and the 'big N' Nottingham city brand platforms.

The 'Birmingham b' brand was launched in 2003 as a key element of a new approach to promoting the city spearheaded by a public/private partnership, Marketing Birmingham, established in the previous year. The brand platform had been produced by a local design agency, Boxer, and was premised on core values held to be reflective of the city past, present and future. Local media were equivocal about the likely impact of the 'Birmingham b', but nonetheless in the aftermath of its launch the new city brand achieved a high degree of visibility locally on posters,

billboards, taxis, and bannerings. A proactive process of adoption locally and an external marketing campaign failed to materialise, so that two years later inertia had come to surround the brand platform. By 2007 Birmingham City Council's Director of Public Affairs was minded to remark that more needed to be done about the Birmingham brand. To this day the 'Birmingham b' has not been revised or replaced. It survives not as a city brand, but only as the corporate brand of Marketing Birmingham and three municipal offshoots - Digital Birmingham, Locate in Birmingham, and the Birmingham City Centre Partnership. In terms of an engineered city brand, Birmingham is effectively brandless.

Similarly, following its launch in 2004, the 'big N' Nottingham city brand achieved a significant amount of local visibility in terms of city dressing as well as alignment and sub-branding, all of it made possible by post-launch grant funding. The new brand was widely commended by marketing professionals for the quality and flexibility of its platform, and study visits were made by UK and continental cities. Its prospects of medium to long-term success, however, were compromised both by the time-limited nature of the resourcing, and by the persistence of the view that the logo should have majored on the city's legendary icon, Robin Hood. As we have shown already, this view was held strongly and vocally by the local newspaper, which referred pejoratively to the logo as the 'wonky' or 'slanty' N. The Nottingham Evening Post mounted a sustained campaign for the brand platform to be 'binned' and be replaced by one based on Robin Hood. A number of local business persons and politicians also expressed similar sentiments, albeit mostly in private.

This undercurrent of 'anti N'/'pro Robin' feeling existed despite the failure of previous attempts to brand the city on the back of Robin Hood (reference the 'Our style is legendary' place brand 1997-2003) and the fact that important city institutions were opposed to the idea of a one dimensional brand platform centred upon Robin Hood. With grant funding for the brand progressively reducing from 2006/7 onwards, and after five and a half years of having 'officially' supported the 'big N' place brand, Nottingham City Council announced in November 2009 that it would be withdrawing its support from the 'big N'. The Nottingham Evening Post front page headline pithily said: 'The End'. The Council committed itself to the introduction of a new Robin Hood city brand spearheaded by a new commission to be chaired by the Sheriff of Nottingham. The new brand platform has yet to be introduced, so that for the moment this city, too, remains more or less brandless.

Having examined the process of city branding - with all its pitfalls - the next section will discuss the outcomes and impacts of city branding initiatives.

4 City branding – assessing the outcomes and impacts

Brand projects everywhere are premised on delivering two main sets of benefits.

- 1** First, they can act as a reference and rallying point for its resident companies, institutions and people.
- 2** Secondly, brands are introduced to heighten awareness in key audiences and to subsequently generate sales and other conversions, leading to economic benefit.

As we have seen – see figure 2 - for a city brand the key audiences typically addressed are student, resident, inward investor and tourist ones. Unsurprisingly, city branding projects are often

described by the producing branding authority as being successful. For example, the Destination Edinburgh Marketing Alliance reports that its 'Edinburgh Inspiring Capital' brand is 'now well established and is delivering impressive results.' Three years on from the launch of the current Glasgow: Scotland with Style campaign the branding authority, the Glasgow Marketing Bureau, cited impressive benefits:

- ◆ 359,000 additional overnight visitors, generating nearly £42 million of local economic benefit.
- ◆ A 3% growth in hotel occupancy rates.
- ◆ Positive media coverage worth £48million in terms of advertising equivalence.

The Bureau's Chief Executive suggested that in just three years the brand has 'more than proved its worth' (www.seeglasgow.com).

Figures such as those above recording a growth in the volume and value of tourism, however, are not the same as measuring the success of individual campaigns – be they brand campaigns or sectoral ones. As various commentators have pointed out, the evaluation criteria for city branding projects is either non-existent or at best unstandardised and vague ([Murray 2001](#)). As discussed directly below, there is a requirement both for greater critical appraisal and for the establishment of meaningful key performance indicators ([Henderson 2007](#)).

Systematic arrangements to monitor the number of sub-brands and alignments secured by the branding authority are infrequently put in place, despite the fact that this is a useful indicator of the success or otherwise of a city brand as a rallying point. The development of key performance indicators tracking increased awareness and conversions from the implementation of a city branding campaign are constrained by:

- ◆ The costs of undertaking such research across the four principal audiences; and
- ◆ The methodological problem of how to isolate marketing cause and effect.

The latter point – the difficulty of disentangling and then quantifying the effects of the various marketing influences is compounded when account is taken of the wider city marketing context within which city branding exercises are executed – refer section 1.

For the reasons set out above, it remains the case that the impacts of city branding programmes have yet to be authoritatively measured and evaluated.

5 Conclusions – whither city branding in Western Europe?

The main conclusion to be drawn from this review is that city branding as it is currently practiced throughout Western Europe is marginal and problematic. Indeed, one can go as far as saying that cities are still unclear as to how to use city branding in an effective manner to drive forward economic development ([Levy 2005](#), pp 328-338). As we have seen, only a tiny minority of cities have explicit, engineered campaigns in place. Either consciously or by default, most cities do not perceive themselves as needing to create a new city brand. Amongst the still relatively small number who have elected to go down this route, none can demonstrate proven levels of success, with the possible exception of 'I Amsterdam'. It remains the case that little empirical work has been done to assess how far city branding demonstrably makes a difference to the development and prosperity of cities. Rates of return are not easily captured and measured,

with cause and effect difficult to disentangle and assess. Moreover, what we have referred to as the constraints surrounding city branding mean that the outputs and outcomes from such initiatives are limited. Analogies with what can be achieved through corporate branding exercises in the private sector fall down in the face of the lack of control and influence identified in section 1. There is a great danger in expecting too much of city branding.

Having reviewed what has been achieved over the past decade, one can characterise city branding as still being very much in its infancy. As we have seen, good progress has been made in developing brand platforms which are flexible and multi-dimensional, enabling a range of audiences to be addressed. City branding is no longer confined to simple logo and slogan-led advertising campaigns of the Glasgow's Miles Better variety. In contrast to the growing sophistication of the brand platform, however, the implementation of city branding strategies do not follow procedures which are tried and tested, let alone evaluated. It is at the crucial applications stage that city branding initiatives typically falter: budgets are small; stakeholders remain aloof or semi-detached; local media ignore or disown the city brand; for most residents the city brand is peripheral to their everyday concerns; and the relationship to the remainder of the wider city marketing enterprise remains weak. As a consequence, city branding exercises tend to lose momentum and have a short lifespan. In Europe, only the 'I Amsterdam' city brand is tantalizingly beginning to show us a 'way forward' and a promise of longevity. It will be interesting to see if it and any of the other 19 city brands included in this review sustain themselves over a medium to long term period.

In the light of what has been said above, it is critical that much more attention, effort and resourcing needs to be afforded to the process of how city branding can really be made to work, and in this respect 'I Amsterdam' is emerging as a role model – organisationally, financially, and operationally. It would, I think, be a shame if into the future city branding comes to be seen as an irrelevance, and in so doing falls completely off the agenda of urban planning and management. We feel that this is unlikely to happen. In spite of all its limitations – inherent and contrived - and with the caveat that it needs to be applied in a much more sophisticated and effective manner, city branding holds out three enduring prospects.

- 1** It is one of only a few techniques that can be used by cities to differentiate themselves in what is an increasingly homogenised, urban world.
- 2** City branding provides a rare, apolitical opportunity for the coming together of business, governance, and residents.
- 3** A city brand enables city marketing to become more 'joined up', through the processes of alignment and sub-branding.

For these three reasons, the survival of city branding for the remainder of the 21st century looks more or less assured.

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Glossary

1988 Glasgow Garden Festival: Held between April and September 1988, the festival was the third of the UK's National Garden Festivals and attracted 4.3 million visitors to Pacific Quay on the River Clyde. The National Garden Festivals were part of the regeneration of neglected and derelict land in Britain's industrial cities, the five festivals were held in Liverpool, Stoke-on-Trent, Glasgow, Gateshead and Ebbow Vale.

1990 European Capital of Culture: Glasgow was the European Capital of Culture in 1990. The designation is now European City of Culture. A city (or cities) in the European Union is designated as such for one calendar year in which it showcases cultural life, often using it to transform and regenerate the city, both culturally and in terms of National, European and international reputation.

Amsterdam Partners: www.iamsterdam.com

Barcelona Metropolis website: Website based on Information and thoughts on the city of Barcelona <http://www.barcelonametropolis.cat/en/page.asp?id=22&ui=305>

Berlin Partners: Organisation that provides support for investors in Berlin and also Berlin based companies who want to invest in foreign markets in order to forward and strengthen the city's brand. <http://www.berlin-partner.de/>

'Birmingham b': The brand of the city of Birmingham, UK. It has gradually become less and less used, though it still being used by Marketing Birmingham

Brand: "The name, symbol, term, design or any combination of these used to differentiate products or services from those competitors." This could refer to an individual product or complete product line. Branding refers to the process in which companies decide what they should offer and how it will be represented.

Richard Teare and Jorge Costa, in J Jafari (2003). *Encyclopaedia of Tourism*. Taylor & Francis

Burrell Collection (1983): The collection gifted by Sir William Burrell and his wife Lady Burrell in 1944 contained over 9,000 works of art. The collection is housed at Pollok Country Park. The building it is housed in was designed by Barry Gasson in collaboration with Brit Andresen and was opened by the Queen in 1983.

City branding: 'The self-conscious application of branding to places as an instrument of urban planning and management' (p 507). It creates a city brand, such as 'Nottingham 'the big N','Coventry inspires' and the 'Birmingham B' (link to definitions)

City Brands Index: Developed by Simon Anholt in 2006 the index measures the image and reputation of the world's cities. The index ranks 40 world cities on the dimensions:

Presence - Based on the city's international status and standing and the global familiarity/knowledge of the city. It also measures the city's global contribution in science, culture and governance.

Place - Exploring people's perceptions about the physical aspect of each city in terms of pleasantness of climate, cleanliness of environment and how attractive its buildings and parks are.

Pre-requisites- Determines how people perceive the basic qualities of the city; whether they are satisfactory, affordable and accommodating, as well as the standard of public amenities such as schools, hospitals, transportation and sports facilities.

People- Reveals whether the inhabitants of the city are perceived as warm and welcoming, whether respondents think it would be easy for them to find and fit into a community that shares their language and culture and whether they would feel safe.

Pulse- Measures the perception that there are interesting things to fill free time with and how exciting the city is perceived to be in regard to new things to discover.

Potential- Measures the perception of economic and educational opportunities within the city, such as how easy it might be to find a job, whether it's a good place to do business or pursue a higher education.

http://www.gfkamerica.com/practice_areas/roper_pam/placebranding/cbi/index.en.html

Core values: The main ideals of an organisation

'Coventry Inspires': The former brand of the city of Coventry, UK. Launched as the city brand in May 1999 used in the promotion of the city.

Destination Edinburgh Marketing Alliance: A public/private body that facilitates the promotion of the city of Edinburgh, Scotland. It was established in 2009 and brings together "leading businesses and organisations to promote the city through fresh co-ordinated planning and to enhance Edinburgh's reputation as a place to visit, invest, live, work and study." In 2011, DEMA, the Edinburgh Convention Bureau, and the film location office for the Scottish capital are to be merged into a single organisation to be called Marketing Edinburgh.

http://www.edinburghbrand.com/about_the_brand.aspx

European Cities Marketing network: "European Cities Marketing is a network of City Tourist Offices and Convention Bureaux for sharing expertise, working together on an operational level, and creating business opportunities." The objective of the network, "is to increase visitors to city destinations through effective tourism and convention marketing."

<http://www.europeancitiesmarketing.com/>

Font, language, and colour palette: Elements that go into creating a logo. Font is the style of lettering. Language is the words chosen and used in the logo. A colour palette is a fixed set of colours used in digital images.

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall (1990): Constructed in the 1980s and opened in 1990 as part of Glasgow's status as City of Culture that year. The Hall was seen as a symbol of the regeneration of the city.

'Glasgow's Miles Better': Launched in 1983 the campaign attempted to change the image of the city from its "No Mean City" image. The campaign featured the image of Mr Happy to put across a positive image of the city. The campaign ended in 1989.

'Global village': Associated with Marshall McLuhan, the term refers to the idea that through technology the world has been contracted into a village. The greater awareness of the world through technology and the immediate transfer of information across the globe has been accelerated by the spread of the Internet across the world.

Hamburg Marketing GmbH: Develops and steers the Hamburg brand within the city, nationally and internationally aiming to portray the city as a positive location and boost awareness and attractiveness of the region through promotion and marketing.

<http://www.marketing.hamburg.de/Hamburg-Marketing-GmbH.home.0.html?L=1>

Interbrand: A brand consultancy specializing in brand services and activities. It is the largest brand consultancy in the world with 40 offices worldwide. <http://www.interbrand.com/>

Landor: Landor is a brand and creative design consultancy based in San Francisco and with 21 global offices. <http://www.landor.com/>

Logos: An image used by organisations to represent themselves. The image often includes the name of the company or organisation and aims to be instantly recognisable to the public.

Lyon Area Development Agency: A body that promotes the city of Lyon, France. It aims to promote Lyon as a recognised economic force, but generally to get Lyon recognised around the world creating a brand for the city so it is “visible, clear, easy to identify and remember”. www.onlylyon.com

Nottingham ‘the big N’: The brand of the city of Nottingham, UK. The brand was unveiled in 2005 used in the promotion of the city through leaflets, advertising and road signs. The brand has lately been discontinued and there are plans by Nottingham City Council to introduce a new one.

Place branding: The branding (link to Brand definition) of a nation, city or region

Procter and Gamble: An American multinational corporation that manufacture consumer goods.

Repositioning: The process of changing the identity of a product or a brand to occupy a different position in the market and eyes of the consumer. In effect changing the product identity in order for it to fit more effectively into the market.

Return on investment: A measure of performance of investments.

Scottish Conference and Exhibition Centre (1985): Supported by the Scottish Development Agency and built on the derelict Queens Dock site at Finnieston, Glasgow. The SECC is Scotland’s largest exhibition centre.

‘Sheffield Shines’: The former brand of the city of Sheffield, UK

Straplines: The sentence or phrase attached to a brand. This emphasises the image of the brand and how the company wants to promote itself and its brand.