THE REBRANDING OF CITY PLACES:
AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

An urban regeneration program that changes fundamentally the character of a district typically involves the rebranding of the area concerned. This may be highly controversial because the redevelopment might result in the importation of financially well off residents, business infrastructures, and cultural and leisure facilities more suited to better off people than to poorer pre-existing inhabitants (who might be driven out by rising property prices and rents). This article presents the results of an investigation into the place rebranding processes of nine urban regeneration units in three countries: Britain, Denmark and the USA. The study examined, inter alia, the organization of rebranding activities, how basic decisions regarding a place's new brand identity were taken, whether integrated marketing communications were employed, consultation procedures, and the major problems that arose. A remarkable degree of consistency across the nine units' vis-à-vis the approaches towards and methods used for place rebranding was observed. Common problems seemingly invoked similar responses.

INTRODUCTION

Urban localities may be regarded as "products" in the sense that they provide labor, land, premises and industrial infrastructures to businesses (Stewart, M., 1996); while offering housing, shopping, leisure and other amenities, and a social *milieu* to residents (Barke and Harrop, 1994.) Increasingly, moreover, cities and places within them compete against each other to attract new investment, tourists and visitors, (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Kanter, 1995; Warnaby, 1998). Branding an area can help differentiate it from other places and hence greatly facilitate the promotion of its place product offer. A brand, according to Louro and Cunha (2001), is a multidimensional assortment of functional, emotional, relational and strategic elements that collectively generate a unique set of associations in the public mind (Aaker. 1996: 68). This set of associations creates a "brand image" for the entity in question, i.e., a bundle of ideas, feelings and attitudes that people have about the brand (Gardner and Levy, 1995) that sum up what it connotes or means in the eyes of the public (Patterson, 1999) The astute branding of a locality will highlight to outsiders its meaning in terms of its "core benefits, style and culture" (cf. Louro and Cunha, 2001: 860-861) and (critically) will assist potential stakeholders (such as investors, residents or tourists) to identify the sources of place products relevant to their needs (cf. Ryder, 2000) Thus, the branding of an area can give it a substantial competitive edge.

PLACE BRANDS

City places, according to Bramwell and Rawding (1996) have become relatively substitutable. West (1997) argued that place substitutability made locational branding

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inevitable in consequence of the ever-growing globalization of business investment and the ferocious nature of the competition among places to attract employing companies, to host major sporting or cultural events, or to become centers for tourism (Miller, 1997). The branding of entire cities has been common for many years (Williams, 1994; Bramwell and Rawding, 1996; Miller, 1997; West, 1997). Well-documented UK examples of the practice include city brands with slogans such as "Leeds the Happening City" (Ward, 1999), "Stoke-on-Trent: The City that Fires the Imagination," "Sheffield the Welcoming City," and, "Birmingham: The Meeting Place of Europe" (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996). The brand imagery involved seeks to reflect a place's aspirations (cf. Hedberg, 2001) and to link the locality *as a whole* with common attributes, benefits, relationships, programs and values attached to various products and services offered within the area (cf. Keller, 1999). Each component of the brand image should possess a rational and/or emotional relevance to a particular constituency and combine with all the other components to provide a total brand experience (cf. Braune, 2000).

REBRANDING OF CITIES

In the same way that large companies sometimes overhaul or completely replace their images and relaunch themselves as fresh corporate brands (Hedberg, 2001 for a list of examples), so too have many cities sought to establish completely new brand identities. Indeed, according to West (1997), "almost every" major post-industrial town or city in Britain, "…has attempted to reinvent or reposition itself by adopting marketing techniques lifted straight from the brand manager's handbook." (West 1997: 11) If it is done effectively, urban rebranding will attract investors and visitors (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996), appeal to government officials, engender civic pride (Williams, 1994), and conspicuously distinguish a place from competing locations. Place rebranding exercises might be implemented to revive a pre-existing but outdated place image in order to make it more relevant to a target market (cf. Hedberg, 2001), or in recognition of the occurrence of fundamental alterations in the character of an area, or to communicate to potential stakeholders a change in the activities undertaken within the region. Crucially, place rebranding affords opportunities for disassociating a locality from past failures or social or other problems (cf. Lewis, 2000). A place might be repositioned in a better market sector (Spaeth, 1998) the new brand image can be used to convey the message that a wider and different range of place products are now on offer to business investors, visitors and tourists (cf. Summers, 1994).

West (1997) reported that many of the highest profile place rebranding exercises have been completed by cities such as Glasgow, Manchester, Leeds or Newcastle, "…old industrial centers that have needed to reposition themselves as centers of leisure and amenity rather than of production and heavy industry" (12). Urban decline within these cities, moreover, had frequently led to media portrayals of their being associated with severe economic and social deprivation, homelessness, high levels of crime, vandalism, public disorder, dirtiness and a dearth of civic amenities (Miller, 1997). The desire to discard imagery connected with an industrial heritage seems to have been extremely strong. For example, in 1991 the city of Manchester embarked on a major rebranding exercise designed to reinvent Manchester as exciting, lively, cosmopolitan, dynamic and culturally enlivened (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996). The new brand was accompanied by the slogan "The Life and Soul of Britain" in conjunction with visual images portraying Manchester as energetic, innovative, culturally sophisticated, and having a

strong youth culture. Likewise, Bradford's "Footsteps of the Brontës" imagery differed sharply from the reality of the city's industrial past. The latter was the subject of an additional rebranding exercise under the name "Bradford's Bouncing Back" (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996). Glasgow experienced two rebranding campaigns in the 1980s and early 1990s. The first "Welcome Home to Glasgow" program featured a "Mr. Happy" figure to "redefine Glasgow and Glaswegians as friendly and welcoming" (West, 1997: 12) and to promote Glasgow as a place to which expatriate Scots should pay a visit. This was replaced however by the "Glasgow's Miles Better" campaign which aimed at wider international audiences and emphasized cultural renaissance and the rebirth of artistic events in the region. Note that the phenomenon of city rebranding is not restricted to the UK (Xiao, 1998). For instance, Amsterdam's "City on the Water" rebranding campaign attempted to rebrand Amsterdam as a genteel tourist destination for older people, in contrast with its risqué "dirt and disorder" image of sexual liberalism, narcotics indulgence and youth culture (Dahles, 1998; Ashworth and Tunbridge, 1990). Copenhagen's "City of Light" rebranding program was motivated by similar considerations.

DISTRICT REBRANDING

An increasingly common practice is for a city's authorities to attach a fresh brand identity to a particular locality *within* the city, especially when the area has been redeveloped so extensively that its basic character has changed. Many neighborhoods in "industrial" cities went into decline in the 1960s and 70s, resulting in a contraction of the local tax base, economic and social deprivation, high levels of crime and homelessness, environmental pollution, and a dearth of local shops, civic amenities and services (Miller, 1997). Often the people who continued to reside in these districts were unskilled and unable to secure jobs in local businesses. Rather, jobs in the area were taken by better educated employees who would commute from more prosperous areas (Brueckner *et al*., 1999).

Government policy both in Western Europe and North America has been to enhance the attractiveness of depressed inner city neighborhoods by stimulating both business investment and the inflow of new residents (*via* house building and public transport subsidies) (Ashworth and Voogd, 1994; Williams, 1994; Elliot, 1996; Warnaby, 1998; Ward, 1999). Retail outlets and entertainment venues have been especially welcome as they attract visitors, encourage "leisure shopping" (which involves meeting friends, visiting cafes, cinemas, etc. – Verbeke, 1990) and help dissuade local people from travelling to and spending money in outlying districts (Warnaby, 1998). Examples of district rebranding within urban conurbations abound. For instance, Bar-Hillel (2002a) reported how Bankside (the rundown area surrounding the Tate Modern Gallery [one of London's most popular attractions]) was being transformed into "a piece of the West End" with sights more familiar in Covent Garden including an attractive complex of shops and cafes in pedestrianized alleys leading to the Tate (72). Likewise, plans were proposed in 2002 to transform London's Bishopsgate Goodsyard area into the "Covent Garden of the East End", with a raised "park in the sky" alongside "green paths and modern amenities" (18). Controversy surrounded the development, however, as the district was the center of one of Britain's largest Bangladeshi communities and housed a local market and many small ethnic-minority owned businesses (Moore, 2002). In March 2002, Bar-Hillel (2002b) noted the existence of no less than 13 Thames riverside

area developments that would completely transform the areas concerned. However, all of them were subject to "pitched battles" between local residents and the bodies seeking to "rejuvenate" the locality. (Such conflicts paralleled those previously experienced during the redevelopment of Spitalfields, Docklands and similar areas in London's East End.) The City of Newcastle's Grainger Town development sought to brand a "cultural quarter" within the city using the slogan "Newcastle: A Real Eye Opener" alongside a drawing of an opening eye inside a bridge across the river Tyne. Another example of district rebranding was the 1996 "London's Wild" campaign which attempted to rebrand some of London's central tourist areas as vibrant and exciting, with a 24-hours a day night-life and culture (rather than their being traditional historical places dominated by museums and art galleries) (West, 1997).

The products developed by urban redevelopment units have been increasingly diverse and sophisticated. For example, a governmental review (DETR, 1998) noted how the Urban Development Corporation (UDC) for Leeds had developed the Brewery Wharf Museum and Visitor Center, relocated the Royal Armouries Museum, created a nature reserve with associated recreational facilities, built houses along the river frontage, and established a shopping mall and a business and industrial park. Similar projects had been undertaken by the UDC for Central Manchester, which in addition had constructed a major concert hall and a "canal-basin complex of leisure and cultural activities" (DETR 1998: 3). Bristol UDC had improved riverbanks and restored a Victorian railway station. All three of the UDCs in question were involved in improving road and transport infrastructures, and all were anxious to clear, refurbish and conserve buildings and support small-scale environmental projects. The contemporary approach is to try to make a location a desirable place in which to live (as well as to invest and develop industrial activity) and one that outsiders will want to visit for social and recreational purposes and in order to shop and spend money (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Williams, 1994; Warnaby, 1998; Ward, 1999). Hence an urban regeneration program might devote as much attention to removing graffiti, laying flower beds and refurbishing facades as it does to advertising (publicly financed) conversions of old warehouses into cheap business premises. The availability of parks, libraries, swimming pools, theatres and museums may be deemed as important as the creation as new manufacturing premises, car parks and convention centers. It is important to note that although the marketing of an area cannot *of itself* physically improve the district it is undoubtedly the case that, in the words of Hultink and Hart (1998: 106), "the world will not automatically beat a path to the door of a better mousetrap". Rather, the advantages of new developments must be communicated forcefully and meaningfully to the public. Successful urban regeneration can only be achieved when people become aware of the existence of new place products and recognize that they possess real benefits. This implies a critical role for the marketing function during the process of rebranding.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

This article presents the results of a study of the neighborhood rebranding activities of nine urban regeneration units in London (UK), Boston (USA) and Copenhagen (Denmark). It focuses particularly on the problem of creating a meaningful new brand for a redeveloped district that possesses multiple identities and where the development is politically controversial. The research examined sources of influence on decision making processes; the extents and natures of consultations with current and potential stakeholders; whether "top down" rather than "bottom up" administrative procedures

were applied; and unit managers' perceptions of the problems associated with rebranding. An important aim of the study was to establish the degrees to which urban regeneration units in different countries employed disparate approaches to the management of rebranding and, if substantial differences occurred, to identify the reasons for divergences. The research was necessarily exploratory in character consequent to the absence of prior empirical investigation in the field and because so little is known about the rebranding of city places. Hence, the objective was to discover the major variables affecting outcomes and the key relationships among them in order to lay groundwork for subsequent more rigorous testing of specific hypotheses (Churchill, 1991).

THE PROCESS OF REBRANDING

The main steps in rebranding comprise name creation and registration, the design of a logo and associated visual image, market research, internal communications, external public relations, and advertising (Haigh, 2000). More fundamentally, rebranding might be seen either as a tactical issue whereby the new brand is *operationally* attached to the place product, or as an important strategic matter in which all the processes of the urban development authority revolve around the construction and development of the new brand (Louro and Cunha, 2001). Manifestations of a strategic approach to rebranding allegedly include the development of a shared vision and control across seemingly unrelated activities (Spaeth, 1998), the systemic alteration of a place's entire strategic direction in accordance with the needs of the new brand (cf. Hedberg, 2001), and the use of integrated marketing communications (i.e. ensuring that all the agencies involved in the rebranding process are communicating the same message [Mazur, 2001]). Braune (2000) suggested that the achievement of such objectives would be facilitated by the formation of a "round table" of brand strategists, analysts and implementers (internal and external) "brought together from the outset to share understanding and avoid a descent into the "process mentality""(Braune 2000:399). It was essential, Braune continued, for the brand creators to be capable of empathizing with the people they were attempting to reach.

As regards integrated marketing communications (IMC), numerous studies completed in the commercial world have commented on its ability to facilitate branding exercises (DePelsmacker *et al*., 2001: 8-15). The adoption of IMC implies that, for instance, public relations programs are constructed around advertising campaigns and those hard copy promotional materials have the same "look and feel" as an organization's website. Integration has been deemed necessary because of the growing number of available communications weapons, the increasing fragmentation of markets, dissatisfaction with traditional forms of advertising, and the need to "leverage scarce resources" (Stewart, D., 1996: 147). A unified voice helps an organization consolidate its image and cut through the noise of many hundreds of promotional messages that continuously beset target audiences. Other benefits allegedly accruing to IMC include the heavier overall impact of a campaign, better use of creative ideas, synergy among promotional tools, and lower costs.

THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED

The quintessential difficulty associated with place rebranding is that a brand image suitable for one group of stakeholders (business investors for instance) may be inappropriate for others (e.g., pre-existing residents). Ideally, the brand assigned to a place will reflect its intrinsic attributes, characteristics and core identity. In many cases, however, the area that is to be rebranded will have a history of social and economic problems and may be extremely diverse in terms of local residents" ethnicity, social class, culture, lifestyle, income levels and types of employment. There need be no unity of purpose among resident groups, each of which will consume disparate bundles of urban services and hence may perceive the "city product" differently (Ashworth and Voogd, 1994; Warnaby and Davies, 1997). Consequently it might be difficult to develop a brand that convinces and correlates with the experiences of everyone, from local citizens to potential foreign investors (Miller, 1997).

Pre-existing *residents* of a community may want its brand image to project the district's local distinctiveness and the aspirations and cultures of current inhabitants (Bolton, 1992). Urban development agencies, conversely, have been known to seek to establish place brands grounded purely on commercial advantages, e.g., the availability of cheap labor, government incentives, low costs, ancillary business services, technology infrastructures, and an area's international links and orientation (Elliott, 1996; McMorrow, 1999). Such messages may have little meaning for local residents (Matson, 1994). The challenge for the marketing manager is therefore to abridge diverse multiple identities within a specific location into a concise and easily understood brand which appeals to business investors and tourists but without compromising indigenous cultures and the distinct pre-existing characteristics of the area.

This can be a tall order, however, as urban development authorities may well be taking decisions *vis-à-vis* which groups they wish to attract from outside and which pre-existing categories of resident they want to retain and nurture. Many urban places have multiple stakeholders (old and new residents, business investors, retailers, domestic and foreign visitors, owners of sporting and leisure venues, etc.) and conflicts among them may occur. DETR (1998) reported "continuous warfare" between local residents and business interests over proposals for the redevelopment (and by implication the rebranding) of certain districts in several English cities and noted how "resident communities" did not always experience the benefits of regeneration programs as much as newcomers, tourists, visitors, and others from outside. West (1997) argued that place branding would only work if the values of the brand were, "…rooted in the aspirations of the people" (West 1997: 12). This was highly problematic however because the basic brand proposition typically had to be sold to, "…people of different races and different tastes." (West 1997: 12).

The other main problem with place rebranding is its cost, as the repositioning of any brand is likely to require significant alterations in the marketing mix (Aaker, 1996). A new set of advertisements, promotions, PR activities, etc., may be needed in order to develop awareness of and formulate attitudes towards the new place products implied by the revised brand identity. The place's core products (i.e., the unique benefits that are being marketed) will be positioned in the public mind according to the products' costs and availability, features, and how these attributes are promoted. A mix of marketing elements appropriate for the modified core place products is likely to be quite different

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to that relevant for the district as it was prior to redevelopment. Fresh images and a new reputation must be created, possibly at substantial financial cost.

THE INVESTIGATION

Three of the localities examined were in London, three in Copenhagen and three in Boston. An earlier study of the place product development practices of 22 urban regeneration units in these cities revealed that nine of them involved rebranding (i.e., the changes in the characters of the districts concerned were so far-reaching that they necessitated rebranding campaigns). Hence, a separate follow-up investigation was completed to establish the rebranding strategies and practices adopted by the nine units, and the main influences involved. All nine of the units were engaged in the same sorts of development projects, e.g., transport infrastructure improvement (two London units, three Copenhagen and two Boston units), crime prevention programs (two units in each city), the development of cultural facilities (two units in London and in Copenhagen, three units in Boston), plus street market and open space improvement, building renovation, waterfront development, and the establishment of libraries and public parks. The three cities are located in countries with similar economic and political systems and commercial structures, and are at comparable stages of economic development. All the districts studied contained (initially) multi-cultural and multi-ethnic populations and, prior to regeneration, were characterized by high levels of unemployment and social exclusion among certain resident groups. Hence the locations selected were eminently suitable for assessing the manners whereby urban regeneration units confronted the issue of multiple identities when rebranding an area. An international comparative investigation was undertaken because city places increasingly compete with each other across national frontiers (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Matson, 1994; Kanter, 1995; Ward, 1999) and because comparative international studies (i) highlight specific practices that are universally applied and (ii) show how common problems are dealt with in different countries.

RESEARCH METHOD

As the rebranding practices of urban regeneration units have (to the best of the authors" knowledge) not been investigated previously, an exploratory research methodology was adopted without specifying any prior propositions or hypotheses. Information was collected *via* in-depth interviews with at least two people in each of the nine units. Face-to-face interviews were deemed appropriate in view of the sensitivity of the topics discussed and the highly controversial nature of the developments the units were implementing. The researchers could strike a rapport with the interviewees in order to induce them to disclose relevant information that would probably not have been forthcoming if a questionnaire had been mailed to a larger sample. Five of the interviewees were chief executives. The remainder had job titles such as general manager, senior planner, project leader, or senior program manager.

The interview procedure applied followed that recommended by Eisenhardt (1989), i.e., a loose but semi-structured approach based on questions of a general nature derived from a review of academic and practitioner literature in relevant areas. However, the *interviewee* determined the emphasis given to various topics. Thus the respondent was at liberty to detail the considerations deemed most pertinent to a unit's rebranding

activities, and to omit or explain the perceived irrelevance of other matters: This approach is known to facilitate the study of decisions within their natural context (Yin, 1984) and to be especially suitable for evaluating the *motives* behind important decisions (Robson and Foster, 1989). Further advantages of this *genre* of interview format include its flexibility (essential for a purely exploratory study – see Oppenheim, 1996) the provision of a deep understanding of relevant issues, the capacity to put specific points into a general context, and the facilitation of theory development (Harris, 2000: 602 for details of academic literature supporting these propositions).

A schematic overview of the issues explored during the interviews is presented in Figure 1. This was used as a general guide for the development of the conversations, although care was taken not to pre-suppose that these particular issues were all embracing. Respondents' comments were taped and initially coded in accordance with the case replication strategy recommended by Yin (1984). Thus, the first (UK) case was examined in depth and successive (UK and foreign) cases then studied to establish whether the responses found in the first matched patterns evident in subsequent cases. Common themes, issues, contexts and problems discussed by the interviewees were noted and disparities in response patterns listed. Clusters of similar comments on specific matters were then identified and recorded using the QSR NU-DIST 4 package. As the respondents were entirely free to communicate their thoughts and opinions without any pressure from the interviewers, there were no grounds for supposing that the semi-structured formats of the conversations led to biases or excessive conformity among the replies. Also, interviews were conducted with a number of different people (all possessing extensive and specialist knowledge of relevant matters) in each unit, and the within-case comparisons of the responses of individuals in particular units revealed a range of disparate interpretations of various issues. Hence it is concluded that the selected interview format did not present the participants with "leading questions" that encouraged uniform replies.

FINDINGS

Respondents in all the units reported that the primary motivation for rebranding the area for which they were responsible derived from bad pre-existing images in relation to poor housing, social deprivation, and high levels of crime, environmental pollution and industrial dereliction. All the projects were controversial and implied fundamental changes in the characters of the areas concerned, normally involving (according to critics) the attraction of higher income and better educated residents (plus social and leisure amenities utilized by this group) at the expense of pre-existing inhabitants.

The units employed between 5 and 14 people full-time, and all were financed mainly by local government. Each of the units was embedded in a larger and wider-ranging local government organization from which it could (and did) draw additional resources and staff. Hence the sizes of the workforces of the units were effectively larger than the above mentioned figures. All the London units and two of the units in Boston had dedicated marketing personnel. In the three Copenhagen units and the remaining Boston unit, marketing was looked after by staffs who were not specialists in the field. All nine of the units engaged the services of professional market research firms and all used external marketing consultants. The role of the latter turned out to be operational rather

than strategic, typically concerning logo design, advertising methods, media planning, and other variables.

Interviewees in six of the nine units reported (without prompt) that they formally monitored the progress of place rebranding activities in other cities and/or foreign countries in order to obtain ideas. One of the London interviewees noted how "we follow events in similar projects in other places" (foreign as well as domestic) "to find out what worked, and more importantly what did not work, elsewhere so we can learn from the mistakes of others". Another commented on how "it's really great to communicate with people in other cities and talk about the problems we all face and to learn about the latest methods". A number of the interviewees mentioned the close similarity of the circumstances; difficulties and challenges faced by urban regeneration projects throughout the industrialized World. Thus, they continued, the routine observation of how common issues were dealt with by other units was extremely valuable. Monitoring occurred through the maintenance of files on other projects, attendance at conferences and conventions, and the collection of the promotional materials of other units, and direct correspondence and conversations. Much of the information for files was obtained from the trade press and from the Internet.

DECISION MAKING

There was a complete schism between strategic decision-making and implementation. It was *not* the case that a "round table of brand strategists, analysts and implementers" convened on a regular basis to devise and execute the new brand, as advocated by Braune (2000: 399). Rather, key decisions concerning brand identity were handed down (in manners described below) and the regeneration unit was then charged with the task of implementing the new identity. Without exception the respondents stated that local government took elemental decisions regarding the nature of an area's new brand identity. The only differences between units occurred *vis-à-vis* which *particular* local government departments participated in the decision-making process (e.g., the Mayor's office, environment department, tourism office, transportation department, etc.). Interestingly, only one of the interviewees (in London) stated that marketing personnel were in any way involved with basic rebranding decisions, and even here the individual concerned was a public relations officer whose role was more to advise on how various groups would react to specific new brand identities than to contribute to decision-making *per se*. Overwhelmingly moreover, major decisions on the new brand were taken in a "big bang" (a phrase used by one of the Copenhagen interviewees) whereby matters were determined by a handful of people in a short period.

The respondents were asked to specify which people or bodies they believed exerted the strongest influences on their local authorities" place branding strategies. A broad definition of the meaning of "branding strategy" was offered to the interviewees in terms of decisions concerning the general character of the place after its development, the determination of priorities, and how radical the changes in the area were to be (cf. Hegarty and Hoffman, 1990). Respondents in seven of the nine units mentioned local government officials (i.e., career civil servants); people in all nine units named representatives of small businesses or of companies in general; seven units specified property owners. Only one unit in Boston and one in Copenhagen included pre-existing local residents" associations in their list.

This emphasis on business and property interests was matched by the consultation procedures typically employed when brand strategies were determined. All nine units affirmed that they formally and routinely consulted representatives of trade, business or employers" associations; but only one unit in each city possessed formal procedures for consulting representatives of residents" groups, and the procedures were usually *ad hoc*. Interviewees were questioned about the techniques their local authority employed when deciding an appropriate brand identity for a locality. Respondents in two units in London and two in Copenhagen mentioned focus groups; two units in Boston, one in London and one in Copenhagen referred to the distribution of questionnaires to businesses; interviewees in two units in Copenhagen stated that their local authorities had convened open public meetings at the outset of the development (but not thereafter). When asked about the main audiences to which the new brand identity was directed, all the respondents mentioned businesses, five referred to potential residents and three to existing residents. However, the market research conducted by the nine units normally turned out to be geared towards business requirements (e.g., interviews with business owners, street surveys of shoppers to establish which types of retail outlet would attract them to the area) rather than canvassing the views of existing residents (only one of the units employed a market research firm to canvass the opinions of local people).

Hence, the model employed by all the local authorities in the sample seemingly involved a top-down approach whereby the determination of an area's new brand identity was taken by local government (in conjunction with certain stakeholders) and the urban regeneration unit concerned was then instructed to establish the chosen identity. It is relevant to note in this connection that none of the units possessed or intended acquiring a system for the *post hoc* measurement of public perceptions of the new brand or of the brand's effectiveness. The only evaluation that took place (in one unit in each of the three cities) was the counting of the number of new businesses setting up in the area and (in London only) monitoring their progress. This reinforces the view that once the basic rebranding decision had been taken there was little interest in discussing or assessing the matter any further.

ORGANIZATION AND REBRANDING METHODS

Cross-functional multi-disciplinary teamworking was the norm in all the units. Issues relating to the implementation of a new brand identity were regularly discussed at team meetings, with the person or people in charge of the unit's marketing taking the lead. The prevalence of teamworking was explained by one of the London respondents as follows:

> Because we operate in a small unit it's simply not feasible to apply functional distinctions. When something needs to be done we talk about it at our weekly meeting and somebody will take ownership of the task. It's still the case that everyone is involved though, right through to the end. This suits everybody because everyone knows exactly what is going on and everyone can help (Anonymous).

Relationships between marketing personnel (either within the units themselves or in the wider local government organizations servicing the units) and staff concerned with the more technical aspects of urban redevelopment were uniformly reported as being excellent. Marketing staff was regarded as key members of urban regeneration teams

and attended all-important meetings. There was extensive communication and information sharing between marketing and other functions and much multi-tasking (whereby marketing staff actively participated in discussions concerning the technical side of a unit's activities). The essential cause of the harmony between marketing and technical staff apparently derived from a widespread perception that urban regeneration units needed to portray their activities as attractively as possible. In the words of a Boston respondent:

> Without marketing and good PR we are nothing. There are so many different interest groups knocking on our door that we need really smart people to communicate our message and keep everybody happy (Anon).

A Copenhagen interviewee noted that, "…marketers can do things and 'go places' the rest of us simply haven't a clue about … they really make a big input to the team."

Invariably the interviewees recognized that rebranding *necessitated* substantial investment in promotion, public relations, image building, influencing politicians, and convincing local authority funders that a unit was doing an admirable job, and so on. Town planners, economic developers, etc., seemed pleased that marketing staff were available to complete these important duties.

The units in the sample employed much the same techniques when establishing their new brands: press releases, websites, direct mail, leaflets and brochures, press advertising, and word-of-mouth. One of the London units also used radio advertising and poster campaigns. Respondents in the London units described the desired new brand images for their areas in terms of their being "exciting", "cosmopolitan" and "the place to be". In Copenhagen the emphasis was on the benefits of investing and/or residing in the district; in Boston the imagery focused on "building a better neighborhood", especially in relation to freedom from crime. However, interviewees in two thirds of the units stated (without prompt) that they transmitted different messages to disparate actual or potential stakeholder groups: businesses, landlords, pre-existing residents, potential residents, retailers, shoppers, etc. Typically the respondents justified this "one brand many messages" approach on the grounds that a message appropriate for one group (property owners for instance) would have little relevance for others. Also it appeared to the interviewers that the respondents feared the possibility that the uniform projection of certain messages would antagonize particular interest groups (although the interviewees were reluctant to discuss this matter directly). Thus, for instance, imagery and messages directed towards specific resident ethnic minorities were not replicated in other promotional materials. Likewise, messages implying rising living costs, property prices and rents (factors likely to drive out ethnic communities) were not incorporated into materials devised for existing residents. "You need to project different images to different interest groups," a Copenhagen respondent commented. A unified message strategy was impossible, she continued, because "the welfare of so many conflicting groups is affected," and "one group's gain is another's loss." Local authorities wanted brand images that attracted businesses but, in the words of an interviewee in another Copenhagen unit:

> If you don't have the existing residents on board you'll never change an area's image. The local people need something they can identify with, even if the World around them – I mean *their* World – is collapsing (Anon).

A Boston respondent stated that on occasion it was necessary to "pull an appropriate image out of the hat like a rabbit". In London an interviewee similarly noted that "any interest group that is *seen* to lose out while others is observed gaining will of course feel aggrieved, and that causes a lot of trouble." Thus, units were generally reluctant to incorporate the same themes into all their promotions and materials.

Clearly, therefore, there was no attempt to apply integrated marketing communications (IMC) within this sample of organizations. Indeed, when the respondents were questioned about the issue directly it emerged that not one of the units had even considered adopting the practice. IMC supposedly ensures that the "messages conveyed by each of the promotional tools are harmonized in order that audiences perceive a consistent set of messages" (Fill, 2002: 141; Stewart, D., 1996). In the present sample, however, the controversial natures of the developments that the units were implementing seriously discouraged the use of IMC. Thus, the failure to employ IMC was a deliberate policy decision and did not ensue from the practical problems known to inhibit IMC implementation (e.g., the complexity and difficulty of co-ordinating disparate promotional activities, lack of relevant skills among marketing staff). Moreover, none of the interviewees even mentioned the (common) criticism of IMC that it necessitates "putting all your marketing communications eggs in the same basket" hence making it difficult to modify an integrated program when marketing conditions alter. Rather, different stakeholder segments were regarded as possessing quintessentially disparate needs for information. The possibility that various constituencies might be confused by the sight of inconsistent messages about the characteristics of an area was not raised by any of the respondents.

THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED

Consensus prevailed regarding the fundamental problem connected with area rebranding, namely the need to deal with capricious local politicians while balancing the image requirements of businesses and pre-existing residents. Interference in a unit's work by local government officials and politicians was said to be common place. All but one of the units (in Boston) alleged that political factors adversely affected their work. "There is perpetual conflict between businesses and the local community and the politicians are constantly changing sides", stated an interviewee in one of the London units. "We have too many politicians to appease, and we don't know from one day to another what they expect", commented a respondent in the other. "There is no consensus among the politicians regarding what the area should be", insisted an interviewee in Copenhagen. This resulted, he continued, in politicians and local government officials "constantly telling us what we should and should not think" (in relation to ideas and activities for developing the brand).

Political ambivalence made it extremely difficult to establish clear aims and objectives for the brand, stated a London respondent. Furthermore:

> People may not want a repositioned area so whatever (brand identity) you come up with there will always be conflict. The politicians don't really know what they want; the officials (i.e. local government civil servants) think they know what the politicians want, but that's not always the case. As for us, we are left in the middle (Anon).

Interviewees in two of the Copenhagen units and a unit in Boston also mentioned the reluctance of local people to (in the words of a Copenhagen interviewee) "buy the brand", and hence the problem of setting meaningful goals for the new brand identity. Another difficulty (mentioned in London) was the short period of time in which rebranding decisions were taken, compared to the far longer periods necessary to build relationships with local residents and businesses in order to 'sell the brand". An interesting issue raised by two of the Copenhagen respondents (though not repeated elsewhere) was that, to secure ongoing funding for a project, local politicians and government officials had to be convinced that the area really needed rejuvenation. This meant transmitting messages and circulating promotional materials that depicted the district as unattractive, dangerous, and generally run down. Otherwise grants would not be forthcoming. Yet these negative representations helped create precisely the sorts of bad image that subsequent rebranding exercises would have to overcome.

CONCLUSIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PLACE BRAND MANAGEMENT

The research explored rebranding issues and practices in a public sector context where new brand identities were determined in a top-down manner by local government authorities. In reaching strategic brand identity decisions a local authority would consult extensively, systemically and formally with business interests and owners of property in the area. Conversely, consultations with existing residents were irregular and usually *ad hoc*. Once a rebranding decision had been taken there was no attempt at *post hoc* brand effectiveness measurement or evaluation. A remarkable similarity of the approaches towards and methods used for place rebranding by units operating in different countries was observed: there were no significant national differences in practice. Analogous problems confronted the units in all three cities and seemingly evoked the same sorts of responses. Managers in a majority of the units closely monitored the activities of urban regeneration units undertaking comparable work in other nations.

Units followed the rebranding stages known to occur in the commercial World (design of logo and visual imagery, market research, PR and advertising (Haigh, 2000), although there was no attempt at implementing integrated marketing communications. Rather, a "one brand many messages" approach was adopted whereby the new overall brand identity was operationally attached to messages directed towards various constituencies (cf. Louro and Cunha, 2001). The respondents complained that effective brand implementation was hampered by political factors arising from conflicts among local stakeholders. Politicians possessed ambivalent and inconsistent attitudes regarding what a place was supposed to be, and were anxious to appease all the groups in the district. This led to contradictory demands and a lack of clear brand vision (cf. Spaeth, 1998; Braune, 2000). The uncertainties and ambiguities arising from this state of affairs made it difficult to execute the brand. Marketing staff was highly respected by technical developers and other unit employees on the grounds that marketing people had a great deal to contribute in these sorts of circumstances. Multi-disciplinary teamworking was the norm and marketing personnel were heavily involved in a wide range of developmental activities.

A major implication of the findings is the need for local authorities to consider seriously the benefits of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the new brand identities that they decide shall be implemented. Local authorities might justify their neglecting to

measure brand performance on the grounds that, given all the difficult circumstances and conflicting interests involved, final decisions must be unequivocal and enforced firmly and without question. Yet, notwithstanding the political sensitivity of the brand identify actually chosen, it would still be desirable to ascertain whether a new brand is fulfilling its core objectives. Is the brand perceived by various stakeholders in the manners the decision-maker originally intended? Could a relatively minor modification of the brand (i.e., one that does not affect its central meaning) substantially improve its attractiveness to potential incoming businesses, visitors and residents? Is the brand influencing appropriate market segment; has the impact of the brand been as strong as initially anticipated? None of these questions can be answered in the absence of a brand measurement system; the implementation of which might clarify issues, pinpoint possible improvements, and (critically) generate information that might be extremely valuable for the design of future urban redevelopment projects.
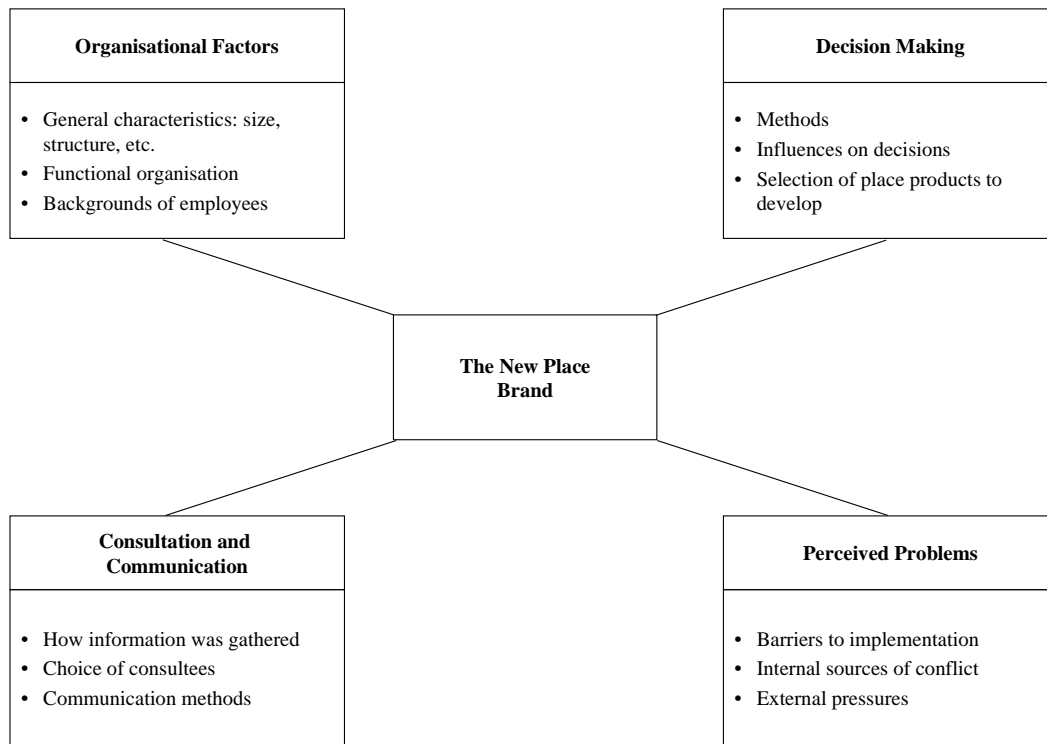
Another disturbing implication of the results is the potential damage to the sample units" overall marketing strategies caused by the absence of integrated marketing communications programs. IMC enables one promotion or message to leverage others, creates important economics of scale, and prevents confusion. If the particular circumstances of city place rebranding render IMC impossible then rational alternative approaches should be explored carefully and systematically, and the costs and benefits of each option measured. The reasons for not employing IMC should be set out explicitly. None of the units in the sample had examined the advantages and disadvantages of IMC in a methodical fashion. A third matter to which local authorities might profitably pay greater attention is the efficiency of the process whereby the new brand identity of an area is determined. The respondents indicated that, typically, strategic branding decisions were taken quickly by local government officers (at the behest of local politicians) in consultation with business and property owning interests. Marketing personnel were not normally involved in discussions at this crucial stage. Instead the new brand identity was decided upon at the upper level and handed down to an urban regeneration unit for implementation. An input from marketing people at the time that fundamental rebranding decisions were being taken might perhaps have helped local authorities to recognize operational difficulties likely to ensue from certain courses of action, and hence to avoid some of the subsequent image-building problems noted by the respondents.

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Figure 1. The Interview Schedule

Organisational Factors	Decision Making
• General characteristics: size, structure, etc. • Functional organisation • Backgrounds of employees	• Methods • Influences on decisions • Selection of place products to develop

The New Place Brand

Consultation and Communication	Perceived Problems
• How information was gathered • Choice of consultees • Communication methods	• Barriers to implementation • Internal sources of conflict • External pressures

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