

URBAN RECONFIGURATIONS OF SPACE AND PLACE WITHIN TOWNSHIP TOURISM

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Abstract

Nowadays global economic and cultural constellation determined urban communities to find a solution in order to preserve local identity and at the same time to attract capital into the area. Tourism represents in our opinion one of the greatest solutions ever exploited in mankind's history which erases boundaries of nations and economic policies, creating glocalised encounters. In the case of a city, tourism or township tourism becomes an economical, political and cultural vector that unifies urban space which develops a network of genuine and artificial urban inter-relations between the principal stakeholders. The city as a destination must be a 'safe' construct that meets the expectations of various kinds of travellers and of their different travelling motivations. We believe that to a certain extent, the (re)branding of cities nowadays consists in the creation of a harmonized space that would reiterate the home-facilities of the traveller. A matter of life-style and life-quality, this issue will be analysed through the lens of travelling as a leisure activity, or as a way of escaping monotone routine of daily living, eventually a way of reinvesting income and creating economical equilibrium.

Key-words: branding, city, place, consumption, tourism, destination, culture and identity

JEL classification: L83, N90, O18

I. CULTURAL GEOGRAPHIES – INTRODUCTORY NOTIONS

The contemporary variability of culture and its distribution at a discursive level as well as a territorial one, led us to an interdisciplinary approach of the new significations and understandings of space, clustered within the boundaries of place. Our study remains tributary to a subfield of human geography – cultural geography, a discipline that aims at analyzing the nexus that culture establishes with space, place and individuals. Cultural geography, situated at the intersection of several sciences, incorporates nowadays notions from economics, cultural studies, postcolonialism, gender studies, youth subcultures, popular culture. According to Jayne, cultural geography focuses on “the study of how particular social relations intersect with more general processes, grounded in the production and reproduction of actual places, spaces and scales, and in the social relations that give those spaces, places and scales meaning” (Jayne, 2008: 35). The same author also opines that “cultural geographers are now playing an important role in making connections in the complex relationships between the local and the global, between individuals, social groups and urban change, and between producers and consumers throughout the world” (*Idem*: 34).

The first preoccupations and methods in the field were developed by the American Geography Professor Carl Sauer's within the Berkley School (considered as the traditional 'cultural geography'),

who coined the 'cultural landscape' as an interactive creation of landscape and human communities. After the 80's, the general background of the critique of positivism in geography, led to the appearance of a new wave of interests, especially in the UK, where attention was shifted towards an analysis of non-material culture in contemporary urban societies. That is why contemporary cultural geography is known in UK under the name of the 'new' cultural geography, triggering the complexity of the notion 'life' and challenging specialists in observing the city's production in terms of the emergent significations that shape a story about places. As a matter of fact, “the central aim of the sub-discipline is a seemingly simple proposition: to introduce 'culture' from a geographical perspective, and space and place from a cultural perspective, focusing on how cultures work in practice and in space, and how cultures are embedded in everyday situations, as locatable, specific phenomena” (Jayne, 2008: 34). As the contemporary urban space cannot be regarded out of a global perspective, the city will be analyzed as a coherent structure of space containing apparently opposite notions such as place and placelessness, in a world where cross-cultural travelling has erased boundaries of spatial constraints. Some specialists still make the distinction, while for others, “place and placelessness are no longer opposed, as the humanistic geographers believed. Hereafter, a place is NowHere and NoWhere” (Richards, 2007: 101).

If “economists define cities as the spatial concentration of economic actors” (Glaeser et al, 2001: 30), sociologists, anthropologists and urban theorists

debate around the way in which cultural heritage confers identity to a place and the way in which this can be transformed into a competitive advantage in the tourism marketplace, for instance. Actually, tourism represents one of the most powerful engines that engenders *meaning* and fills the contemporary gap between space and identity, between local and global, between culture and landscape. From this perspective, tourism becomes the discursive premise of ‘place-making’ art, evoking issues that cultural geography is concerned with, as we shall depict in the following pages.

In his *Production of Space*, Henri Lefèbvre makes the difference between “the extreme formal logic-mathematical space” and “the practico-sensory realm of social space” (Lefèbvre, 1991: 15). He insists on the production of space as a space that can be *read* and which involves a process of *signification* (*Idem*: 17). In Marc Augé’s opinion, “the term ‘space’ is more abstract in itself than the term ‘place’, whose usage at least refers to an event (which has taken place), a myth (said to have taken place) or a history (high places)” (Augé, 1995: 84). We may eventually envisage space as a meta-language which self-produces in a social and cultural context, as Lefebvre pointed out that “space embodies a meaning, and that social or cultural practices generally determine that meaning” (Richards, 2007:93). At the same time there seems to be a symbiotic relationship between space and place because, as Richards believes “space provides a context for places and arguably derives its diversity of meaning from those places” (*Idem*: 94).

If Michel de Certeau did somehow radically and generally argue that “every story is a travel story” (1984:115), we could say that every place is a story in itself that involves a process of *naming* and the narration of an identity. The name of a place represents in fact an evocative tool in destination marketing. Furthermore, we could argue that on one hand, globalization enhanced the phenomenon of ‘global trotting’, but on the other, it de-localized real place within virtual space (i.e. Internet). Although *placelessness* or “the geography of nowhere” (Lippard, 1997 in Richards, 2007: 99) can be considered a negative consequence of globalization and of excessive commercialization, leading to standardisation and loss of authenticity, we believe that de-localization through Internet (yet another form of consumption) contributed as well to the appearance of *placelessness* as a phenomenon. In other words, “placelessness is arguably the end of cities; therefore, we must rethink the way in which urban spaces are transformed and regenerated through culture” (Richards, 2007: 93).

In a phenomenological understanding, the concept of place “is derived from the analysis of existential or ‘lived’ space. Each individual occupies an egocentric space, of which he or she will have a certain perceptual awareness [...]. Our lived geographies consist of an intricately woven network of personal and social/collective perceptual spaces and places” (*Idem*:

95). A place is a construct of the local community, a ‘product’ of a “collective consciousness” as it “embodies the geographies of our everyday experiences” (Richards, 2007: 94). From an ontological perspective, “reducing space to its objective basis makes it impossible for man to discover his place in the world and leads to a sense of ‘homelessness’ that is characteristically modern” (Menin, 2003: 150).

In a more pragmatic view, a place is a space of exchange, where the main social actors (the residents, the visitors and the sellers) share common goods, either if we talk in terms of culture, heritage, products, or simply *gazing*. As David Harvey asserts in his *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), “image and spectacle are the basis of more mundane urban economies near the end of the millennium” (quoted in McDowell, 1999: 160).

We shall see how a place can be transformed as to being regarded exclusively in terms of a commodity to be consumed in different forms, in the context where presenting a city as a cultural hub represents an effective way of promoting economic growth (Miles and Miles, 2004: 45). Eventually, “space and place are not passive backdrops to human relations, but reconceptualised as active in political and economic formations, social relations and identities” (Jayne, 2008: 37).

II. CITY, PLACE, URBAN CONSUMPTION

The concept of consumption reached complex understandings in the contemporary academic debates, reaching the question of how to improve the quality of urban life through the creation of an attentively balanced product reflecting correct urban planning and preservation of cultural heritage. A product in itself designed by planners and modelled by investors, the city is consumed via places which inscribe a certain relation between people and the ‘corporeal’ space of living, in a proxemics of automatisms that make appeal to human senses. For instance, *gazing* (that Urry coined in his famous expression “tourist’s gaze”) represents one of the most powerful medium that connects people to places, bodies to cities, eventually creating both a specific group behaviour and individual behaviour: citizen(s) as subject(s) of consumption. The sociologic character of consumption resides from the fact that the way we consume represents a mirror for ourselves and a witness to our living experiences. The consumption of cities or the sociology of life within the urban context represents a concept and an act at the same time, involving various disciplines and practices that cover topics from economic growth, labour and power relations, ethnic and gender issues, to questions of low and high culture. As a matter of fact, “consumption has become central to people’s lives and to their senses of identity, and is now a locus for everyday cultural practices – arguably more so than production, which was once seen to determine people’s social location” (Jayne, 2008: 36). From this perspective, we shall try to

depict in the following lines the complex relationship between consumption and culture framed within the sense of location and/or belonging.

The need for the 'consuming place' concept has derived from the fascinating field of the sociology of place, which in its own turn developed from the specialists' concern for the way in which social relations form as a living experience. In *Consuming Places*, John Urry (Professor at the Department of Sociology, University of Lancaster, UK) brings to our attention four categories of consuming places: 1. places as centres of consumption, involving the strict process of change-exchange in terms of purchasing and merchandising; 2. tautological consumption of place, visually speaking; 3. a literarily consumption of places as "what people take to be significant about a place (industry, history, buildings, literature, environment) is over time depleted, devoured or exhausted by use" (Urry, 2002: 5). Eventually, Urry refers to a form of consuming the very identity of a place, in the case of visitors, locals and/or both (4).

A fundamental question for our paper is what role does culture play in the economy of the city; does actually consumption blur or enhance on culture and its role in the construction of a city's identity? For that matter, Richard Butler identifies significant advantages and benefits of culture-rich environments. In his opinion,

"a culture-rich environment is not only attractive to visitors, but also to new citizens and firms. Apart from their ethical value, historical buildings, monuments and sights enhance the atmosphere of a city, providing prestige to the urban environment. Cultural attractions score high in the preferences of agents in the new service class (Dziembowska-Kowalska & Funck, 2000), and influence the development plans of companies and multinationals. This feeds a process in which tourism is the engine of economic regeneration." (Butler, 2006: 139)

As we find analogies between the consumption of place and the consumption of goods and services in an epoch where culture is commodified as well, we may assert that one of the intersection point between *culture* and *economy* is represented by the *culture industries* like art, tourism, leisure. Actually, "consumption cultures were shown to be responsible for stimulating the development of particular spaces and places within the city" (Jayne, 2008, 35). Furthermore, in an epoch of globalization, *corporations sell their products in a grammar of signs and symbols, which dominate and standardize space, creating uniform urban landscapes*. Yet, paradoxically enough, globalization along with 'homonegenization' and 'disembedding' has lead to the enhancement of the notion of 'localization'. In fact, "cultural homogenization is apparent in modern architecture, clothing, fast food, popular music, hotels ...an endless, globalized list. 'Everybody is basically the same' expresses a neutrality-seeking view of the world. The desire to neutralize difference, to domesticate it, arises (or so I will try to show) from an

anxiety about difference, which intersects with the economics of global consumer culture. One result is to weaken the impulse to cooperate with those who remain intractably Other." (Sennett, 2012: 8).

Cultural tourism, one of the most important branches of tourism industries and an academic issue of recent debate, is 'responsible' for safeguarding authenticity within the local, as specialists realized the importance of preserving *local identities* and the uniqueness of a place, materialized in tourism's promotional language, like "sense of place", "authentic essence of place" (Richards, 2007:3), or Unique Selling Proposals. Yet, the same promotional language which actually (re)constructs the Other, risks restoring the negative effect for which it was created, eventually leading to *placelessness*:

"In an increasingly competitive tourism environment, many cities are clamoring to promote their cultural distinctiveness, yet the concomitant destruction of a specific place identity is threatening their future development and promotion potential." (Richards, 2007: 92)

Although people's fascination with big cities may have been rooted in the mesmerizing force of abundance and choice, we believe that consumption "is not simply a characteristic of urban life, it is a major factor in determining the nature of that life" (Miles and Miles, 2004: 3). At the same time, the authors show that *a city of consumption represents a city of paradoxes and contradictions*, emphasizing on consequences such as group/class-segregation including as well 'geographies' of labour and gender spatial division. Another question that arises here is whether this kind of 'programmed' consumption creates 'simulated' places that 'build' at their turn pseudo-identities. The "arena in which consumption takes place" (*Idem*: 131), the city, we may say, is in itself a space of *representation*, which exhibits *places* in a pseudo-culture of urban consumption. Symbolism reaches its utmost when the reality passes through a process of deconstruction of the genuine place (landscape), which becomes a packaged object for consumption. We believe that a place is *culturally in-corporated* (we refer here to a certain cultural heritage, genetically inscribed and practiced through automatisms) through senses and transferred at the level of emotions which make appeal to certain intrinsic needs that engender a typical consuming behaviour. Nevertheless, specialists are concerned with the real tangibility of the final satisfaction that this imposed symbolic consumption could embed, as "the consuming city is in some senses a myth that our society has convinced us to consume. Indeed it could be argued that in many ways the consuming city is nothing more than the figment of the over-active imaginations of tower-planners, architects and urban idealists. Consumption can offer planners and developers vast financial rewards, but what does it really offer to the consumer?" (Miles and Miles, 2004: 1). We assume then, that this symbolic consumption transforms into a self-consumption, as a consequence

of the socially and spatially shaped omnivorous behaviour of the *homo urbanus*, speculating thus a rather hedonistic side of this issue.

We could say that globalisation and capitalism created a new urban order, as in Massey’s words, the ‘power geometry’ (Massey, 1993) that involves individuals, groups, cities and nations (Jayne, 2004: 39) in a global infrastructure of exchange. This perspective brings city consumption under the sign of tourism, as it offers an inner and an outer-city consuming experiences: the locals’ experience and the tourists’ experience.

III. TOWNSHIP TOURISM: PLACE BETWEEN CULTURAL IDENTITY AND CREATIVE BRANDING

One main preoccupation of tourism nowadays as a phenomenon at large and as a research field in particular is the regeneration of the *authentic*. Generally speaking, authenticity in tourism is regarded from two perspectives: the ‘guest’ and the ‘host’, the latter as a form of self-perception at the destination (Richards, „2007:3). Actually, the ‘host’ perspective is an aggregation between *identity*, *place* and *responsibility* (Massey, 2007: 187) as the author correlates these terms in her work *World City*. The community’s responsibility in tourism case consists into preserving an identity of a place by transforming it into a destination, whose image (identity) showcases local cultural products. Yet, present tourism studies are interested in the role of the visitor’s experiences and the way in which destinations could use their cultural resources to develop those experiences (Richards, 2001 in Richards and Munsters, 2010: 3). If tourism were to

be defined as the “experience network in which various actors co-create as they engage in tourism experience”, we would realize that the tourist is first and foremost a human being, whose travelling decisions are influenced by a series of factors in the home environment. The *place* in township tourism case can be regarded both as *local*, meaning the “*internal geography*’ of relational identities” (for instance Londoners) (Massey, 2007: 187), and also as an artificially marketing creation, ready to be externalized as a global product. As stated before, a place focuses on the idea of *existence*, an *intrinsic ‘collection’ of elements that together form a meaning* – the premise of authenticity, which culturally shapes an identity. Thus, the reiteration of a *home* within the destination’s environment involves both the opportunity of preserving a certain local specific, and the risk of creating standardised places that must serve intrinsic needs of the individual and restore his/her daily environment in a packaged language of exoticism:

“the consumption of the familiar is made interesting not by the content, but by the context. In some ways, cultural tourism may be seen as a form of “suspension”, in which the tourist travels within a cultural frame of reference that is an extension of home, while seeking an experience of the ‘Other’ that does not produce culture shock or go as far as a reversal of the home culture” (Richards and Wilson, 2004: 7).

Thus, there must be found an equilibrium between ‘shock’ and ‘safety’ when designing the authenticity of a place, as “the tourist is rarely willing to sever his umbilical cord to everyday life” (Richards, 2007: 48); so definitely, when creating the tourist’s profile, specialists regard him/her from the perspective of a human being acting in his/her daily context/environment.

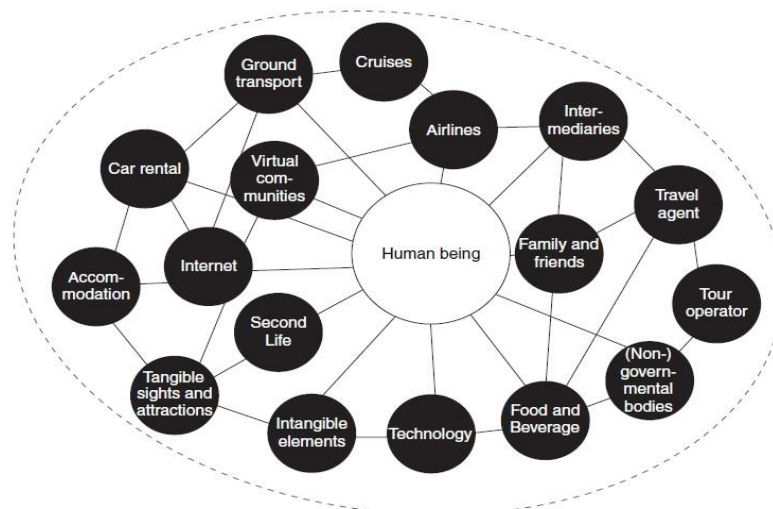


Figure 1. - Tourism experience networks
(source: Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009 in Richards&Munsters, 2010: 42)

Figure one expresses a general network that includes the relations that form around the human being who is not yet conferred the status of tourist. The second figure represents the human being in his or her home environment and the distance established

between him or her and the internalized proximate reality elements (such as family, friends, music), which may trigger motivation for travelling; we can also observe that the elements from the destination are projected in an exterior space:

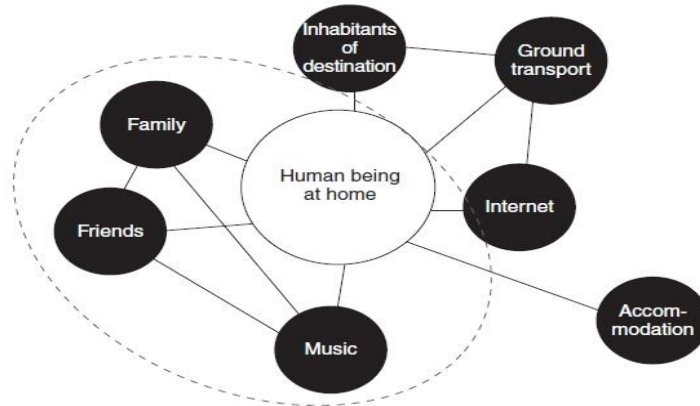


Figure 2. - Experience network of the home environment

(Source: Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009 in Richards and Munsters, 2010: 43)

Time and space along with money - the third dimension of the travelling-decision moment, create urban destinations and “sites of intense cultural exchange and experience - physical and virtual. [...] The cultural and creative industries, in their new and old guises, have taken over as the future economic and

symbolic global industry, of which tourism is now only one element, along with the Internet and the consumption and transmission of a widening range of cultural goods and services” (Scott 2001 in Richards and Wilson, 2007: 58-9).

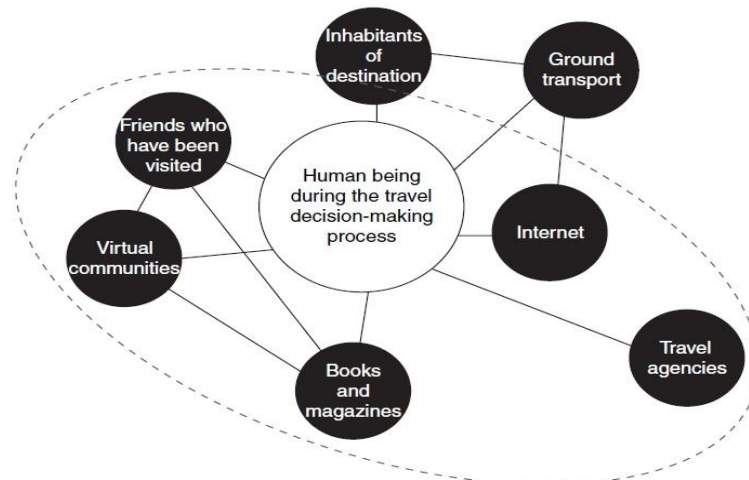


Figure 3. - Experience environment during the travel decision-making process

(Idem: 43)

As represented in figure three, a travel decision-making process forms in a networking environment of human, non-human and virtual elements and represents the feed-back to certain stimuli created through a specific vocabulary that the individual has received from the *Other* in order to convey meaning to a place. The creation of a story of anticipation embeds a place-selection in a day-dreaming expectation of the promised fulfilment in the destination. The recreation of oneself as the *other* from the inside commodifies, to a certain extent, the very identity of a community who *performs* a certain life-style, in a certain architectural ‘decorum’, which must suit the right consuming

profile. The local becomes thus a secondary reconstruction of the ‘tourist’s gaze’, who eventually came in the destination to consume the *different* (the *Other*), as a perfectly designed product. We could say that the condition of the urban touristic product designer and/or marketer is not very different from the one’s of an architect, as the latter involves *a priori* as well an *Other*, as “contingency insures that no architect is able to determine a design free from the relationship with the ‘other’ – the client, staff, and other factors relevant to the design process. All architects face this other. Architecture is thus a form of communication conditioned to occur without common rules – it is a

communication with the other, who, by definition, does not follow the same set of rules” (Karatani, 1995 in Harvey, 2001: 112). In addition to this, the ‘architecture’ of *place-individual* equation crystallizes the individual’s relation with one-Self and his/hers own intimate history, ingraining *meaning* that determines the individual to incorporate the other as an inherited plurality; as Sarah Menin puts it in her work, *Constructing Place: Mind and Matter*:

“Place-making derives meaning from the qualities of a location and its surroundings as it envisions capitalizing upon the potential of their attributes. [...] Norberg-Schulz has often stated that man’s desire is to understand his existence as a meaningful thing and, therefore, the purpose of architecture is to create meaningful places. Meaning is given through comprehending our human condition as expressed by the drama of our actions performed upon the stage of these places. Successful architecture consequently necessitates places that mutually reinforce one’s life experiences where happenings and settings interact as a totality. Only when such ‘meaningful places’ result, can architecture establish its

significance and value, thereby becoming part of our cultural heritage.” (Menin, 2003: 143)

The socio-economic and political apparatus behind the romanticised image of the ‘host’-community should take into consideration “both the needs of local people and those of the global tourist when undertaking spatial reconfiguration. Clearly, a reconciliation of global and local tensions in urban planning is not always viable, especially where economic and financial imperatives drive regeneration strategies. However, cities need the cultural diversity of their local communities and their distinctive heritage and place identities in order to maintain competitive advantage in the tourism marketplace” (Richards, 2007: 92). We can see in the following figure how close is represented graphically the relation individual-inhabitants, the latter elements being connected to accommodation and airlines, as the guests make themselves responsible for ensuring minimal infrastructure which covers basic living needs. We can also see that travel agencies are an exterior element, as at this moment of the travelling-decision process, the procedure is already made.

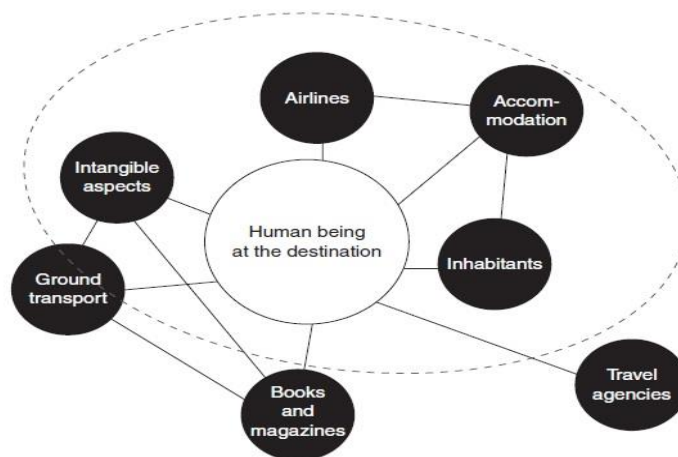


Figure 4. - Experience network at the destination
(Idem, 44)

In the context where urban regeneration requires “a coherent intertwining of past, present, and future”, (Richards, 2007:101) correct planning plays a key-role in the construction and representation of urban space, which conducts to the idea of brand-designing of a certain city-place. One perspective, as Richards points out, would be that “within the context of urban regeneration or tourism development, it is more likely that spaces will be built for entertainment, leisure, or recreation” (Richards, 2007: 95); that is reshaping space in order to (re)brand a place, in a marketing strategy packaged by media discourse. But at the same time, “the cultural dimension to mainstream tourism expands, the imperatives of maintaining distinction and promoting tourism in postindustrial cities has led to the renewed process of city cultural branding (Hankinson 2001; Kavartzis 2004). Cities that are most successful offer both consumption and production, heritage and contemporary culture, as well as a cosmopolitanism

that cannot easily be replicated or imported” (Richards and Wilson, 2007: 60). The cultural heritage on one hand, the ‘created’ infrastructure of leisure and entertainment on the other, became the very reason of township tourism, whose promotional language adapts to the various needs of the global traveller and consumer. Branding a place is no longer a question of prestige or image, as “place substitutability made locational branding *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 in Bennett and Savani, 2003, 70).

IV. THE ECONOMY OF PLACE. (RE)BRANDING CITIES AS TOURISTIC DESTINATIONS. APPLICATION ON ANGLO-SAXON CORPUS

As Richard Butler reminds us, “urban tourism remains in a sort of ‘scientific vacuum’, which Cazes and Potier (1996) attribute to the difficulty of establishing disciplinary boundaries in the study of the phenomena” (Butler, 2006: 140). From the very beginning, there must be made a differentiation between the city as a touristic space and the specific touristic places as nuclei of local distinct zones of either cultural heritage or anthropomorphic origin (malls, waterfronts, thematic parks etc.). We retain that “the pattern of leisure space distribution is termed *recreational belt around metropolis* (ReBam) (Wu & Cai, 2006). The formation of a ReBam is driven by three factors: demand for week-end recreation, suppliers’ development activities associated with land use, and spatial link attributed to transportation networks. Cities, especially those with large populations, are great sources of local visitors as well as international tourists (Pearce, 1981)” (quoted in Human Kinetics, 2010: 296). Yet, if we were to consider *tourism as a mode of spatial organization* (Ringer, 1998) we must highlight the importance of tourism in creating local geographies, “semiotically, through the medium of place representation [...]. Tourism differentiates space in a ceaseless attempt to attract and keep its market share. In the face of growing global cultural homogenization, local tourist agencies strive to assert their spatial distinctiveness and cultural particularities in a bid to market each place as an attractive tourist destination. This is achieved both intentionally, by the use of advertisements, brochures, press releases, travel agent promotions and education, and the like, but also intentionally, as an effect of autonomous events such as the locational shooting of a film or television drama” (Hughes in Ringer, 1998: 30).

Marketing a place or a city as a touristic destination is very much linked with the idea of branding, in order to confer it a certain position in the consumers’ minds. It is generally acknowledged that *identity*, *image* and *communication* represent the three main elements of a brand. Moilanen and Rainisto compile in their work a list of general benefits of a brand from various fields of research (2009: 7-8), as it follows:

- A brand differentiates/separates itself from competing products (Ambler and Styles 1995)
- A brand creates emotional benefits for the customer (e.g. Srinivasa 1987)
- Brands facilitate the customer’s decision-making (Jacoby and Kyner 1973; Kapferer 1992), reduce information retrieval (Jacoby et al. 1977), and diminish risk (Murphy 1998)
- A brand protects the organization’s marketing (Karakaya and Stahl 1989) and brings long-term strategic benefits (Murphy 1998)

- A brand enables the connection of responsibility to the producer (Keller 1998)
- A brand can support innovations and be the ‘main thread’ (de Chernatony and Dall’Omoile 1999)
- A strong company brand connects personnel and business partners so it is possible to develop stronger relationships and ensure long-term investments (Murphy 1998)
- Brands increase the efficiency of marketing operations (Demsetz 1973; Wernerfelt 1988) and strengthen the process that creates more financial value (Murphy 1998)
- A business brand connects all goodwill-value derived from doing business (Murphy 1998)
- A brand guarantees quality and gives protection if things do not go as they should (Besanko et al. 1996)
- A brand increases turnover (Broniarczyk and Alba 1994).

Place branding became a reality of our day-to-day existence and it is a more and more debated subject in research field. The sub-branches of place branding are *city branding*, *destination branding*, *nation branding* and *location branding*; yet branding procedures “are not directly applicable when you are branding complex and multidimensional entities such as countries, cities or tourist resorts” (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009: 3). A brand represents an innovative reputation of a place that provides credibility (*Idem*: 12), which becomes analogical with *quality* in the consumers’ mind. Actually, “a good place image needs good communications, good operations and substance. [...] Communications give promise, and operations fulfil these promises. Promises of good communications are reliable, desirable and unique. They are factors that are important to the target groups, and they differentiate the town from its competitors. The idea is to emphasize the place’s recognizable face. This can happen in several ways including the name, logo, printed material, business gifts, as well as image advertisements, sponsorship, media publicity, and PR events” (*Idem*: 12-3).

The competitive advantages are shaped at the level of discursive strategies: *linguistic* (branded under the sign of superlative) in slogans, guides/brochures presentations, TV ads, visiting sites texts, and *visual*, encapsulated in logos and/or websites design, which *add symbolic value, confer emotion and create city identity*. For instance, in figure five, the ‘reader’ is invited from the very cover of a tourism brochure into immersing in an outdoor, yet intimate frame. We have also identified a series of key-words that describe Bath destination in the presentation text of Bath’s front page visiting website, which underline the city’s uniqueness (“the only place”), which remind the principal competitive advantages (natural hot spa water and roman style baths) and define the type of destination, “spa break destination”:

“Welcome to Bath, **a city so beautiful and special** that it has been designated a World Heritage site.

Independent, creative, unique and stylish, Bath is **the only place** in the UK where you can bathe in naturally hot spa water and original roman style baths, making it **the ultimate spa break destination** for thousands of years.” (<http://visitbath.co.uk/>)

The various forms, colours, graphic distribution and meta-symbols of the logos design reinforce on the meaning force that a logo encapsulates in a reduced space. In fact, they are created as an identity ‘sign’ that should further root deeply in the consumers’ minds and trigger associative mechanisms.

Another frequent case in tourism/place branding is the strategy of *brand alliance*, or what we would call branding within branding technique. This is a powerful *differentiation* brand strategy, which ads a brand a plus of relevance and energy. For instance, in a campaign of week-end city-breaks, Hilton Hotels associated its image with Scotland’s range of city-breaks opportunities, presenting in a 30 seconds spot the competitive advantages of *Aberdeen (music)*, *Dundee (flavours)*, *Edinburgh (spectacular)*, *Glasgow (culture)*; eventually they represent the elements of a melting-pot that the region offers to the tourist eager to “mixing with the locals”. As shown in figure three (see annexes), we have freeze-framed the sections in which text superposes image creating thus a syncretised meaning which transmits information concerning the competitive advantage of each city/region, functioning at the same time on the media principle of the ‘agenda’, as it represents a ‘things to do’ prepared list for the consumer.

In a 30 second spot, the famous shopping centre Bullring Birmingham transforms into a micro-town, or a ‘toy-city’, under the slogan “We are so city”. Bullring becomes a ‘destination’ place where the macro and the micro are reversed (see figure 4 in annexes). The range of products that Bullring offers is presented creatively at a hyperbolized scale; while the advertised objects are zoomed in, the size of the shopping centre is considerably zoomed out; a whole world of consumption is reduced to the dimension of a spinning,

Dysneyfied place. Yet the slogan confers it the proportions of a city, reinforcing on the idea that space is a mere question of perception, and that a shopping centre as a thematic place takes the dimension that the consumer perceives, on the basis of his or her consuming interests of the moment.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Projecting a city as a touristic destination represents a balanced approach between local resources (either in terms of heritage and in terms of infrastructure, from food providers, shopping centres, wellness resorts, business meeting places and so on) local pride and the wish for commodifying the authentic into a luring story packaged through the techno-semantics that advertising at all levels provide. Eventually, we believe that city branding takes place at the point where two different academic fields converge: branding and urban governance, as city branding cannot function in the absence of city policies. At the same time, we must not forget that a place is “a result of the union between space and lived culture”, “a combination of heritage and contemporary life-style” (Richards, 2007: 94), thus, the branding of a place in touristic purposes may represent a reunification of disparate communities, as “the tourist gaze can also reinforce local perceptions of, and pride in, place and local identity” (*Idem*: 95).

A city/place brand is eventually something beyond it, the mere pretext of the meeting point between the ‘gaze’ of the viewer (subject) and of the other (object), culturally shaped under the sign of *differentiation* (<http://www.arlt-lectures.com/2002ssPsyIVv07-03.htm>). Eventually, the ‘designing for the gaze’ represents the architecture of place branding in the context where “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”, which involves a critical role for the marketing function during the rebranding process (Bennett and Savani, 2003, 73).

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VII. ANNEXES

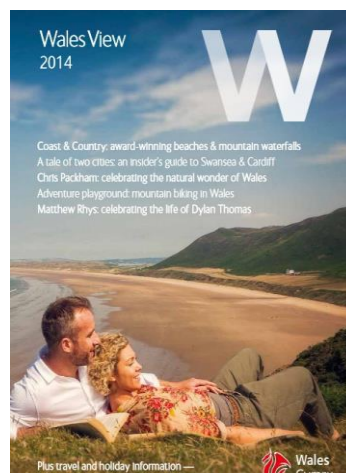


Figure 1. - Wales online brochure cover
(Source: <http://www.visitwales.com/brochures>)



Figure 2. - Compilation of visual discursive strategy at the level of the logos of important British cities

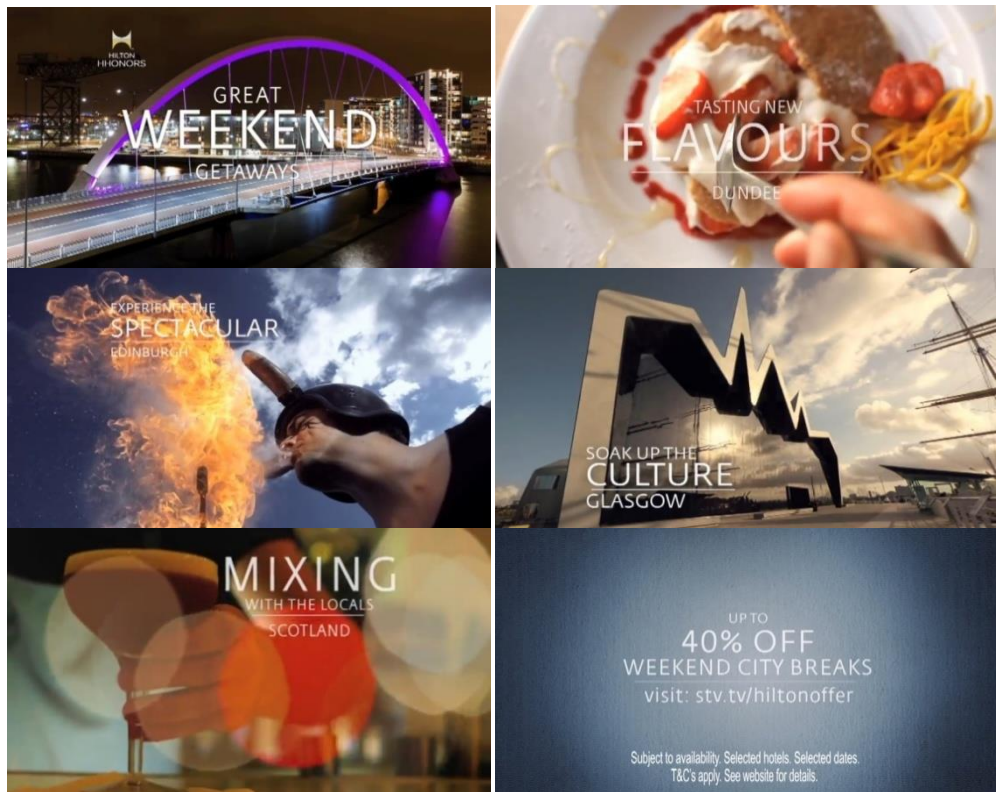


Figure 3. - Compilation of freeze-frames representing the superposition city-competitive advantage through iconic and textual mixture

Source: The Great Getaway – Week-end city-breaks with Hilton (TV ad)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V15YJqpSt20>

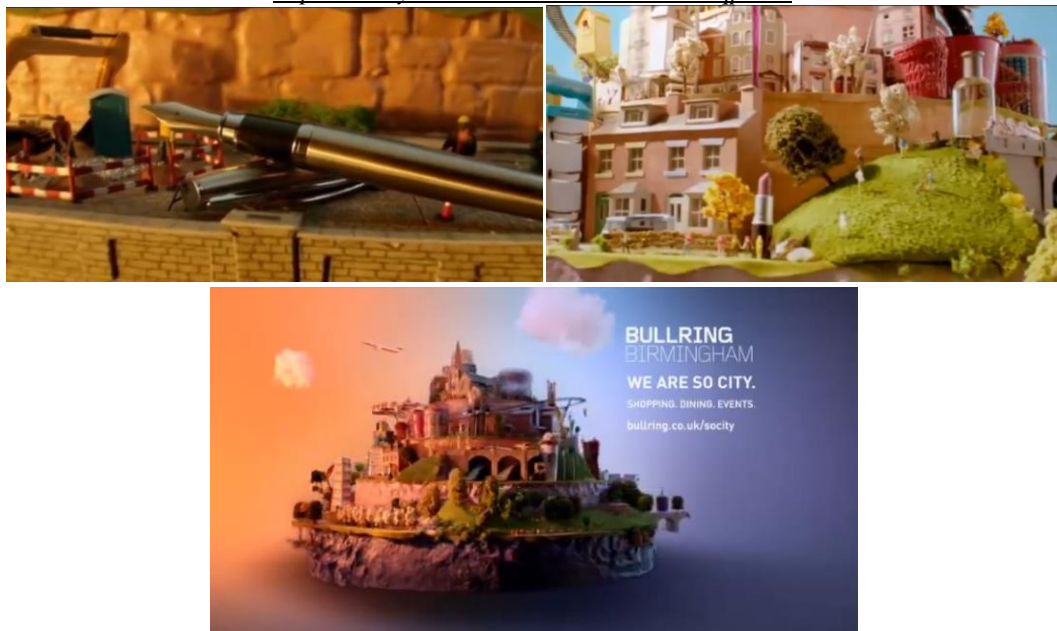


Figure 4. - Compilation of freeze-frames representing Bullring, Birmingham, “We are so city”, TV ad

Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ZqFLSsIOnl>