Postmodern Openings

Building Place Identity through Heritage

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Abstract

In an increasingly globalized world, the fading specificity is producing homogeneous images that make cities more and more difficult to tell apart. The market economy tends to commodify each and every aspect of urban life, even those belonging to the cultural realm. As a consequence, a need for differentiators arises, which can be best embodied by the local heritage.

The present paper is trying to establish a link between the concept of Place Identity, seen from a marketing point of view, and Heritage, as a key factor to build or emphasize a 'point of difference' for 'a unique selling proposition'. Although 'brands' are commonly associated with globalization and its supposed tendency to erase defining characteristics, their marketing principles could prove to be the very solution to regaining the lost specificity, since they help embed local heritage, already an asset, into the 'mix' that determines 'place identity'.

Building and promoting an identity is also the endeavor of branding, hence the overlapping of these two concepts. It is therefore useful to examine the evolution of brands from simple marks of identity to entities which develop complex relations with the users. The need for a 'a unique selling proposition' that brands have already acknowledged should be considered when building the place identity so much needed by cities in their fierceful competition for attracting activities.

Branding through heritage could prove to be a safe bet to reinforce the particular in the globalised market, if correctly managed and planned. Promoting the city and salvaging one of its key differentiators at the same time is, for sure, a win-win situation.

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Introduction

For the last decades, our world has been facing an accelerated pace of globalization. Due to this phenomenon, local features are alarmingly fading and being replaced by more generic ones to be found almost everywhere on the globe. The Fordist system of production having reached its limits by now, the system of "flexible accumulation" (Harvey, 1992) relies on the concept of 'added value'. This is the reason why the present concern of the Post-Fordist production is to avoid commodification by means of emphasizing a key-differentiator or, in marketing and branding terms, a 'point of difference', in order to create a 'unique selling proposition'.

The globalisation and its effects of fading specificity are present even in some of the "rigid" environments like the built one. Thus, contemporary cities are delivering homogeneous images with no specificity or local differentiator whatsoever, looking more and more alike no matter where they may be situated, geographically or culturally. The accelerated pace of urban development is erasing the local features, placing the urban image in the dangerous path of commodification.

In response to this trend, cities are struggling at present to create some differentiators to build on or maintain their image and reputation in a globalised competition. New and spectacular urban developments are being designed, even when there is no imperative need for them. Almost every big city is striving to build iconic buildings to make them look dazzling in postcards. In this given context a question arises: if architecture is to provide part of these differentiators, why not turn to the city itself and one of its most specific features, its heritage, to provide the starting point?

The present paper is trying to determine the role heritage can play in building 'place identity', a much needed ingredient in the global competition nowadays. But before searching for answers on how heritage can shape a city identity, it is important to see how and why specificity was lost throughout the globalisation process and where this need for differentiators came from.

1. Avoiding commodification. The need for differentiators
1.1. From "Fordism" to "flexible accumulation"

Over the last hundred years, architecture was deeply influenced by the evolution of the production system. At the beginning of the

twentieth century the Fordist - Keynesian system of production management asserted itself in architecture through functionalism – the optimal distribution of functions, and the standardization of the building process (Klingmann, 2007). Both these trends led to erasing the differences and specificity in architecture and urban planning, resulting in cities all over the world looking the same.

With the downfall of the Fordist system, the capitalist world moved from the rigid mass-production to a 'flexible accumulation' characterized by "flexible labour processes and markets, of geographical mobility and rapid shifts in consumption practices" (Harvey, 1992). Due to the mobility trend, the globalization process accelerated, threatening local specificity. At the same time, with the aid of the new technology which allowed a flexible production, the market started to promote diversity. To avoid overproduction which had led to the crash of the Fordist economy, the Post Fordist system of flexible accumulation was emphasizing the difference in order to stimulate consumption.

1.2. Fighting commodification - the need for differentiation

The main endeavour of companies began to be avoiding commodification. Huge budgets were being spent on brand building and advertising campaigns. However, this was seemingly not enough to help products maintain their special character and not become mere commodities. Therefore, the Post Fordist economy changed its course to a service economy. Services correspond, as Pine & Gilmore assert, to the third stage in economic evolution, after commodities and goods, and are to be followed by various experiences in the strive to avoid commodification (Pine and Gilmore, 2011).

In a parallel course, it seems that our cities went through this process backwards: from places that have to be directly experienced, to mere images that recall a certain place, to the anonymous globalised city image – a mere commodity. Oddly, this is happening in an age when there is a fierce competition between cities to attract activities like tourism or business.

To obtain and maintain awareness and a good reputation in the globalized world, cities and regions are now desperately looking for differentiators in almost the same way as brands do. The marketing approach is used more and more in city management and architecture is regarded as one of the strongest ways to build "points of difference" in

the urban image in order to deliver a "unique selling proposition" for the city. In this regard, big cities have begun a competition to build iconic architecture to shape their skylines. Paris, through "les Grands Travaux", London with its Millenium campaign or Barcelona with its works for the Summer Olympics in 1992 started an offensive to renew the image of the city. In places with a shorter urban planning history, like some cities in the Middle East or Far East, architects have found amazing opportunities to build their most flamboyant fantasies in the shape of the iconic buildings so much desired by city management.

Now, more than ever, cities are striving to create new buildings to become that "unique selling proposition" for visitors. Yet, too much of these efforts are directed towards the brand new architecture when for those places with a long and well-kept history, their heritage can be a more natural and undoubtedly original differentiator.

2. Heritage
2.1. Heritage – Evolving concepts/ Parallel fields[3]

The concept of 'heritage' is a general term that defines all things relevant to the collective memory, worth saving for future generations. It encompasses various fields of interest, including the built environment, local traditions, even language, places of memory that recall certain historical events and the narratives themselves. Heritage is a collective story for future generations, like an all-encompassing archive of memories.

So, how did our understanding of 'heritage' come to be as it is now?

This chapter deals with heritage from the perspective of the built environment. Its goal is to gain a better understanding of the multiple fields that it encompasses and the parallel, sometimes overlapping concepts that it implies, making the untangling of the issue a complicated endeavour. The concept of heritage gradually changed its domain, from considering individual historical monuments to preserving large fragments of urban fabric that came to be known as 'the historical urban fabric'.

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[3] This subtopic contains a brief account of the information contained in the PhD Thesis: Păcescu, A. (2012). Public Space in the Historic Centres of Towns in Romania - Urban Clippings at Successive Scales, chapter II.

To schematize the matter, shifts in the theoretical domain of two parallel fields of interest, restoration and urban planning, induced mutual transformations, leading to a global understanding of 'heritage' in the form it takes today.
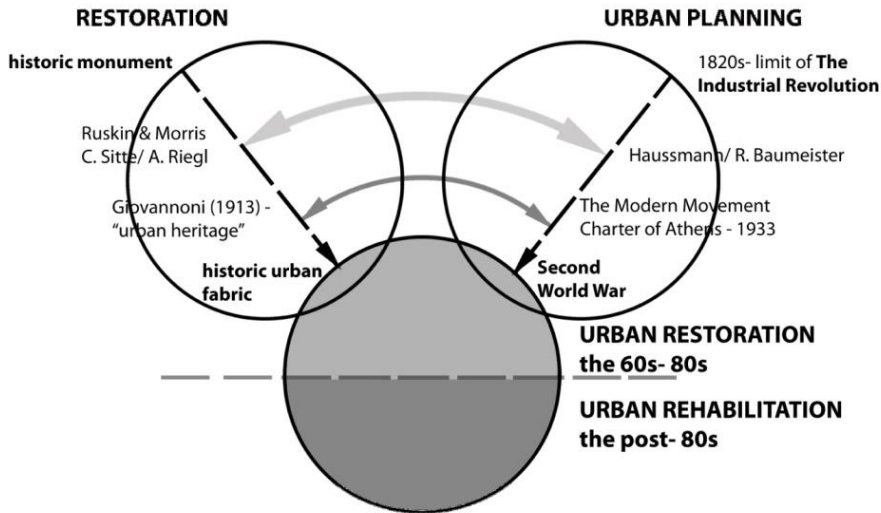

Fig. 1 – Monument to urban fabric – synthetic scheme

The Industrial Revolution, generally placed around 1820, brought about a rift in development, changing momentum. By shifting scale and speed, it disrupted an ancient, all established way of living, leaving people in search of their origins and reference points.

The object of study in restoration, the 'monument', went through a process of change in meaning that started with mid-19th century and is considered to have been over in 1960. Françoise Choay (Choay, 1992) places the birth point of the 'historical monument' around 1850, stating that by that time, the concept was already fully developed in most European countries. Then a "triple extension" of the notion occured, including 'context' as worthy of protection (1), erasing the age limit criterion in considering monuments (2) and extending the territory to cover other places beyond Europe (3).

By the end of the XIXth century, the discourse still revolved around the monument, so it was still circling the field of restoration, marked by the antagonism of the two leading forces, England and

France and the opposing theories of Ruskin and Morris versus Viollet-le-Duc. With Ruskin, we can place the beginnings of contextual thinking, since he invested ensembles of buildings with the same value as individual monuments, even if his vision was still directed towards the past, trying to recover the ancient ways by disregarding progress. Approximately around 1875-1900 is the time when the basis of urban planning (Cérda), urban morphology (Camillo Sitte) and restoration (Camillo Boito, Alois Riegl) were laid. This is the time when entire neighbourhoods were being put to ground to make way for new routes, the time when Haussman and later on Reinhard Baumeister were enforcing new urban planning rules in all-scale European cities. C. Sitte is the first to voice concerns over changes in urban forms, in search of the lost aesthetical qualities of the built environment, directed, unlike Ruskin, at the future and thus acknowledging change. The restoration field of the end of the 19th century was dominated by Italy and Austria, with the crumbling of the Viollet-le-Duc theories. With Boito stating the need to clearly mark any intervention upon the historical and Riegl assigning a 'commemorative value' as well as a 'use value' to the monument, the evolution in restoration can be considered to have come to an end (1860), since Choay states that from then on, the theory has remained much the same up till now.

In between the wars, parallel stories were developing: the emerging of the concept of 'historical urban fabric' and the birth of the Modern Movement.

Giovannoni was the first to come up with the term 'urban heritage', in an article in 1913 that turned into a book in 1931 (Giovannoni, 1931), although this had been priory envisioned by Ruskin and Morris. He no longer saw the urban fabric as a collection of singular monuments that fell into the category of 'major' and 'minor' importance but assigned value to the urban fabric as a whole, placing it under the same preservation rules as Boito's monument.

At the same time, le Corbusier was drafting his Plan Voisin and the Modern Movement was covering more and more ground, with an opposing attitude: the annulment of the historical city as we knew it, under the proclamations of the Charter of Athens (1933) and the Regulatory Plans.

The end of The Second World War was the new rift that brought about change. Much of the historical fabric being run to the ground, a

new need to take action emerged, along with the question of how to do it. The initial tribulations from before were beginning to settle, and Reconstruction Plans were being drafted, taking into account the relationship between the old and the new.

To summarize, there was a time gap between the invention of the concept of 'monument' and of 'historical urban fabric', and at the moment of this leap, a new field of interest branched out from restoration that is to be called 'urban restoration/ rehabilitation'.

The Gubbio Charter of 1960 established a list of priorities to preserve heritage, also assigning an economical value to it, both as 'cultural good' and 'commercial good'.

The general limit 1960 can be considered the shifting point from protecting the monument to protecting different scale historic urban fragments, according to Choay (Choay, 1992).

After the 60's, two different time frames occurred.

Firstly, there was the period 1960-1980, that focussed on rehabilitating historical centres, which I have named 'urban restoration', a term taken from M.C. Gianbruno (Gianbruno, 2007). This interval deals with the 'urban administration', when architects relinquish their role to urban planning, methodologies based on a typological approach (Italy leading the way) and the concept of 'zoning'. This is the time when many of the historical centres throughout Europe are being remodelled, using opposing strategies of 'whole restoration' versus replacements of 'bits and pieces' (Bologna vs Pesaro plans).

Secondly, the post 80's period, called 'urban rehabilitation' (Pol Mendez, 1990), surpassed the issue of centres to focus on other non-central historical areas, 'marginal areas' (Pol Mendez, 1990), that now become part of an extended notion of heritage. Waterfronts, former urban facilities, industrial heritage, old city limits, archaeological sites were now being included as candidates for preservation.

Public space, a concept born and bred in the 70's, becomes a key-ingredient in the 80's, making heritage marketable to inhabitants and tourists together. 'Strategic planning' and 'urban management' become central, since large urban spaces needed to be considered, with rising concepts like 'urban quality', 'city upgrading' and 'mixed use'.

2.2. Heritage – economic/ cultural capital; place identity

Heritage is a "contemporary product shaped from history" (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996) that provides a sense of purpose and projects a desired future. Its strength lies in meanings assigned by communities to artefacts of the past. These projections vary with time because the communities' understanding of value may change according to political, economic and social events. Heritage is not about studying the past, but more about filtering present values that get to extract from the past representations for the present. This process generates further associations, with concepts such as 'collective memory', 'traditions', 'need for belonging'.

Heritage is considered "the key factor in creating representations of place as a core attribute of identity" (Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge, 2007), defined as "that part of the past that we select in the present for contemporary purposes, whether these be economic or cultural (including political or social factors) and choose to bequeath to a future, whatever posterity may choose to do with it" (Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge, 2007). The connections between 'heritage', 'identity' and 'place' help shape the sense of belonging and purpose. As it has been stated before, heritage comes in various shapes and sizes, the built heritage being only part of it. At the same time, identity refers to a multitude of human attributes, such as ethnicity, language, religion, interpretation of history. Only part of identity refers to place, forming a direct connection that links communities to places that takes the shape of 'place identity'. The three concepts are therefore linked and partly overlap.

Since heritage reflects a contemporary view, this view cannot ignore contemporary marketing strategies.

There are two sides to the concept of heritage. On one hand, heritage is a cultural product that helps reinforce place appropriation and identification. On the other hand, it is an important economic resource that in turn takes two spins. Firstly, heritage is part of the strategies to promote tourism and urban development. Secondly, heritage artefacts are an economic asset in themselves, since they constitute a built environment whose main attribute in marketability is its appropriation by the community. As a consequence, it becomes economically valuable in itself, as well as in its role as key promoter of other commodities, as a 'package deal'. This is the case of "direct" or "indirect trading" that

David Harvey (Harvey, 2002) speaks about when formulating his theory on "monopoly rent". Monopoly rent arises when an income stream is achieved by having exclusive control over tradable items that have some "unique and non-replicable traits".

Indirect cases of monopoly rents would be trading upon an asset whose value derives from being linked to external valuable items (proximity to the centre, its unique marketable product etc.). In plain terms, a land becomes valuable because of its centrality or closeness to a concentrated activity and the vineyard is valuable because of the trade-mark wine it produces. The direct case is the case when the resource, being it the wine or the concentrated activity (financial centre) is traded upon directly.

Harvey's example is of a Picasso being bought as an investment (direct trading) and displayed in a museum on a lease with the intent to make profit (indirect trading). He points out the difference between this kind of cultural goods that can both be subject to the fore-mentioned ways of trading and another type of heritage, for instance Westminster Abbey or Buckingham Palace, where direct trade is highly unlikely, but the consequences of indirect trade contribute largely to tourism promotion.

'Place identity' is the turntable between the two aspects of heritage, because it derives from the cultural side and generates the commercial value. The concept of 'place identity' has been defined in 1978 as "those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioural tendencies relevant to a specific environment" (Proshansky, 1978). It has also been defined as "sub-structure of the self-identity of the person consisting of broadly conceived cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives" (Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff, 1983). The concept links together the separate notions of 'place' and 'identity', stemming from the reciprocal association between places and communities. Places shape groups, inducing certain cultural footprints that end up defining their identity both as individuals and groups. On the other side, places are marked by their association to a group. Thus, "space is transformed into place through traditions, memories, myths and narratives and its uniqueness confirmed and legitimated in terms of their relationship to

particular representations of the past" (Ashworth, Graham and Turnbridge, 2007). As a conclusion, place identity is one aspect of the larger definition of 'identity'.

3. Branding and Heritage – creating profitable niches

Smaller countries can never win a race against larger countries in chasing contemporary landmarks. In doing so, they only end up erasing their past and local identity. Instead, a safer bet would be to rely on a 'niche' approach involving the promotion of heritage as a key factor of identification. The market positioning strategy implies placing oneself as 'leader', 'challenger', 'follower' or 'nicher'. In place identity this strategy is not to be directly applied as the leader position is almost impossible to reach since the gap between powerful countries and the emerging economies is unlikely to be bridged. Positioning as a nicher might be a wiser decision in this case. Emphasizing genuine specificity as a case of "monopoly rent" is the real chance of these countries, since they lack sufficient notoriety to promote themselves as leaders. Place identity provides 'images of place' that are directly marketable, since they are easily recognisable.

It is important to establish a balance and a link between promoting the built heritage and promoting the experience of a place, including traditions, crafts and other non-built items that create specificity. On the other hand, the built heritage needs to become part of a realistic hierarchical evaluation to adjust promotion efforts according to the "rareness" of the segment of heritage. For instance, among a multitude of cities that rely on their medieval centres, a fortress or a chain of former defense walls can constitute the differentiator. Any mark of specificity increases the chances of better promoting, that translates into revenue.

On a general note, heritage can fall into one of three categories (Păcescu, 2012). Firstly, there are the "urban interstices", abandoned spaces of former industrial use that need a grand-scale approach and uses that best integrate them into every-day life. Secondly, "urban limits" such as waterfront areas of historical importance (abandoned docks, warehouses etc.) or former city defence walls can become promenades that not only enhance the experience of a place but help disseminate economic growth in larger neighbouring urban areas. Thirdly, "urban paths" connect various places of interest spread across a larger city area,

also casting light on the city fabric in between and enhancing its tradability.

Conclusions

Throughout this article, we have tried to establish that heritage could become 'the point of difference' in creating place identity for cities in general and smaller ones in particular. Large and economically powerful cities can rely on other aspects for self-promoting, such as impressive skyscrapers, modern museums, all kinds of iconic architecture of large investment and flashy outcome. For smaller cities, engaging in battle at this level would be pointless, the gap being impossible to bridge. Hence, heritage can become their primary asset in coming up with 'the unique selling proposition' earlier on discussed.

The link between economical gain and Heritage works on at least three different levels.

Firstly, in a systemic approach, heritage is part of the network of the city, and since the city needs to differentiate itself in competing against others, heritage contributes to shaping its identity. So, in formulating the city 'brand', one needs to consider this matter and, as a consequence, assign the fair amount of resources in promoting this valuable asset.

Secondly, heritage is a valuable resource in itself. The thesis of the present article would be that, in terms of the economical aspect, some strategies and techniques borrowed from the advertising world could be successfully applied. For instance, when a promoting a product, a brief is supplied at the beginning of the project. Studies of various extents try to identify target audiences and strengths of the product to be stressed upon. Sometimes, when we are dealing with a well-established identity, a brandbook is created. This could maybe partially apply to heritage, since any project of refurbishment/ renewal is best suitable for a category of uses or mixed-use whose proportions vary according to target audiences, urban location, time of day it needs to be functional and activities it needs to attract in the long run. Marketing strategies need to take all of these factors into consideration when devising a marketing strategy for historical artefacts of different scales.

Thirdly, heritage helps market other products that are directly or indirectly related to it. So, if we take into account that tourism wraps

heritage in complicated relations to other products, the mix being marketed as a "package-deal", a long chain of affiliation is created.

Any of these directions can constitute the starting point for further study, aimed to test the theories that have occurred. From these intertwined threads, a more complex understanding of heritage and its economic implications in urban renewal can be achieved.

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Biodata

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