PLACE MARKETING AND BRANDING IN (ANGLOPHONE) URBAN STUDIES AND URBAN POLITICAL ECONOMY: A CRITICAL REVIEW

Claire Colomb

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Abstract

The paper offers a synthesized account of the different disciplinary, theoretical and normative perspectives offered by the (primarily Anglophone) literature on place marketing and branding. It first reviews the changing context which has given rise to place marketing and branding practices, i.e. the widespread shift towards 'entrepreneurial' and 'neoliberal' urban governance. It then reviews the ways in which such practices have been analysed by different disciplines and approaches, making a broad distinction between 'new public management' and '(critical) urban studies' approaches. Within the latter (which includes human geography, sociology, politics, planning, architectural and cultural studies), I argue that one can contrast two types of approaches: those shaped primarily by a materialist political economy approach and those of a cultural-semiotic nature. The paper then highlights the work of a small number of scholars who have sought to reconcile these approaches in a fruitful way to generate a better understanding of the politics of place marketing, branding and imaging and the role of the 'symbolic' in contemporary urban governance.

Το μάρκετινγκ και branding τόπων στις αγγλόφωνες σπουδές αστικού χώρου και στην αστική πολιτική οικονομία: μια κριτική επισκόπηση

Περίληψη

Το άρθρο παρουσιάζει μια συνθεση των διαφόρων επιστημονικών, θεωρητικών και πρακτικών προσεγγίσεων της (κυρίως Αγγλόφωνης) βιβλιογραφίας πάνω στο μάρκετινγκ και branding τόπων. Ανοίγει με μια ανασκόπηση του μεταβαλλόμενο πλαίσιο που οδήγησε σε πρακτικές μάρκετινγκ και branding, μέσα στη γενική μετάβαση προς την «επιχειρηματική» και την «νεοφιλελεύθερη» αστική διακυβέρνηση. Στη συνέχεια, εξετάζει τους τρόπους με τους οποίους τέτοιες πρακτικές έχουν αναλυθεί από διαφορετικούς κλάδους και προσεγγίσεις, καθιστώντας μια ευρεία διάκριση μεταξύ των προσεγγίσεων μια «νέας δημόσιας διαχείρισης» και των «(κριτικών) αστικών σπουδών». Εντός του τελευταίου (που περιλαμβάνει την ανθρωπογεωγραφία, την κοινωνιολογία, την πολιτική, τον αστικό σχεδιασμό, τις αρχιτεκτονικές και τις πολιτιστικές σπουδές), υποστηρίζω ότι μπορούμε να αντιπαραβάλλουμε δύο τύπους προσεγγίσεων: αυτές που διαμορφώνονται κυρίως από μια υλιστική προσέγγιση της πολιτικής οικονομίας και εκείνες πολιτισμικο-σημειωτικού χαρακτήρα. Το κείμενο στη συνέχεια υπογραμμίζει το έργο ενός μικρού αριθμού μελετητών που προσπάθησαν να συμβιβάσουν αυτές τις προσεγγίσεις με παραγωγικό τρόπο, ώστε να κατανοήσουν καλύτερα τις πολιτικές μάρκετινγκ και branding τόπων και το ρόλο του «συμβολικού» στη σύγχρονη αστική διακυβέρνηση.

Introduction

The structural economic changes and shifts in urban governance which have characterized North American and West European cities since the 1970s have led to the widespread development of strategies of physical redevelopment as well as symbolic 'reimaging' of cities. A prominent aspect of the new 'entrepreneurial urban politics' described by Harvey (1989a) entails place marketing practices aimed at positioning individual cities in the perceived,

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strengthened global inter-city competition. Place marketing refers to 'the various ways in which public and private agencies - local authorities and local entrepreneurs, often working collaboratively - strive to "sell" the image of a particular geographically-defined place, usually a town or city, so as to make it attractive to economic enterprises, to tourists and even to inhabitants of that place' (Philo and Kearns, 1993: 3). Such practices have not remained confined to the so-called Global North and have, over the past two decades, increasingly been adopted by urban decision-makers in cities across all continents. The production and dissemination of urban images, of advertisement and communication about the city, and the creation of a city 'brand' have become a specific field of public policy and a new area of professional expertise and private consultancy services.

This paper first briefly reviews the changing context which has given rise to place marketing and branding practices, i.e. the widespread shift towards 'entrepreneurial' and 'neoliberal' urban governance. It then reviews the ways in which such practices have been analysed by different disciplines and approaches, making a broad distinction between 'new public management' and '(critical) urban studies' approaches. Within the latter (which includes human geography, sociology, politics, planning, architectural and cultural studies), I argue that one can contrast two types of approaches: those shaped primarily by a materialist political economy approach and those of a cultural-semiotic nature. The paper then highlights the work of a small number of scholars who have sought to reconcile these approaches in a fruitful way to generate a better understanding of the politics of place marketing, branding and imaging and the role of the 'symbolic' in contemporary urban governance.

From Baltimore to Beijing: the central role of the 'politics of urban imaging' in contemporary urban governance

Modern practices of place promotion emerged in the nineteenth century as a key component of the process of industrialization and capitalist urbanization (Ward, 1998a). In the United States, railway companies, entrepreneurs and chambers of commerce had to proactively sell the 'Western frontier'. Practices of civic 'boosterism' then formed a continuous part of the history of American urbanization throughout the twentieth century (Ward, 1998a; Greenberg, 2008), as firms and investors used relocation strategies from one city (or state) to another to pressure for more beneficial local tax regimes (Goodman, 1979). In Western Europe, early forms of place promotion were by contrast limited to the promotion of new residential suburbs or tourism destinations - such as seaside resorts - for the nascent and increasingly mobile industrial bourgeoisie (Ward, 1998a, 1998b).

The structural economic change which have affected Western industrialized economies since the 1970s have transformed the nature and intensity of place promotion practices. Processes of globalization and economic integration were accelerated by trade liberalization policies and changes in transport and telecommunication technologies, which facilitated the cheaper and faster movement of goods, ideas, people and capital across national borders. Those processes were argued to have caused a weakening of the nation-state as a key actor of economic regulation, as well as an intensification of competition between regions and cities for supposedly 'footloose' capital. As large corporations expanded their activities to the global scale and relocated their manufacturing operations towards developing countries, the economies of North American and West European countries underwent large-scale deindustrialization and a significant growth of the service and knowledge-based industries - a shift to a 'post-Fordist' mode of production and 'flexible accumulation' (Harvey, 1989b).

These structural economic changes were both facilitated, and responded to, by changing forms of government intervention and a transformation of the role of cities and regions as political actors (Mayer, 1994; Le Galès, 2002). The idea of 'inter-city competition' became part of the logic of action of municipal governments and 'success in competition' gradually imposed itself as 'the legitimizing principle of public policy: it [was] made to seem a natural, unavoidable constraint' (Le Galès, 2002: 203). North American and European local governments began to shift towards more 'entrepreneurial' patterns of urban governance, albeit to a varying degree. The term 'urban entrepreneurialism' was coined by David Harvey (1989a) to refer to two

processes affecting local governments: (i) the shift from the provision of public goods and services and the amelioration of local conditions as key objectives of public action (what he referred to as 'urban managerialism') towards outward-orientated policies designed to attract mobile investment, tourists or new residents; (ii) an organizational and institutional shift from 'urban government' to 'urban governance', characterized by new forms of co-operation between the public, private and non-profit sectors for the delivery of urban services and infrastructure, and by the increasing influence of private sector management practices on the functioning of city governments.

As part of the shift towards more entrepreneurial forms of urban governance, old practices of 'civic boosterism' were transformed to respond to deindustrialization, inner city decline and fiscal crises in the changing, globalizing context. In the USA, the municipal governments of Baltimore and New York were often presented as the pioneers of 'post-Fordist urban transformation' achieved through new place marketing strategies, flagship redevelopment projects and local government restructuring (Harvey, 1989b; Greenberg, 2008). Coalitions of local politicians, public officials, economic development agencies and business elites began to develop coordinated, capital-intensive campaigns of 'strategic image management' (Kotler *et al.,* 1993) to transform and 'sell' their cities as post-industrial centres for services, leisure and consumption. In the global marketplace, it was argued, 'perception is as important as reality' (Anholt, 2006: 4). This entailed both transformations of the built environment through the construction of 'spectacular urban landscapes' (Hubbard, 1996) and iconic buildings (Sklair, 2006), hand in hand with the production and dissemination of particular textual and visual representations of the city disseminated via various media to different target groups (Holcomb, 2001; Avraham and Ketter, 2011). Municipal governments began to pay a purposeful, sustained attention to image generation and thus act as public relations and marketing firms (Zavattaro, 2014a). This was facilitated by the emergence of new media technologies (Bass Warner and Vale, 2001) and by the professionalization of the marketing and advertising industry. In the 1970s, the use of marketing techniques was gradually extended from private firms to public and non-profit organizations, giving rise to 'political', 'social', and 'place' marketing (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008). Market research, corporate branding and business management techniques began to be applied to cities, a trend reinforced by the rise to prominence of 'new public management'[2] in local government. New 'business location consultants' and place marketing experts became powerful actors in charge of advising urban political and economic elites on the appropriate strategy to increase a city's attractiveness.

In European cities, place marketing practices began to develop in the early 1980s (notably in the UK and France) through the activities of local governments, chambers of commerce, business or retailers' associations, consultants, and newly created city marketing agencies. Throughout the 1980s, municipal governments in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Spain increasingly adopted place marketing techniques, irrespectively of their political colour (Hubbard and Hall, 1998). In Germany, for example, by the mid-1990s sixty per cent of cities had devised an explicit city marketing strategy (Grabow and Hollbach-Grömig, 1998). However, there has been a notable diversity in the intensity and forms of place marketing practices across European cities (Ward, 1998b; Kavaratzis, 2007). In many localities, political leaders often carried out 'weak' strategies of urban entrepreneurialism (Jessop, 1998) and did not abandon social welfare and redistributive objectives (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000; Le Galès, 2002; Kazepov, 2005). Moreover, the decline of inner cities in continental Europe and the flight of the middle and upper classes to suburban areas has never reached the same level than in the USA, meaning that one of the 'image problems' which place marketing was supposed to solve was never so acute. And in some cities, place marketing practices have been, in part, shaped by rationales which cannot entirely be reduced to the search for economic competitiveness (see Colomb, 2011 on Berlin).

In the 2000s, the term 'place branding' became increasingly popular in theory and practice to refer to a process of 'forging of associations' between a place (a neighbourhood, a city, a region or a nation) and some desirable qualities supposed to resonate with particular target audiences (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). At the same time, the popularity of place marketing and

branding policies spread outside North American and European cities to other parts of the world such as the Middle East (Freire, 2012), China (Broudehoux, 2004; Berg and Bjorner; 2014), South-East Asia (Yeoh, 2005; Anttiroiko, 2014; see also Chang, 1997; Ooi, 2008 and Buck Song, 2011 on Singapore), South Africa (Sihlongonyane, 2015) and Latin America (Pasotti, 2009; Kalandides, 2011; Dinardi, 2015). Following the 2008 global economic crisis and recession, which temporarily affected international flows of foreign direct investment and visitors, city leaders often chose to intensify, rather than roll back, place marketing and branding policies, even in a context of fiscal austerity and cuts in public spending. In that regard, it is interesting to note that the adoption of place marketing, reimaging and branding strategies across the world has happened in spite of the fact that there is no indisputable evidence of the effectiveness of such strategies in generating or attracting investment and growth. Measuring and evaluating the impacts of such strategies is a methodologically challenging task (such as assessing the impact of an image campaign on the attraction of new firms or tourists to a particular place). A failure to reach the desired objectives is often interpreted by the advocates of place marketing and branding as the result of poor, or insufficient, activities - rather than as an inappropriate approach in the first place. This partly explains why such activities are continued with zeal by local governments of different political colour, in spite of the limited evidence of their effectiveness in terms of local economic development (Greenberg, 2008).

Place marketing and branding through the prism of scholarly research: 'new public management' versus '(critical) urban studies'

Place marketing and branding became a focus of academic inquiry long after urban actors began to 'sell' cities through boosterist activities. Various disciplines have engaged with them, and the amount of work published on the subject cannot be done justice to within the framework of this paper. However, a key distinction should be made at the outset between the strands of literature which seek to theorize what efficient place marketing or branding *should be* in a practice- and ac-

tion-oriented way; and the strands of social science scholarship which have analysed practices of place marketing and branding as part of a *critical inquiry* into contemporary processes of urban economic, political and social restructuring.

The professional field and academic discipline of 'marketing' developed in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s, encompassing a broadening of the concept from private firms and consumer products to public and non-profit organisations as well as 'places', as mentioned above. While the North-American scholars who first theorized place marketing in the early 1990s came from business management and marketing science (Kotler *et al.*, 1993, 1999), their European counterparts often came from public administration, geography and planning (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Van den Berg et al., 1990; Corsico, 1994; Smyth, 1994; Kavaratzis, 2007, 2009; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005; Ashworth *et al.*, forthcoming) and were inspired by both 'new public management' as well as 'communicative planning' theory (in Germany in particular, see Helbrecht, 1994; Grabow and Hollbach-Grömig, 1998). In the field of tourism management, the terms most commonly used have been those of 'destination marketing' and 'destination branding', which have been the object of a vast literature not covered in this paper. In the 2000s, the term 'place branding' became increasingly popular in the practice-oriented and professional literature (see Lucarelli and Berg, 2011 for a review). New dedicated journals were created (*Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* in 2004; the *Journal of Place Management and Development* in 2008) and a number of textbooks on the theory and practice of place and city branding were published (Anholt, 2007, 2010b; Govers and Go, 2009; Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009; Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2010; Dinnie, 2011; Anttiroiko, 2014; Zavattero 2104; Kavaratzis et al., 2015). The two terms of place marketing and branding are often used interchangeably, although most authors argue that they refer to different processes (Kavaratzis, 2004). Place marketing is often depicted 'as a tool for selling the products and services and attractions of the place more effectively, and not for tackling the overall image or reputation of the place in any direct way', as branding is supposed to do (Anholt, 2010a: 2). This definitional debate cannot be addressed here (for a discussion in the practice-oriented literature, see *inter alia* Kavaratzis,

2004; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2006; Anholt, 2008, 2010a; Govers, 2013).

While there are variations in the conceptualisation and normative importance assigned to place marketing and branding as techniques to be used in the process of shaping and governing 'places', what all the above-mentioned scholars have in common is a positivist and *practice-oriented* take on place marketing and branding. It is grounded in the belief that previous approaches to urban economic development and urban planning inherited from the post-WWII era have become ill-suited for the new challenges faced by cities and regions since the 1970s. These authors argue that urban political leaders, in cooperation with a variety of actors, should shift governance patterns and public policies towards new forms of urban management, and transform the city's physical, economic and institutional fabric in line with the demands and needs of identified target groups such as external investors, visitors, potential residents or the local population (Van den Berg and Braun, 1999). Their work is based on the assumption that the 'city' (or any other territorial unit) can be compared to an organization or corporation in charge of satisfying the needs of particular customers and target groups (Kavaratzis, 2009), or to a commodity which can be packaged, marketed, branded and sold (Corsico, 1994; Krantz and Schätzl, 1997). Many of these authors, however, agree that place 'selling' and 'advertising' activities are only a small part of what the process of strategic place marketing or branding should be, and propose a number of steps in their strategic policy prescriptions (see Kavaratzis, 2007; Zavattaro, 2014b among others).

A significant part of the literature referred to above is, with few exceptions, implicitly or explicitly positioned within 'new public management'. Authors within this strand discuss the ideal characteristics of what successful place marketing or branding should be, but not necessarily the *desirability* or *appropriateness* of the 'application of a concept from business management to the city as a political institution, as a space of citizenship or as a living space' (Colomb, 2011). Anholt, for example, argues that 'branding, like any other tool, is itself ethically neutral' (2006: 2), that the 'comparison of place to product' is 'logical' and there are 'evident benefits' from competent and professional management and promotion for the citizens of the place

(2010a: 4). Authors in this strand of scholarship tend to stay silent about the possibility of fundamental disagreements and conflicts between social groups around the 'new urban politics' and particular urban development and policy choices, and how such conflicts are supposed to be arbitrated. The dominant focus on *efficiency* and urban *management* often leaves out the politics, conflicts, legitimacy issues, power struggles and inequalities which are present in, generated by, and often reproduced through, place marketing and branding strategies and practices.

Some of the authors within this strand of scholarship have transformed their argument over time in response to such critiques. Kavaratzis and Ashworth, for example, recognise that 'places are not products, governments are not producers, and users are not consumers' (2005: 510; see also Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2010). Many authors nonetheless maintain their call for the use of place branding techniques in urban management, albeit tempered by due consideration to be given to the involvement of a broad public in the process, i.e. 'how well the approach to city branding is rooted in the identity of the local community, how various stakeholders and especially citizens are involved in constructing brands and visions, and how democratically such a brand-making process is governed' (Anttiroiko, 2014: 7-8) (see Kavaratzis, 2012; Braun et al., 2013; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014; Kalandides and Kavaratzis, 2009; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015).

By contrast, a diverse, mostly Anglophone body of literature from human geography, sociology, politics, planning, architectural and cultural studies has since the 1990s analysed place marketing and branding within a wider *critical agenda* of inquiry into contemporary processes of urban restructuring and urban governance.[3] Most of this work is inspired by urban political economy (often shaped by neo-Marxian ideas), a 'broad set of approaches which examine how material processes of production and exchange "of and within cities" shape and are shaped by decisions made in economic and political institutions (Nevarez, 2007: np). Scholars in this tradition seek to interpret and explain urban physical and socio-economic changes - and uneven development between and within cities - in relation to the evolving structural dynamics and geographies of the global capitalist system and the role of the local state as an agent of accumulation and social re-

production.[4] Place marketing and branding are thus analysed as politically and socially constructed practices whose role in power relations, capital accumulation and the production of socio-spatial inequalities need to be unpacked. This means questioning the assumptions held by most authors in the new public management tradition described above.[5]

From the late 1990s onwards, Anglophone urban studies became increasingly shaped by debates about neoliberalization, the restructuring and rescaling of the state (Brenner and Theodore, 2002a, 2002b; Brenner, 2004; Jessop, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 2002). Brenner and Theodore's concept of neoliberalization refers to two parallel process - 'the (partial) destruction of extant institutional arrangements and political compromises through market-oriented reform initiatives; and the (tendentious) creation of a new infrastructure for market-oriented economic growth, commodification, and the rule of capital' (2002b: 362). These authors included place marketing in their list of 'neoliberal policy experiments' in cities, alongside 'enterprise and empowerment zones, local tax abatements, urban development corporations, public-private partnerships, and new forms of local boosterism to workfare policies, property-redevelopment schemes, business-incubator projects, new strategies of social control, policing, and surveillance, and a host of other institutional modifications within the local and regional state apparatus' (*Ibid.*: 368) (see also Eisenschitz, 2010).

While there is no space here to offer a comprehensive overview of the critical urban studies literature on place marketing, branding and urban imaging, one may summarize the main critiques most commonly voiced by the scholars belonging to this strand under four key themes (Colomb, 2011). Firstly, the definition of a marketing or branding 'vision' for a city (in particular which aspects of the urban economy, society and culture should be prioritized) is often done in closed circles by a small elite of politicians, public officials, business leaders and consultants, with little or no public involvement or democratic debate (Eshuis and Edward, 2013). The adopted vision often represents and naturalizes the interests, lifestyle and 'urban imaginary' of a narrow segment of the population (Greenberg, 2000). There is a 'politics of social relations implied in the seemingly neutral economic discourse of branding' (Johannsson, 2012: 3624) - a 'technique of fiction and nar-

ration' which contributes to producing 'discursive privileging and marginalisation' (p. 3612). The subsequent implementation of marketing activities is often carried out by public-private partnerships which lack transparency (Colomb, 2011).

Secondly, place marketing practices, within the context of urban entrepreneurialism and neoliberalization processes, are argued to have uneven social and spatial impacts: 'uneven in the way that certain cities become "winners" in interurban competition for investment, in the way that certain neighborhoods in cities become the focus of development while others were left to decline, and uneven socially as certain interests gain from the new entrepreneurial stance while many others do not' (McCann, 2013: 20). Place branding is conceived as 'a narrative programme that aims at redescribing place by means of sanitising, obscuring or alternatively emphasising chosen aspects of reality' (Johansson, 2012: 3613): specific elements of local culture(s), history(ies), identity(ies) and aesthetics are selected, sanitized, commodified and marketed to target groups such as tourists or high-income residents (Kearns and Philo, 1993). Non-market values are appropriated by the marketing discourse for market-oriented objectives (Lederman, 2015). This process can have negative consequences for the social groups (and spaces) concerned, as it can involve the exclusion or repression of cultures and histories deemed 'undesirable' in the discursive and/or physical public sphere of the city, and lead to a loss of authenticity or to outright displacement (Zukin, 1988, 1995). Geographically, a small number of sites and areas (often in the centre of cities) become the focus of place promotion and investments in flagship projects and mega-events, with opportunity costs for other areas which may suffer from public disinvestment. Such strategies do not necessarily trickle down to social groups and areas most in need, and ultimately can fuel spatial divides and conflicts through processes of 'touristification' or gentrification.

Thirdly, critical urban scholars argue that alongside the search for urban competitiveness and the attraction of external investors, visitors or potential residents, place marketing and branding strategies are often directed at the local population and used as a tool of social control and mobilization to create a 'pseudo-community of locality' (Cox and Mair, 1988: 318, see also McCann, 2002), 'a sense of social solidarity, civic pride

and loyalty to place and even … a mental refuge in a world that capital treats as more and more place-less' (Harvey, 1989a: 14). What Harvey (1989b) has termed the 'mobilization of spectacle' is criticized as 'a subtle form of socialization to convince local people, many of whom will be disadvantaged and potentially disaffected, that they are important cogs in a successful community and that all sorts of "good things" are really being done on their behalf' (Kearns and Philo, 1993: 3). As stated by McCann (2013: 8):

Branding as a strategic approach to the commodification of cities and marketing as a particular element within a brand strategy are ideological, political projects that seek to create a general sense of local common purpose in order to naturalize the notion that certain types of development and growth are good for everyone, in one way or another, and to marginalize any group or individual that questions this myth.

This specific rationale is, additionally, particularly salient in cities in transition or formerly marked by political conflict or racial divides, as place marketing strategies may be used to help redefine collective identity (Neill, 2004; Till, 2005; Colomb, 2011). The politics of image production and place marketing is, in that sense, a politics of identity (Broudehoux, 2004: 27). This is why place marketing strategies may be contested, because 'the marketeers also try to sell places that mean other things to the other peoples of the city, who thereby resist the form that the selling takes (along with its primarily economic motivation) and who also resist the "bread and circuses" element of this selling' (Philo and Kearns, 1993: 18).

Finally, the critical scholarship on place marketing and branding stresses that urban elites' search for 'distinctiveness' in a globalized world paradoxically often leads to the serial replication of similar promotional and urban development strategies and to a homogenization of urban landscapes (Harvey, 1989b). For Harvey (2001), this is one of the inherent contradictions of urban entrepreneurialism: that it tends to destroy the unique qualities of a place and erase its 'monopoly advantage'. This is why place marketing and branding strategies have been labelled as a 'zero-sum game' - highly inefficient and speculative exercises (Loftman *et al.*, 1994; Leitner and Sheppard, 1998) which drive city leaders into a never-ending cycle of increasing in-

vestments in promotional campaigns, flagship projects and mega-events (Greenberg, 2008).

The political economy of place marketing and branding: combining cultural and materialist approaches

While the political production of new urban images has become a popular focus of investigation in (critical) Anglophone urban studies over the past two decades, as briefly outlined in the previous section, I have argued elsewhere (Colomb, 2011; 2015) that the initial literature on that topic in the 1980s and 1990s was often divided between two strands of approaches – those shaped primarily by a materialist political economy approach and those of a cultural-semiotic nature. This reflected a broader tension at play in geography and urban studies around the articulation between culture and economy, 'characterized by crude caricatures of culturalists as die-hard absolute relativists, and of political economists as irreducible base-superstructure materialists' (Ribera-Fumaz, 2009: 1). In conventional urban political economy, place marketing, branding and reimaging practices were initially neglected. This was in large part due to the fact that the Marxian and neo-Marxian tradition of urban political economy and its materialist-economic outlook did not leave much room for the analysis of 'symbols' and 'culture' (Le Galès, 1999). Traditional urban political approaches to the 'local politics of business' (e.g. analyses of 'growth coalitions'), for example, tended to ignore the cultural politics involved (McCann, 2002: 388) and missed out the centrality of discursive and imaging processes in the 'new urban politics'.

By contrast, another strand of scholarship conceptualised the city and its representations as made from 'a plethora of signs and symbols infused with power relations' (Eade and Mele, 2002: 11), which needed to be decoded through the adoption of methods borrowed from cultural and media studies such as visual and semiotic analysis. Semiotics deconstructs textual and visual representations into signs made of a 'signifier' (the vehicle) and a 'signified' (the meaning) (Barthes, 1964). The semiotics of urban image construction was first tested by Burgess (1982) and Burgess and Wood (1988) in their study of the reimaging of the London Docklands, and later used to unpack the 'theming' of

urban landscapes by the real-estate industry (Gottdiener, 1997), as well as the images and representations of the city produced in entrepreneurial urban strategies and city marketing campaigns (Crilley, 1993). Such approaches provided a good insight into the mobilization (and commodification) of particular features of heritage, culture, and the built environment in urban redevelopment and place marketing strategies, but tended to remain rather vague about the underlying forces transforming a city and the socio-economic and political processes and actors behind the production of 'signs' (McNeil, 1998; Jessop, 2004).

The pioneering work of Sharon Zukin (1988, 1991, 1995) and David Harvey (1989b, 2001, 2002) began to bridge the gap between these two strands of approaches and paved the way for the recognition, within urban political economy, of the role of the 'symbolic economy', cultural resources and the politics of urban imaging in contemporary capitalist urbanization processes. Zukin analysed how the economic prosperity of cities in a post-Fordist era (driven by the service, leisure and consumption industries) relies on intertwined processes of production of *space* (through capital investment in particular urban developments) and of *symbols* by 'place entrepreneurs', officials and investors (1995: 23-24). Harvey (1985, 1989a, 1989b), from a historical-materialist political economic tradition, began to highlight the mobilization of 'culture' into new strategies of urban entrepreneurialism and its fundamental role in the transformation of (urban) capitalism. He emphasized how urban elites constantly struggle to find new marks of distinction and uniqueness 'to maintain a monopolistic edge in an otherwise commodified and often fiercely competitive economy' (Harvey, 2001: 396–7; 2002). This entails the increased commodification of particular forms of local culture, history, heritage, and identity in the redevelopment of urban landscapes; the creation of spaces for entertainment, consumption and leisure; a growing reliance on events and spectacles; the turn to an iconic, eclectic and playful postmodern architecture, and the appropriation of the work of artists and cultural producers, whose creativity feeds into the production of collective 'cultural' or 'symbolic' capital for a city (Harvey, 1989a, 1989b). This capital can then be traded directly or indirectly (e.g. by being turned into real estate value), a process referred to by Zukin (1995) as the 'artistic mode of production'.

Following Harvey's and Zukin's pioneering work, in the 1990s and 2000s research into the symbolic economies of cities and the role of culture, symbols and images in urban development expanded rapidly, as part of a wider 'cultural turn' in urban studies which integrated the question of representation so central to cultural studies. This meant accepting that 'representation and imagination are not simply some kind of by-product of urban life. Rather they are central to the very ways in which cities are ordered, managed and made sense of' (Koch and Latham, 2014: 15). In urban political economy, this cultural turn took various forms (for a concise overview see Ribera-Fumaz, 2009). Scholars sought to 'incorporate newer understandings of the symbolic and the cultural without doing away with the traditional focus on the state, class, and urban accumulation' (Eade and Mele, 2002: 6).

Place marketing and branding practices began to be investigated by a number of authors through the combined examination of the 'discourses that sustain the practice of manipulating culture in the selling of places', and of 'the material context (in terms of the national and local economies, polities and societies) that are generating this practice as a key feature of urban governance in the late-twentieth century Western world' (Philo and Kearn 1993: ix).

In urban geography, McCann's analysis of the 'cultural politics of local economic development', for example, sought to grasp how 'commonality' around notions of 'community' or 'locality' is constructed by particular actors for political and economic ends, and how 'meaning-making and place-making occur simultaneously in struggles over the future of space economies' (2002: 385). Conversely, in media studies, Gibson (2005) highlighted the benefits of a synthesis of cultural and political economic analyses to study the symbolic politics of urban development. Rossi and Vanolo's urban political geography textbook (2011) emphasizes the performative power of representations in urban politics and call for the development of a 'political economy of representation', that is, studying the ways in which 'politico-economic elites produce and circulate images and discourses sustaining strategies of urban development and capital accumulation' (p. 1). This approach has been pursued by Vanolo, in his forthcoming book on city branding and the politics of representation in globalising cities.

Other studies of place marketing and branding in particular cities which have fruitfully combined urban political economy and cultural, discourse-analytical or semiotic approaches include Rutheiser's study of the politics of 'imagineering' in Atlanta (1996); Broudehoux's work on the 'remaking and selling' of post-Mao Beijing (2004); Greenberg's analysis of the activities of New York City's 'branding coalitions' (2003, 2008); Lehrer's work on the articulation between image production and material processes of global city formation in the case of the *Potsdamer Platz* redevelopment in Berlin (2000, 2002, 2003); and Johannsson's discourse analysis of the branding of a garden city in Finland (2012). In my own work on the politics of place marketing and urban reimaging in Berlin between 1989 and 2009 (Colomb, 2011), I conceptualised place marketing as a threefold phenomenon – a form of public policy, discourse and visual imagery – investigated through hybrid research methods drawn from political economic and cultural approaches. All those studies carefully consider the power relations, the conflicts and contestations surrounding the development, the implementation and the consequences of place marketing and branding policies (see also Dinardi, 2015).

Conclusion

This brief intellectual mapping exercise has offered a necessarily simplified (and therefore potentially simplistic, some will argue) account of the different disciplinary, theoretical and normative perspectives offered by the (primarily Anglophone) literature on practices of place marketing and branding. It has sought to summarize the main arguments present in the broad range of work falling under the loose label of 'critical urban studies' and urban political economy which have engaged with such practices. It has then highlighted how a number of scholars have sought to overcome a longstanding divide between 'culture' and 'economy', between the study of 'symbolic' and 'material' processes in urban studies, to offer a more perceptive, rich and sophisticated analysis of the politics of imaging in contemporary urban development. The authors referred to in the last section of this paper do not form an entirely homogeneous body of work, but they all 'share a preoccupation with the relations between space, culture

and political economy within the urban political economic restructuring of the last decades' (Ribera-Fumaz, 2009: 8). As such they can provide helpful approaches and a sense of direction to young researchers in the urban political economy tradition wishing to research those processes and practices.

Notes

2. This term refers to a set of prescriptive approaches inspired by rational choice theory which seek to improve the efficiency of public action through the application of private sector management techniques to public administration (Rhodes, 1997).

3. For a discussion of what 'critical' urban theory is, see Brenner, 2009. The term is used to refer to the work of 'leftist' or 'radical' urban scholars after 1968, who emphasize 'the politically and ideologically mediated, socially contested and therefore malleable character of urban space—that is, its continual (re)construction as a site, medium and outcome of historically specific relations of social power' (p. 198). Critical urban theory involves 'the critique of ideology (including social–scientific ideologies) *and* the critique of power, inequality, injustice and exploitation, at once within and among cities' (*Ibid.*).

4. The work of planning (and urban) historians is an exception and does not fall easily into this category, as they tend to avoid such a critical positioning vis-à-vis their object of inquiry to focus instead on producing intricate, detailed and penetrating accounts of the development and diffusion of particular practices across time and space (Ward, 1998a, 1998b).

5. Anholt provides a sharp illustration of this tradition: 'I have always held that the market-based view of the world, on which the theory of place branding is largely predicated, is an inherently peaceful and humanistic model for the relationships between nations. It is based on competition, consumer choice and consumer power; and these concepts are intimately linked to the freedom and power of the individual. For this reason, it seems far more likely to result in lasting world peace than a statecraft based on territory, economic power, ideologies, politics or religion' (2006: 2).

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