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A brand tells a story. A story employs a text set across a structure. Place-branding involves the deployment of a coordinated and homogenized campaign of aesthetic features and attitudinal markers across a location. But the resulting weave is also open to unpicking, frottage or re-use.

Any story is helped along with an attention-grabbing opener. So on 26 September, 2005, the Leeds City Council's place-marketing arm, Marketing Leeds, unveiled its city brand at the city's famous Victoria Quarter. This arcade includes such key up-market retail brands as Harvey Nichols, Ted Baker and Louis Vuitton that underline Leeds's national reputation as a shopping destination. The event featured support messages from Leeds-connected celebrities such as Chris Moyles, the BBC Radio 1 DJ and local bands Embrace and the Kaiser Chiefs.

The brand carried the slogan 'Leeds. Live It. Love It'. In developing this identity, the local branding and communications group entitled An Agency Called England, undertook a survey of Leeds residents to discern if the city was a person, what kind of person would that be. As if to underline the consumeristic bias of its launch, the 'research' that came back was that Leeds would be, '..a young male, friendly, your best friend, a reall nice person to know, an ambitious person, living in a trendy apartment, driving a Volkswagen Golf GTi' (Scott 2005).

Outside the 'official' identity for Leeds, sit a number of cues that provide alternative narratives for the city. That Leeds is home to the largest Jewish population and the most extensive Afro-Carribean carnival in the UK outside London were absent at the launch party. So too were other causes for celebration, such as the city's long history that melded creative practices and political activism, evidenced through bands such as The Mekons and Chumbawumba. Additionally, it is home to the Leeds Animation Workshop, founded in 1976 as a group of women friends who came together to make a film about the need for pre-school childcare. Since then they have produced numerous titles on social issues. Leeds is also the home of Leeds Postcards. Founded in 1979, this group set the standard for activist stationery in the 1980s. Leeds is also where, via a slow process of community participation, steps were made in the 1990s to the establishment of Britain's first Home Zone, turning residential

streets into mixed use civic spaces. By 2008, a group of what I will call 'design activists' had instigated a counter-brand with the slogan 'Leeds. Love It. Share It', connecting into a number of other initiatives.

*****INSERT OFFICIAL 'LEEDS. LIVE IT. LOVE IT' (nb. dependent on permission which could be unlikely) AND 'LEEDS. LOVE IT. SHARE IT' LOGOTYPES HERE****

The subversion of brands, by their decollage or rewriting has become a common trope within activism. Examples of 'subvertising' are abundant. Witness, for example, www.subvertise.org or the journal *Adbusters* where visual or literary puns on company names, ads or slogans are made in order to reveal how they conspire in systems of exploitation. Hence, 'Ford' becomes 'Fraud', and so on. Such incursions are nonetheless *reactive*. They provide critique of dominant actors and processes within neo-liberal capitalism, but they do not necessarily propose alternative actions. Subvertisements, I hold, might be effective in jogging political consciousness. But by existing wholly in the same cultural field – print and digital media –they do not offer any specific indicators as the 'the next step'.

By contrast, a counter-brand may extend from critique into the instigation of alternative attitudinal markers for action. The slogan 'Leeds. Love It. Share It' is, at a basic level, a subversion of the official line of 'Leeds. Live It. Love It'. This takes some inspiration from the historical tradition culture-jamming activities, some of which was, indeed, energised through the aforementioned Leeds Postcards. But it also offers the suggestion that local enthusiasms can be mustered toward a more equal and inclusive practice of urban life. The Leeds of the official brand slogan is almost an abstract concept. Loving it is loving an idea of Leeds. However, sharing it begs the questions, 'Share what? Amongst whom? In what proportions?' and so on. Thus focus is diverted toward the specifics of its physical and economic resources and its people. A more concrete notion of Leeds is considered to be acted upon.

With reference to the case of Leeds, this chapter reviews the ways that design activism contests and disrupts the assumed spatiality that is inherent in place-branding. In particular, folded into the dominant spatial ideology is the notion, within their governance, of postindustrial urban agglomerations as, primarily, sites of consumption in the context of neo-liberal global networks. The economic and spatial logic on which this ideology is founded becomes challenged by the dual exigencies of financial meltdown and climate change, This opens up a space within which its own

protaganists begin to question their own assumptions. However, as 'political intermediaries', activists – including those working in the design sphere – have already anticipated the need for changes in tempo and focus in local governance.

Place-branding and globalism

The *a priori* casting of urban identities in a globalist way is common among many academic accounts. For example, Anna Klingman, takes a critical view of international architectural traditions that foreground landmark buildings as a tactic for making a place recognisable. She sees the tactics of branding – in her case, thinking about the orchestration of the users' experience of spatial phenomena – as an antidote to this. None the less she begins her book by positing that, 'It is a fact that people and places must differentiate themselves in a global economy' (2007: 27). The emphasis here is on the *outward* orientation of locations and the users of them. The latters' everyday dispositions therefore become automatically imbricated into their role as actors in on a world stage rather than in their own right or toward localised. Being cosmopolitan is part of being urban; being urban is part of participating in the global order of things and their economy.

The need for differentiation through place-branding exists within assumptions with regards to inter-territorial competition for investment, jobs, residents and visitors (Storper 1997; Buck et al 2005). This is derived in part from a logic formed with management studies, in particularly Porter's notion of 'competitive advantage' (Porter 1990). Here, differentation is concerned with providing a niche within the marketplace rather that head-on competition with other companies, or in this case, places. Thus the features of a place are refined and articulated in order attract certain forms of capital investment, entrepreneurial expertise and labour resources according that script (Jensen 2007).

This is a defensive strategy in that it responds to perceived demands of the global marketplace rather than proposes an alternative approach to the healthy economic, social and environmental maintenance of a place. Recent much quoted examples suggest that alternative frameworks of existence for urban agglomerations may be pursued. Regeneration specialists in Rotterdam are investigating the notion of reframing itself as a 'skill city'. By focusing on the existing and latent faculties of its population, it is expected that alliances, dispositions and relationships may be forged

that provide new social models for conviviality (Oosterling 2007). Detroit is emerging from terminal deindustrialisation and depopulation as an energetic model for urban agriculture (Boggs 2003).

Critiques have emerged that problematize the easy alliance of urban identity, globalism and a homogenizing view of cities. Fraser and Weninger (2008: 1436) argue that the narratives of globalisation and neoliberal governance are 'increasingly deployed as the lens through which the transformation of urban space is written'. Smith (2001: 43) maintains that early accounts to understand globalization in terms of finance and flexible accumulation (in particular, for example, Harvey 1985) leave out politics as a social and cultural force. They omit an analysis of power in all its criss-crossing forms as opposed to the power of capital. Robinson (2006) adds that the dominant account of globalization privileges a Western notion of modernity within whose discourse cities are subsequently ranked.

These assumptions about the operation of urban agglomerations automatically lead to some quite basic problems. Within days of the Leeds brand launch it was revealed that Hong Kong had already carried the 'Live It. Love It' marketing slogan for three years. This confirms one of the perennial problems of place-branding: that in fixing the image of a location in readable and understandable way for a global audience, the message is reduced to broad rhetorical devices. Equally, a brief survey of cities shows that Singapore, Brisbane and Birmingham have described themselves as 'dynamic' and 'cosmopolitan' or 'diverse'. Johannesburg and Manchester were both 'vibrant'; Birmingham, Glasgow, and Johannesburg were 'cultural', Santo Domingo and Brisbane, they claimed, were 'sophisticated' (Julier 2005). Theirs is a quest to ally themselves with notions of being modern and cosmospolitan while at the same time differentiating themselves from each other. However, they show that the limited scope allowed in the former leads to failure in the latter (Turok 2009).

Nevertheless, slogans and tags are merely one part of the codification of urban identities and their formation through promotional graphics, urban design, architecture and marketing strategies. Place-brands are subject to guidelines that rigorously set out such details as allowable applications of colour palettes, typefaces or textual copy. These provide legally enforceable standards, transposing research into local characteristics and/or their global reputation into intellectual property. In so doing they also establish a marque of authority over specific spatial contexts.

Authoritarianism Beyond Place-Brands

This authoritarianism extends into the built environment through planning processes whose aesthetic features are also informed by localised design guides. Urban design is redolent with compendia and 'best practice' guidelines that involve the codification of its practice and outcomes. These are invariably arrived at by careful appraisal of the architectural and planning features of the city. But at the same time they are tightly bound into assumptions with regards to notions of 'character' and 'modernity' and how these are communicated (Julier 2009).

In the UK, this process has been folded into urban regeneration strategies. The UK government's Urban Task Force, founded soon after New Labour's election to power in 1997, published its highly influential policy statement *Towards An Urban Renaissance* (Urban Task Force 1999). This and the subsequent Urban White Paper (2000) came amongst a plethora of government policy that attempted to address urban living in the postindustrial era. For the first time, design was placed as a key component in the revitalisation of urban areas.None the less, its translation into government policy and thence into application at local level has tended to focus largely on a narrow interpretation of design as engaging its purely formal rather than processual features. Implicit in this is a behaviouristic model of urban design that is deeply embedded in its theoretical backgrounds (see Cuthbert 2006). In brief, this approach is firmly rooted in a view of space as the assemblage of typologies that are based entirely on their material facets rather than on practices of everyday life. Thus, for example, we hear of 'settlement pattern', 'urban form', 'urban space' and 'built form' (eg. DCLG 2006: 65) rather than the human infrastructure of, say, 'kinship', 'mobility', 'social networks' or 'labour'.

Whether it be the guides on 'best practice' in developing design codes or the design codes themselves, the emphasis is on design that *produces* attitudes and behaviours in and toward places. Put the other way around, despite the recurrent reminders that public consultation is generally a good thing in the development of design guidelines, the end result is a particular, specifically cast narrative of what urban living should be. This narrative is, in turn, served up as something to be consumed, adhered to and adopted as a disposition or, as Bourdieu (1984) would have had it, an urban *habitus*. Citizens are to complete the scenography, in other words.

This is perhaps more implicit in design codes and guidelines for urban design and planning. In place-branding the message is perhaps clearer or, even, more brutal in that it requests a particular form of performativity in response to the brand values that are laid down. Branding orthodoxy involves the fixing of core themes that describe the essential features of the object. These are, in turn, translated into aesthetic gestures that begin with a fixing slogan. These are further rolled out into a logo, websites, print material and beyond, sometimes, into aspects of urban design, planning and architecture (Julier 2005). Brand guidelines provide rigorous rules on the use of such details as colour, typography and 'voice'. Design implementations of the brand may be controlled by the restriction of any subcontracted work to an approved roster of design studios who make legal agreements to adhere to the guidelines. In this way, the message is tightly controlled.

The Political Economy of Place-Branding

Mommaass (2002: 34) usefully provides a summary of the conundrums that are felt through place-branding and its connection into a authoritarian view of development and globalization. He argues that not addressing the *particularities* (my emphasis) of local culture produces the following tensions:

> 1. the tendency to gear city brands to the dynamic of an external cash-rich market rather than to that of internal cultural practices and feelings;
> 2. the tendency to objectify and generalize specific cultural meanings by the means of 'brands' and then to link these meanings materially to spectacular places and projects;
> 3. the possible danger that 'brands' preclude renewal rather than stimulate it, the long-term effect being that urban practices are dragged along on their necessary inflation. (Mommaas 2002: 34)

In Leeds, the intense instrumentalization of design in the fixing of an image and practice of urban living goes hand-in-hand with a set of priorities with regards to its political economy. Over the past 20 years, Leeds and its city-centre in particular has undergone significant change. Key features include:

— re-imagining of the city as 24 Hour City with 'European' allusions to being the 'Barcelona of the North', 24 hour café society and city centre living from the early 1990s (Haughton and Williams 1996);

— growth of its city centre population from a few hundred to a projected 20,000 by 2015 (Knight Frank 2005) (NB. however, this will only account for 2% for the city's population (Fox and Unsworth 2003));

— £1.4b. worth of office and apartment schemes under construction at the end of 2006 and a further £5.8b. proposed – a total of £10.4b since 1997 (Leeds City Council cited in Chatterton and Hodkinson 2007);

— reduction of social housing stock by 40,000 over the past 25 years with a further reduction of 10,000 by 2016 (Leeds City Council cited in Hodkinson and Chatterton 2007)

— adherence to the largest Public Private Partnership or Private Funding Initiative programmes in schools, health and other welfare provision (£880m) in the UK and a consequent tying in of their operation and governance with a range of private services in accountancy and law and other forms of private sector service delivery (Faucet 2009).

In short, then, the visual and material transformation of Leeds – intensely focused on its city-centre – has stood in to confirm and, even, celebrate its participation in neo-liberal policies on the financialisation of its operations at a regional or national level while, at the same, time to implicate it even deeper into global flows of capital. The place-brand, architectural and urban design inputs to the city must be read in the context of capitalisation and financialisation processes (Molotch 1976; Minton 2009). Challenges to the city's prevailing dominant design strategies must also be read as challenges to its dominant ideological discourse with regards its economic and, thus, spatial structure.

This drive itself came about in response to the perceived poor performance of Leeds against an ascendant verve for ranking global cities (eg. CWHB 2002; Sperling and Sander 2005). At a city envisioning event in 2002 ('The Big Meeting') it was noted that Leeds did not figure amongst the top 20 European cities to do business in. For a city of only 700,000 inhabitants competing against the likes of Frankfurt, Amsterdam and Barcelona, this should hardly be a thwarted ambition. However, the exterior perception of Leeds certainly riled. In 2003, the local advertising agency Brahm was commissioned by the city council to carry out research on external perceptions of Leeds. Out of this, but also out of this more general sense of insecurity shared

amongst city officials and leadership came the notion of 'Going up a League'. This was coined by the umbrella group of city council, agencies and leaders, the Leeds Initiative and made in response to a comment by Hans Anders, Senior Planner of Gothenburg, who in response to 'The Big Meeting', commented, If you don't work on going up a league, you will end up going down one'. The first of the Leeds Initiative's aims is, 'Going up a League', 'making Leeds an internationally competitive city, the best place in the country to live, work and learn, with a high quality of life for everyone' (Leeds Initiative 2004). The 'Leeds. Live It. Love It' brand was therefore constituted in this boosteristic context.

Challenges to Place-Brands

Place-brands may not always go in one direction, either on the part of their originators or on that of interlopers. Dismantling or understating a place-brand may be a deliberate process on the part of its originators. Medway and Warnaby (2008) raise the notion of strategic 'demarketing' of places. They draw attention to the occasional need to manage visitor numbers in order to avoid supply outstripping demand or to discourage the 'wrong kind' (eg. disruptive stag parties). They also argue that 'perverse place marketing' may be effective, for example, by drawing attention to the quirkiness of a location (eg. Whitby as a 'goth town' to attract a niche visitorship) or its underside (eg. the London Borough of Hackney advertising itself as 'Britain's Poorest Borough' in the 1980s in order to influence policy makers).

Subculturally-orientated entrepreneurialism may also trigger unofficial place identifiers. The 'Birmingham: It's Not Shit' website (see www.birminghamitsnotshit.co.uk) was established in 2002. It acts both as a mildly sarcastic celebration of the city, delivering peons to such features as its 1960s Bulllring shopping centre or the city's No.11 bus route. For its author, the humourist Jon Bounds, this site also provides a shop-window for his writing and an opportunity to sell related merchandise. However, it also provides an important opportunity for listings of gigs and other events and has an enthusiastic blog following. In so doing, the website gently mocks notions of city-pride whilst providing an alternative lens through which the city may be seen.

Similarly, even before the 'Leeds. Live It. Love It' brand was released, local radio station Aire FM had promoted an alternative identity for the city. In 2004, it ran a billboard advert adjacent to the annual temporary ice-rink in the city centre that read, 'No La-De-Da Skating, No Lycra Outfits, No Cheesy Smiles, Remember This Is Leeds'. Bell (2009) argues that city centre ice-skating provides a regulated ludic space – the engineering of affect (Thrift 2004) – while at the same time underscoring notions of individual and collective risk as well as entrepreneurialism. It provides a materialisation of 'official' city aspirations and an opportunity for participants to adopt these as dispositions. But Aire FM had other thoughts. There is another narrative of Leeds, and Yorkshire, as unfussy, solid and down-to-earth (Sandle 2004) to be got over and heady city ambitions were not going to detract from this other story.

The image of 'going up a league', of Leeds as the international, 24-hour city to do business in, of retail-fuelled loving-it-while-you-live-it got severely dented by the economic recession of 2008-10. Employment had peaked at 455,000 in 2007 and was expected to decrease by 18,800 over the following 3 years (Leeds City Council 2009). Of a total of 5,653 city centre apartments, 15.51% were empty at the beginning of 2009, 7% of which had been so for more than 12 months (BBC 2009). As the city's river Aire burst its banks – the second major flooding of the city centre inside a year – so this gave visible evidence to the need to build a more sustainable approach to urban planning and design. In the background, the development boom has passed its zenith. The credit crunch of early 2008 and loss in demand, led to many schemes being put on hold, including the £160m. Spiracle tower, a building for which the city's only city centre public swimming pool was closed to make way for.

Set against this recessionary backcloth was the rise of a number of new activist initiatives in the city which were centred on issues of sustainability, urban form and governance. These included Stop Climate Chaos Leeds, a Transition Towns group, the Leeds Eco-Village project, the Leeds: Are We Going In The Right Direction? initiative and Climate for Change. Amidst these, and drawing on the city's 'alternative' historical roots, a revindication of design activism was sought amongst several of its creative practitioners. While, needless to say, some impetus for such activist initiatives may be read in the context of global concerns with regards to climate change, peak oil and economic crises, their focused was highly localised in that they rested on questions of the ways that Leeds *is* and could be. The official brand was a useful point of reference for contestation for design activists.

Design Activism and Place-Identity

Fuad-Luke (2009: 27) puts forward a definition of design activism as, 'design thinking, imagination and practice applied knowingly or unknowingly to create a counter narrative aimed at generating and balancing positive social, institutional, environmental and/or economic change'. It could be claimed that design activism has as long a pedigree as the profession itself. The emergent, modern conception of design in the latter half of the nineteenth century located it in terms of an 'added value' that was to temper a Kantian notion of endless production that filled out the later industrial revolution. Design was an ethical challenge that harnessed taste and control as against the rampant commercialism of modern production and consumer culture (Dutta 2009). Thus, as propogated by John Ruskin, William Morris, Christopher Dresser and their progenies, design was to be a moral filtering system. Since the early 1970s, design for social need and ecological concerns have been recurrent themes, as witnessed by the enduring success of Victor Papanek's seminal text *Design for the Real World* (1972), that became an international cult book for designers and non-designers alike.

The activist impulse amongst many designers has been been given further impetus since 2000. Needless to say, this may be allied with general concerns for environmental amelioration and social justice as echoed in such books as *Massive Change: A Manifesto for the Future Global Design Culture* (Mau 2004) and *Design Like You Give a Damn: Architectural Reponses to Humanitarian Crises* (Architecture for Humanity 2006). In such accounts, following in the footsteps of Papanek, the designer's work keys into globalist ambitions wherein expertise is lent to specific local challenges (such as fresh water or mobility) as part of a world view on responsibility. Here, creative solutions are largely technical before they are social.

There is another design activist approach that foregrounds social practices. This focuses on innovations that individuals or communities create for themselves, seeing that 'unofficial customization' of resources may be of significance. The designer's job is to recognise these, facilitate their development and possible up-scaling. Thus, for example, turning informal arrangements for lift-sharing into a neighbourhood scheme supported by internet booking may be a social innovation that the designer develops upon (Manzini and Jegou 2004). In this approach the emphasis is on the small-scale

and local and on the analysis of the everyday ways by which people live and their capabilities. While this verve for localism maybe a starting point, it is accepted that cultures are not territorilized but exist in extended relational networks and flows. Thus, to borrow from Fraser and Weninger (2008:1438) the design activist enters into these networks and becomes 'part of the dynamic that produces futures'.

The 'Leeds. Love It. Share It.' counter-brand was established by an alliance of creative practitioners and members of the academic community who were concerned the direction of the Leeds. The 'Leeds. Live It. Love It.' slogan was seen to typify the globalist ideology, powered by neo-liberal financialisation, as already discussed above. However, to re-cap, 'Leeds. Love It. Share It.' was more than a cheeky rebuff or a challenge to the authoritarianism of the official brand and what it stood for. Its implication in 'sharing it' was to shift attention from the city-centre as site of tourism, shopping and night-time economies, to a participative city, encompassing all its spatial and demographic features.

The activism that was intended in producing an alternative logotype was in a moral position that the city's population deserved 'something better', both visually and in its message. It was also driven by an awareness of the need to imaginatively re-think the ways that urban life are practiced and identified in the face of climate change, peak oil and global economic recession. Thus, the management of the counter-brand would have to be distinct from the official Leeds brand. The official 'Leeds. Live It. Love It.' logotype could be liberally applied to merchandise and communications that existed in the dominant neo-liberal domain of the city's urban culture. The 'Leeds. Love It. Share It.' counter-brand had to honour the autonomy of other activist groups in Leeds (and thus not being seen to appropriate their own energies). Any alternative space that it inhabited would, effectively, have to be created by itself. Distribution of the counter-brand was thus low-kay and, thus, it was largely ignored by Marketing Leeds who managed the official city brand. In any case, since it was of entirely original design, the counter-brand was not in any breach of any legal guidelines governing trade marks.

In seeking another space for the counter-brand to become embedded and meaningful, 'Leeds. Love It. Share It.' worked to model design activist practice. Whilst it deliberately set out to challenge dominant conceptions of the city, it was also necessary to instigate activities that demonstrated the possibilities of alternative

approaches to its economic, social and environmental make-up. A project was needed.

'Leeds. Love It. Share It' could therefore not work entirely independently of the systems of local governance. It would look to building relationships with interested departments of the Regional Development Agency, Yorkshire Forward and other agencies who were engaged the development and delivery of regeneration and neighbourhood management services. In so doing, it exploited the very system of, what Whitfield (2006) calls. 'agentification' that neo-liberal governance had itself established. Here, delivery of public sector services may be developed and managed through the alliance of local authority social services, semi-public agencies, and the voluntary sector. These in turn may be financed through a mixture of recurrent local authority expenditure, specific national or European government grants or charitable donation. 'Leeds. Love It. Share It.' could therefore insert itself into this complex web of interests, benefitting from partnerships, while not so stridently challenging the status quo so as to alienate itself from potential funders or allies. The balancing act of activism and collaboration was most probably achieved through careful targetting of interested parties (eg. speaking to sympathetic people in the Regional Development Agency) coupled with demonstrating that the aims and expertise of 'Leeds. Love It. Share It'. could be of longer-term benefit to the city at large. Finally, for legal-financial reasons it thus had to constitute itself as a Community Interest Company in order to manage externally funded projects.

In a project entitled 'Margins within the City' and in partnership with Yorkshire Forward and the Local Enterprise Generation Unit 'Leeds. Love It. Share It' undertook a mapping of social networks, skills and space use in the Leeds inner suburb of Richmond Hill (population 17,000) during 2009. This revealed the hidden potentials that exist in a maligned and little understood neighbourhood that carried a reputation for long-term unemployment, social fragmentation and a poor environment. However, the chief concern of this project was to design and prototype tools that could be rolled out to other neighbourhoods. In so doing, the emphasis was on the discovering and drawing attention to their productive capacities. These may reside in an expanded field of economic practices and social skills – ones that do not appear in business listings – such as mending cars or informal caring arrangements. The mapping process itself thus becomes a way that a neighbourhood knows itself. Focusing on its productive capacities (both extant and *in potentia* and in their most

broad conception) provides a means to forge new place-identities that are flexible, dynamic and specific to the everyday lives of citizens.

Why should this be seen as *design* activism, rather than, more generally, activist work? At a banal level, the generation of a counter-brand involves design decisions as to such elements as typography and colour. But it is the more extended activities of 'Leeds. Love It. Share It.' that lends themselves to 'design thinking'. More specifically, its approach resonates with the emergent specialism of 'service design' (Kimbell 2009). This is very much concerned with investigating the *relations* and *exchanges* that go on between citizens and environments. Its method involves deep user research in order to understand the variety of requirements and experiences that they engage. In addition notice may be taken of small scale innovations that users and producers of services create themselves, seeing that their 'unofficial customization' may be of significance and applicability that can be up-scaled. In the case of the 'Margins within the City', mapping such things as the distribution of social centres or cornershops, what they provide and how community members access them pays attention to the micro-levels of everyday life and how, in turn, these relate to a larger sense of neighbourhood.

Such data can then be returned to community stakeholders so that they can engage in the design and development of services that are most appropriate to their needs. The project has revealed the 'hollowing out' of the neighbourhood through the progressive removal of power, place-identity, finance, economic opportunity and services in preference to the capital and infrastructural intensity of the city centre and elsewhere (Leeds. Love It. Share It 2010). But in the small-scale innovations, the adaptations, the exploitation of low-costs that may be found in economically marginal neighbourhoods or the forging of informal economies, alternative forms of resilience and adaptability that challenge the dominant scales through which it is conceptualized (see Pike, Dawley and Tomaney 2010) may be developed. For Richmond Hill it may not be so much a case of 'Going up a League' as inventing a new game.

Rather than imposing a top-down conception of city-living (one that privileges a mythical lifestyle of an affluent minority, reflecting a city-centre bias) the 'Leeds. Love It. Share It.' counter-brand favours the flourishing of multiple-identities in a multi-centred urban agglomeration. New senses of locality and identity may arise while the ambition of the umbrella counter-brand is for it to eventually become redundant.

Conclusion

Place-branding, as with branding in general, is founded in perceived perception. It is outwardly oriented to the globalist gaze. How an urban agglomeration is framed is dependant on how its dominant authority believes it should be seen. This is driven by a spatial model that sees the city as a node in global flows of finance and people. Thus in order to make it attractive to the right finance and the right people, it has to invent itself with a language that appeals to this presumed global audience. Meanwhile, its citizens are required to play bit parts within this carefully designed scenario of global (or Western) modernity.

An alternative is to reverse this process, giving prominence to the actors that *make* the city, allowing its many practices and identities to provide a multilayered urban conception. This acknowledges the agency of human action. Design activism may involve re-working the urban *habitus* or, at least, finding new ways of representing what's there but overlooked.

By shifting from slogan and logotype to action, by only establishing a counter-brand as a starting point for a more extensive, activist approach, the 'Leeds. Love It. Share It' initiative might avoid the pitfalls of mimicry. An official place-brand involves the reduction of a complex spatial and social organism to an oversimplified and easily contestable utterance. A counter-brand can easily do the same. However, if the latter is presented as just the starting point for a debate with regards to the kinds of places we want to live, learn and work in, then it may open out onto other practices.

Reflecting on attempts to re-brand Britain as 'Cool Britannia' during the 1990s, Robert Hewison argued that , 'it is up to the creators of symbolic goods – the designers, artists and architect[s] … to scribble all over the marque, to break in from the margins of an ersatz, marketised identity and reveal just what our collective sense of ourselves could be' (Hewison 1997:31). However, design activism can do more than just scribble. It can produce alternative narratives or, at least, provide some of the tools to write new stories.

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