Branding the Contemporary City
- Urban branding as Regional Growth Agenda?

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores the phenomenon of 'urban branding' within the context of cities transforming from industrial cities towards cultural, creative and knowledge-based urban environments. The paper addresses the contemporary urban situation of globalisation, the re-structuring of urban economies and what is here termed 'New Urban Management'. By exploring notions of creative cities, the 'Creative Class', knowledge cities, culture cities, shopping, fun and leisure cities the paper paves the way for an understanding of the contemporary city and the transformation processes it faces in relation to branding practices. The paper establishes a tentative understanding of urban branding as for what we might term the 'representational logics of urban intervention'. In two empirical cases urban branding is explored. These are the cases of the Øresund Region and the city of Aalborg. In the end of the paper concluding remarks are made in relation to the phenomenon of urban branding as potential regional growth agenda. Furthermore, tentative observations on the relationship between branding 'from above' and branding 'from below' are made.

Branding the contemporary city - urban branding as regional growth agenda?

All the world's a stage, and all the men and women are merely players
William Shakespeare, As You Like It, 1600

It is a particular attraction of world fairs that they form a momentary centre of world civilization, assembling the products of the entire world in a confined space as if in a single picture. Put the other way around, a single city has broadened into totality of cultural production. A single city to which the whole world sends its products and where all important styles are put on display
Georg Simmel, The Berlin Trade Exhibition, 1896

The Spectacle is the chief product of the present day society
Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle, 1967

1. Introduction

In relation to the Berlin Trade Exhibition Georg Simmel noticed as early as in 1896 that "*where competition no longer operates in matters of usefulness and intrinsic properties, the interest of the buyer has to be aroused by the external stimulus of the object, even in the manner of its presentation*" (Simmel 1991:122). Clearly this has an affinity to the contemporary situation where the 'image of the city' seems to be as important as the physical attributes of the place. This paper shall explore the notion of the 'city represented' by looking into the contemporary phenomena of urban branding or city marketing.

The paper explores the phenomenon of 'urban branding' within the context of cities transforming from industrial cities towards cultural, creative and knowledge-based urban environments. The paper targets the contemporary urban situation of globalisation, the re-structuring of urban economies and what is here termed 'New Urban Management'. By including notions of creative cities, the 'Creative Class', knowledge cities, culture cities, shopping, fun and leisure cities, the paper paves the way for an understanding of the contemporary city and the transformation processes it faces. The paper establishes a tentative understanding of urban branding as for what we might term the 'representational logics of urban intervention'.

In two empirical cases urban branding is discussed. These are the cases of the Øresund Region and the city of Aalborg. In the end of the paper concluding remarks are made in relation to the phenomenon of urban branding as potential regional growth agenda. Furthermore, tentative observations on the relationship between branding 'from above' and branding 'from below' are made.

2. Notes on the Contemporary Urban situation

The world is changing apace. This has always been the case, but there seems to be a broad common understanding in urban theory that at least during the last three decades society has changed in novel and speedy ways that do not seem to have much historical precedence. Harvey speaks of a transformation from Fordism to 'Flexible Accumulation' (Harvey 1990:41) as a way of understanding the transformations of the organisational and spatial frame of capitalism. But also the way capital works in its changed relationship between the material and the immaterial has called for

new terminologies, as for example when Lash and Urry identify a new regime of 'Reflexive accumulation' (Lash & Urry 1994:60). Diverse theorists have argued for a renewed understanding of the 'Knowledge-based economy' (Jessop 2004:49), and the 'Informational mode' of capitalism (Castells 1996). Kvorning discusses the adaptation to post-industrial conditions in the case of the transformation of Copenhagen from industrial to post-industrial city (Kvorning 1997). Here Kvorning identifies a duality of receptiveness and opposition as the city sheds its industrial identity in order to become re-oriented towards new international networks and linkages[1].

Globalisation and urban development
Multiple definitions and debates unfold around the notion of globalisation. Here we shall take point of departure in Giddens' rather simplistic definition and try to relate it more explicitly to contemporary urban development. According to Giddens, globalisation has to do with:

> The intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities
> in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many
> miles away and vice versa (Giddens 1990:64)

The understanding of globalisation as a frame condition for urban performance has led to a number of theoretical and conceptual developments that are trying to capture the relationship between cities and their economic competitiveness (Jensen-Butler 1999). As an exemplification of the immense complexity Begg discusses this under the heading of the 'urban competitiveness maze' (Begg 1999:802). This redirects the orientation of urban stakeholders, planners and politicians as it is generally accepted that:

> The task of urban governance has increasingly become the (re)creation of urban
> conditions sufficiently attractive to lure potential capital into the area (Rogerson
> 1999:971)

However, in a general climate of business friendly local governments, footloose capital and high-technological infrastructure, basic attributes such as 'quality-of-life' has not been forgotten (Rogerson 1999). In the words of Landry, the city has a special role to play in the 'new economy' since face-to-face interaction, networking and trading remains vital (Landry 2000:34).

In this climate of global change there has been a shift in the nature of workers loyalties from an older set of loyalties to a firm or an industry towards a new set of loyalties targeting an occupational group and a particular place that offers 'career buzz' as well as good community relations (Gertler 2004:3). Thus, there seems to be a need for understanding the profound and very complex transformations of the relationship between social agents and their physical environment. Clearly one should consider globalisation and the rise of a 'network society' (Castells 1996), but not as a story of the 'end of geography' (Bauman 1998) and the loss of any spatial referents in the building of social identities. Rather, new dynamics seem to make the articulation of socio-spatial

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[1] The treating of a city as one distinct subject that 'takes action' is clearly not an adequate description. The city as a spatial entity obviously does not take action. Only urban stakeholders with competing intentions and rationalities do! On the 'city as subject' problem Jessop warns against not only subscribing a non-existent coherence and unity to cities, but also to the risk of conflating city representatives' notions and ideas with those of whole urban populations (Jessop 1998: 86-7). Furthermore, one runs the risk of thinking of the city as a 'thing' instead of understanding its complex and fluid character (Amin & Thrift 2002). Hence whenever cities are presented as acting subject hereafter it should be with this reservation in mind.

identification an ongoing 'negotiation' and 'story' of relating and belonging to different entities at different scales and at different times (Savage et. al 2005).

Lever identifies (at least) five basic targets for cities' competition; for mobile investment, for added value to the gross domestic product, for population, for public funds and finally for hallmark events and major pieces of infrastructure (Lever 1999:1029). Based upon an analysis of European interurban competition in terms of income-growth and employment-creation, Lever concludes that:

> Competitive success reflects visionary civic leadership, flexibility in the labour force, a responsive public sector, effective public-private partnerships and an entrepreneurial milieu (Lever 1999:1042)

Urban branding or place marketing (as it was labelled in the 1990's) is a response to such increased interurban competition. A tendency that leads urban governments towards more entrepreneurial and market oriented forms of urban management (van den Berg & Braun 1999:987). In the urban landscape industrial brown-field sites have captured the eyes of the urban stakeholders and developers. But also the waterfronts of the old transport harbours are transforming into larger harbours as a result of the centralisation of bulk and goods water transport – the branding potential of the 'fluid city' is immense (Dovey 2005). There is nothing new in the attempt to make cities attractive in a market economy, but there is now an increased awareness of the strategic and professionalized dimension to such urban branding activities. Hence, apart from a 'product that can be sold' urban managers and politicians also need to be considering the 'organising capacity' for institutionalising new branding practices (van den Berg & Braun 1999:998). Such strategic thinking is furthermore being broadened out from the hard economic figures and infrastructures to also include the 'softer' dimensions of urban liveability:

> As interurban competition on a global scale became the norm in the 1980's and 1990's, image took on an ever more vital role in urban economies … 'Quality of life' became the rallying cry of many big-city mayors elected at this time, based on a 'broken window' theory whereby the simple appearance of disorder had a material effect of provoking criminal behaviour, thus justifying urban policies based more on cleaning up those appearances than on addressing underlying social issues (Greenberg 2000:250)

What we find is a relativization of spatial scale as a resurgence of the urban and metropolitan as sites of economic competitiveness (Jessop 2005:51). Such re-positioning have not only to do with changed condition for the cities but also the conditions of their 'hosting' nation-states:

> This repositioning of cities is part of a more general structural transformation and strategic reorientation of the Fordist economy and its Keynesian Welfare National State (KWNS) towards … the Schumpeterian Workfare Post-National Regime or SWPR (Jessop 2004:51)

Such a shift on behalf of the regulating entities has real repercussions for the turning towards the new markets of the 'experience economy'.

'Look No More Factories!' – Leisure and event cities in the experience economy
The societal transformation process of the Western countries has been labelled many things, but the shift towards immaterial and experiential stimulation seems to be a common denominator. Let aside that there still are massive inequalities and welfare problems, the global shift has given social agents completely new 'tools' for constructing identities and relating to one another. Thus we are, with the German sociologist Gerhard Schulze, living in the '*Erlebnisgeschellschaft*' or 'experience society' where the primary concern shifts from subsistence to 'making sense' through seeking ever more stimulating experiences (Schulze 1992).

Short identifies a predominant theme in the urban re-structuring and the branding of US cities as; '*Look No More Factories*!' (Short 1999:45). Due to the global transformation processes of the contemporary capitalist economy cities with an industrial background and heritage are busy erasing the traces of that historic legacy:

> To be seen as industrial is to be associated with the old, the polluted, the out of date. A persistent strand of urban (re)presentations has been the reconstruction of the image of the industrial city (Short 1999:45)

Clearly this is a major theme on the branding agenda in the case of Aalborg, which we will have a closer look at later in the paper. As in other cities, here the re-imagining process involves not only semiotic work but also a physical reconstruction of the city (Short 1999:46). Thus the situation of re-imagining the post-industrial city faces diverse challenges. Firstly, the de-industrialisation destroys the meaning and representation circulating in the city and challenges the identity formation around the history of the industrial city. Secondly, such 'image makeovers' express struggles for the right to represent the city and its new future.

According to Pine & Gilmore (1999:6-14) the hallmark of our economy is that it is an 'experience economy'. Accordingly, there is an extreme added value in moving from commodities, goods and services into the 'fourth dimension' namely that of the 'experience'. Adding the symbolic dimension of a nice café atmosphere makes the ordinary cup of coffee multiply the revenue potential (Pine & Gilmore 1999). Stressing the open-endedness of their way of seeing the new economy they boldly state that '*there is no such thing as an artificial experience*' (Pine & Gilmore 1999:37), which is a clear suggestion that the sky is the limit in terms of turning the city into ever new sites to be consumed. Part of such staging and 'theming' has to do with the transformation of leisure and fun into new dimensions of urban experience commodities such as visiting a museum or going to the mall. Short identifies two broad themes of US urban booster campaigns; the 'city of work' and the 'city of play' (Short 1999:41). As a part of the 'culture shift', cities now represent themselves as 'fun places' meaning places where the 'good life' not only is about employment but increasingly also about ample time for leisure (Short 1999:52).

The role and importance of consumerism and shopping for urban economic growth and cultural changes has been widely described (Clark 2003, Koolhaas et. al.2001, Ritzer 1999). Or in the words of Lash and Urry: "*... many towns and cities are being reconstructed not primarily as centres of production but consumption*" (Lash & Urry 1994:216). Furthermore, the new ways of merging former separated spaces of consumption and leisure into new 'fun scapes' challenges the notion of urbanity but also offers new branding opportunities. In the words of Ritzer "*the distinction between shopping and fun has completely imploded*" (Ritzer 1999:136). The case of the German Ruhr district serves as a well-known example of this process (Davy 2004). The journalist and author of

'Fun City' Tracy Metz argue that leisure must be understood not only as a transformation of city scapes as places of changing functionalities but as a more profound societal and cultural change:

> Leisure is more than the time you can spend as you like, it has become an omnipresent culture of fun with an enormous economic importance. Our social identity is determined by the way we spend our leisure at least as much as by the work we do or the possessions we own (Metz 2002:8)

The bulk of commercials advocating the 'city hop' and metropolitan weekend tourism furthermore bears evidence to the fact that fun, leisure and shopping merges into a distinct urban cultural pattern of activity of great interest to cities branding themselves on this dimension:

> Fun and leisure usually combine well with urban culture, and can even contribute to its diversity. Number one on the list of leisure activities in urban areas and one of the greatest economic motors of this age is so-called 'fun-shopping' (Boer & Dijkstra 2003:185)

According to Kunzmann however, planners have not been ready to deal with the importance of leisure, fun, entertainment and cultural activities in their professional thinking:

> Most planners, being Calvinist-minded missionaries for social justice and equity or militant warriors for sustainable development, have deleted entertainment from their proactive agendas. Denying the entertainment dimension of culture in spatial development is hypocritical (Kunzmann 2004:389)

Part of this inability to embrace shopping, leisure, and entertainment has led to a simple dismissal of private spaces in the city as they are not deeply enough engaged with the serious matter of providing public domains. However, there might be a scope for alternative interpretations of the many new spaces of leisure, fun, transit etc. in the contemporary city and, thus, potentially for whole new ways of facilitating cities with public domains (Hajer & Reijndorp 2001).

Knowledge city and the Learning Region
There was an upsurge in the academic literature linking regional development to issues of innovation and learning during the 1990's (Lorenzen 1999:3). In the so-called 'localised learning' paradigm the assumption was made that with the increased speed of globalisation differences in learning capacities of regions would matter increasingly (Lorenzen 1999:5). Part of this framing of the city in a new global knowledge based economy draws upon the classic and contemporary theories of cities as clusters of innovation (Maskell & Lorenzen 2004). Such a notion stresses the increased importance of understanding a more informal and territorially based form of market organisation as opposed to the network organisation (Maskell & Lorenzen 2004:996).

One central point made in the urban clusters literature is that knowledge-building through locally embedded actors (dubbed 'buzz') combined with knowledge obtained by the construction of channels of communication ('pipelines') together makes a particular advantageous cluster (Bathelt, Malmberg & Maskell 2004). In general there seems to be a 'knowledge-based theory of spatial clustering' where the main argument can be presented in a highly condensed form:

> Innovation, knowledge creation and learning are all best understood if seen as the result of interactive processes where actors possessing different types of knowledge and competencies come together and exchange information with the aim to solve some – technical, organizational, commercial or intellectual – problems (Bathelt, Malmberg & Maskell 2004:32)

However, Bathelt et al. depart from a dualistic notion of 'tacit = local' versus 'codified = global' that allegedly springs from this line of thinking. They rather stress that the more clustering firms engage in the building of translocal 'pipelines' the more information is 'pumped' into internal networks creating more dynamic local 'buzz' (Bathelt, Malmberg & Maskell 2004:41). From this analysis springs a warning against policies focusing too much on local 'buzz' and too little on external links and networks. Not advocating that cities and regions should disregard their local culture, there seems to be reason for caution:

> Still, recent cluster policies are so predisposed toward local networking that the importance of external, translocal communication is overlooked. Perhaps it would be wiser for policy actors to consider extensive efforts in generating and promoting local buzz through various forms of social engineering (Bathelt, Malmberg & Maskell 2004:48-49)

This line of argument does hold some affinity to the caution that also must be exercised on behalf of the branding strategies focusing only on imagery. The lesson must rather be to link global connections of knowledge when building infrastructure with awareness to the local 'buzz', values and mores. Perhaps what could be seen as a argument for the institutional grounding of the branding imagery.

From a large quantitative analysis of Scientific Citation Indexes (SCI) related to university cities in Europe, Matthiessen and Schwarts conclude that universities and knowledge production infrastructure in general are to be seen as location factors for competitive knowledge intensive businesses. Furthermore, they argue that cities potentially can 'propel' themselves into an above-average rate of economic growth by planning for research strengths (Matthiessen & Schwartz 1999:475).

The Entrepreneurial City
The number of strategic and proactive 'responses' to the situation of increased global urban competition has given rise to the notion of the 'entrepreneurial city' (Hall & Hubbard eds. 1998). Taking their cue from the entrepreneurial theorist par excellence Joseph Schumpeter (1943/96) Hall & Hubbard argue for an understanding of how this 'business oriented' form of urban governance relates to a wider cultural component and, thus, links economy, governance, and culture in a new type of policy narrative (Hall & Hubbard 1998). Elsewhere Jessop writes about this intricate but important relationship between the material base of urban economy and its symbolic forms of representations:

> … The city is being re-imagined – or re-imaged – as an economic, political and cultural entity which must seek to undertake entrepreneurial activities to enhance its competitiveness; and … this re-imag(in)ing is closely linked to the re-design of governance mechanisms involving the city – especially through new forms of public-private partnership and networks. This is evident in the wide range of self-

> representational material emitted by cities and /or agencies involved in their governance (Jessop 1997:40)

However, few cities qualify to the label of entrepreneurial city in the 'strong sense' and will rather have to opt for a sort of 'weak entrepreneurialism' (Jessop 1998:79).

In their discussion of 'selling the entrepreneurial city', Hall & Hubbard identify that a process of social exclusion as the construction of the image also is a construction of identity that tend to be biased in favour of the social groups in power – in Western Europe and North America predominantly the white and wealthy (Hall & Hubbard 1998:28, Short & Kim 1998:74). This clearly raises the question of an official image or brand and how this relates to the identities of local residents and urbanites?

In the historic transformation process of de-industrial reorientation Ward show the similarities and differences between North American and British cities. Especially the British urban condition for the entrepreneurial city was an issue of (in the wake of Thatcherism) to '*pick themselves up an, dust themselves off and start all over again*' (Ward 1998:33). Here the most striking example is said to be those of Boston and Baltimore:

> If New York had set the pace for city boosting campaigns it was Boston and Baltimore which led in defining the nature of the post-industrial city as centre for consumption. It was their harbour-front developments, festival market places, aquaria, conference facilities, museums, galleries and much else that created the marketing image of the reinvented, post-industrial city (Ward 1998:47-8)

Clearly the re-staging of the post-industrial city as an entrepreneurial city has to do with new ways of making organisations, policy-institutions and networks. However, the big issue in relation to branding is obviously about representation. From a collection of 34 cities' advertisements in the US two themes keeps surfacing; business (economic benefit) and quality of life (Short & Kim 1998:61).

Culture cities, creative cities and the rise of the new 'Creative Class'
As a consequence of the global shifts and transformation discussed so far the importance of creativity and culture seem to gain weight on the agenda as well. There is a discourse of the 'creative city' which gains currency by means of articulation and re-articulation amongst city fathers, developers, politicians, planners and other urban stakeholders. New planning frames for 'cultural planning' (Kunzmann 2004) and an increased awareness of the importance of innovation, art and creative capacities in cities is widely noticed (Landry 2000)[2]. Substantial research thus indicates the importance of culture in the making of successful contemporary urban economies (Hesmondalgh 2000, Stevenson 2003, Thorsby 2001). Also, there is an increased awareness to the notion that art and business are joining forces in the new urban competitive economy (Caves 2000). A hard indicator of this trend is that the value of creative industries to the UK's GDP has become higher than that of the manufacturing industries (Hall 2000:640). Statistics support this understanding, as the UK in particular has experienced growth in the creative sector of the economy during the last 7-8 years (Kunzmann 2004:395).

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[2] As in the discussion of the risk to identify cities with simple agency or even subjectivity, the notion of the 'creative city' runs the opposite risk. Thus one might risk lifting the individual and its creative capacities out of the analysis and understanding by reducing the question of creativity to be one of institution building and collective networks only. Clearly creative individuals are of great importance to the creative and innovative milieus of any city.

These understandings go alongside the development (and marketing) of one of the most widely know concepts in this field, namely that of the new 'creative class'. Coined by Harvard professor Richard Florida the notion of a new social class with a particular creative potential has gained immense influence in urban policy and planning circles worldwide. According to Florida

> The nation's geographic center of gravity has shifted away from traditional industrial regions towards new axes of creativity and innovation. The Creative Class is strongly oriented to large cities and regions that offer a variety of economic opportunities, a stimulating environment and amenities for every possible lifestyle (Florida 2002:11)

So the new buzz in urban policy making and planning is the discussion of how to create the attractive urban environments for the new creative class. Condensing the argument in a somewhat simplistic manner, Florida coins the notion of the '3 T's' of economic development; Technology, Talent and Tolerance (Florida 2002:249). Clearly the importance of knowledge-infrastructures has been recognised as stimulating urban and regional growth. The new thing, towards which many in urban planning and policy making are now turning to, is the issue of tolerance. Here Florida seems to have invented the parallel to the miners' canary in the coal mine – wherever there is room for gay communities and other indexes of the vibrant tolerant urbanity that attracts the new creative class profit can be made in the new economy.

However the conceptualisation of Florida's idea has not been without opposition as for instance here in the words of Kunzmann:

> In a typical American MBA approach to providing simple answers to complex questions Richard Florida convincingly explained the success of regions by the rise of the creative class and how it is transforming work, leisure and everyday life (Kunzmann 2004:391)

However, this idea of Florida's seems to coincide with the observation made by Hjalager in a Danish context when she writes that:

> … this analysis suggests that the image of urban spaces is still playing a decisive role in attracting particular segments of well educated, young people. Space is an element in the formation of careers, and perhaps more important than we envisage … there is a strong concentration of the best-educated and younger strata of the labour markets in larger urban agglomerations (Hjalager 2003: 3 & 13)

Another very influential person in the field of cultural planning is the British urban planning consultant Charles Landry. On the basis of decades of consultancy work, he has developed a more practically oriented notion of the 'creative city' (Landry 2000). According to Landry, a high quality of life is a 'competitive tool' (Landry 2000:139). Leaning on the notion of agglomeration economies, Landry revokes Hall's notion of the 'milieu':

> A creative milieu is a place – either a cluster of buildings, a part of a city, a city as a whole or a region – that contains the necessary preconditions in terms of 'hard' and 'soft' infrastructure to generate a flow of ideas and inventions. Such a milieu is a physical setting where a critical mass of entrepreneurs, intellectuals social activists, artists, administrators, power brokers or students can operate in an open-minded,

cosmopolitan context and where face to face interaction creates new ideas, artefacts, products, services and institutions and as a consequence contributes to economic success (Landry 2000:133)

Gertler argues for support to policies facilitating the development of creative cities, since they play an increasingly important role in the national economy and since they have the potential of enhancing the quality of life for its urban inhabitants (Gertler 2004:1). In Gertler's vision, creative Canadian cities therefore need to develop features of 'socially inclusive creative places' (ibid.). Along this road, Gertler identifies (in the mode of presentation of Florida) the 'three C's' that has to be successfully related; Creativity, Competitiveness and Cohesion (Gertler 2004:2).

Clearly the presence of artists are another hallmark of vibrant urban sites, and the challenge to policy making and planning is to make places attractive to such artistic communities with their preference for vibrant artistic networks, a climate of support for the arts, and a good and affordable quality of life (Gertler 2004:4). Many larger city centres might be able to offer these facilities, but how smaller urban communities are to make themselves attractive to these dimensions is more challenging. Relating the presence of vibrant artistic communities to the spatial transformation processes that empties out industrial production sites is a well known story, as described in e.g. Zukin's widely known notion of New York 'loft living' (Zukin 1988) in order to make a spatial imprint and 'distinction' of taste (Bourdieu 1979/94). What seems to happen when artists 're-appropriate' industrial sites is that they generate a value increase in the housing stock, as well as generating added brand value for the city as a whole (Gertler 2004:5). And one might ad, the risk of producing gentrification as well (Bianchini 1993). As mentioned this increased focus on the importance of creativity and culture in urban development has led to a discourse of 'cultural planning'. Here it seems that 'cultural planning' is being applied strategically by urban governments acting within the new framework of 'New Urban Management' (see below).

Furthermore the European Union's 'Culture City' can be seen as an event platform for urban branding that taps into the creative city discourse (Thomsen 1996). As Kunzmann states, the cultural dimension to spatial planning has been neglected in planning education, practice and theory (Kunzmann 2004:383) even though culture and creativity have become key concepts on the agenda of city managers, development agents and planners (Kunzmann 2004:384). According to Kunzmann there is a certain post-modern *Zeitgeist* to these new developments (ibid). This means that there is reason for caution and balancing in applying these new cultural and creativity based policies.

The main message here is that the importance of culture and creativity in the development of competitive urban environments needs to be thought of in less instrumental ways than as 'standard' economic growth conditions. We need to engage that the notion of locally produced culture is an asset in global competitiveness. This not only leads to a less instrumental view upon how 'culture is made' but also to the idea that successful strategies need to be embedded within the wider social society and not only in the minds of city fathers and urban developers. Clearly this has an affinity to understanding the phenomenon of urban branding much more widely that just as a matter of attracting investment. At stake are also narratives of belonging and notions of identity:

> More and more towns and cities, regions and countries – established and emergent – [therefore] look to culture to reaffirm their identity/ies; attract and retain their share of cultural industries (and tourists); join the 'competitive city' race and contribute to the

design and adaption of the public realm and consumption in urban society (Evans 2001:14)

These ideas are close to the classic 'defence of difference' (or 'Mixophilia' in Bauman's terms 2002) within the more progressive strands of urban theory (e.g. Sennett 1990, Jacobs 1961, Massey 1991, Sandercock 2003, Harvey 1996, 2000). Such standpoints shall be reintroduced and discussed in further detail and depth in the end of this paper as we get closer to the question of power, social exclusion and identity in relationship to urban branding.

New Urban Management – governance in the contemporary city
Thus far we have seen that globalisation shapes the contemporary urban development. Cities respond in manifold and diverse ways. Some articulate strategies of the 'leisure and event city' in the experience economy. Others focus on the importance of knowledge and information as the cities turn into 'knowledge cities' and 'learning regions'. Moreover this seems to suggest a renewed understanding of the processes by which decisions are taken and innovation is made. Clearly this new climate of urban buzz is most vividly captured in notions of culture cities, creative cities and the rise of the new 'Creative Class'.

Summing up this very complex transformation process that is sweeping the cities today might be possible by labelling the new governance situation as one of 'New Urban Management' (NUM). In western urban policy and planning literature, concepts such as network governance, public-private partnerships and urban entrepreneurialism (Borja & Castells 1997, Goodwin & Painter 1997, Jessop 1997, Newman & Thornley 1996, Short 1999, Swyngedouw et al 2002) tries to capture the new transformation logics. What we find is, however, not only an increased flow of capital, goods and people but ideas and models for urban intervention (Czarniawska 2002). Across contemporary Europe local authorities are learning and building a new urban management culture (Le Gales 2002:107). A culture that could be summarised by the following characteristics:

New Urban Management
- From Government to Governance
- Public-private partnerships
- The ex- and implosion of Politics

The transformation of urban intervention into network governance structures, often blurring the lines between the public and private spheres of society has led the Danish political scientist O. K. Pedersen to coin the notion of the 'ex- and implosion of politics' (Pedersen ed. 1994). This means that politics (and public planning/urban intervention) 'explode' out of constitutional representative organisations (e.g. national Parliaments or City Halls) and 'implode' into semi-public and closed institutional settings beyond the realm of democratic control. Drawn together, this may be understood as a contemporary situation of 'New Urban Management'.

From this attempt to pinpoint some of the contextual changes of the contemporary urban condition and some of the many responses, the focus will more explicitly be on one particular 'discipline' within the new articulation process namely that of 'urban branding'.

3. Urban branding and selling the city

The etymology of the word 'branding' literally takes on the notion of 'burning'. But we have left the notion of burning cattle in order to identify the property relation in the farming society and are now dealing with 'burning' in the consumer-mind. The agenda is thus 'Selling the City' (Boyer 1992).

The literature on urban branding is extensive, but as a point of departure it can be postulated that urban branding is selective 'story telling' (Eckstein & Throgmorton (eds.) 2003, Sandercock 2003), or attempts to re-imagine the city. Furthermore, urban branding can be said to be a form of 'collective impression management' to expand on the classic concept of 'impression management' of Irving Goffman (1957). Like all agents are more or less consciously occupied with attempts to control their impressions on other social agents, so are city stakeholders engaging in the game of urban branding trying to manage what sort of understanding and impression potential visitors, investors or inhabitants might get. Urban branding has thus to do with coining concepts and articulating differences. Seen in this light, urban branding is a sort of evocative story telling aiming at 'learning' its recipients 'to see the city' in a particular way (Selby 2004). In other words it is an issue of the dynamic relationship between 'foregrounding' and 'backgrounding'. However, branding for identity construction also means branding for alterity construction (Czarniawska 2002). In Czarniawska's words; there is no reason to believe that the question 'Who am I unlike?' should be less interesting and important than the question 'Who am I like?' Translated to the field of urban branding this means understanding how city managers represent their cities with an eye not only on the cities they would like to be compared to but, equally important, on the ones they would like not to be in the company of! Urban branding has to do with shaping the 'urban imaginary' understood as a:

> … coherent, historically based ensemble of representations drawn from the architecture and street plans of the city, the art produced by its residents, and the images of and discourse on the city as seen, heard, or read in movies, on television, in magazines, and other forms of mass media (Greenberg 2000:228).

Again the role of media and the public sphere in shaping the discourse and narrative of the city is considered to be of outmost importance. Furthermore and at line with an understanding of all urban representations as inherently power-laden, there will most likely be a number of coexisting urban imaginaries – often competing against each other for hegemony (Greenberg 2000:228).

Greenberg sees the urban marketing activity as one of creating a monolithic, consumer-oriented version of the urban imaginary characteristic of urban branding (Greenberg 2000:229). In a complex manner the branding strategy thus bears witness to the way in which the 'word city' is overlaying of the 'built city' (Greenberg 2000:230). In this sense urban branding and the shaping and re-shaping of the urban imaginary must be understood as 'cities-as-texts' as well as 'texts-as-cities'. In a dynamic process of socio-spatial dialectics, the city becomes the frame upon which its physical surface is inscribed by new ways of 'playing' the global competitive game (e.g. by means of music houses at the derelict harbour fronts) at the same time as the city is articulated and represented in images, texts and logos and, thus, embedded in a representational logic of urban intervention.

In general there are three types of analysis that are laying the foundation for place branding activities; scrutinising the identity of a place, understanding the demand patterns and images of

place consumers, and identifying the position of the place in the view of competitors (Therkelsen & Halkier 2004:3). Where traditional place marketing takes its point of departure in an understanding of the demands of the customer (and thus 'outside-in) the branding approach is working itself the other way around. Branding means starting out on the level of identities and values working 'inside-out' (Therkelsen & Halkier 2004:4).

Obviously, there are a number of differences when the branding object is a location or a city, and not a 'simple' industrial artefact or product. One thing is the number of stakeholders and their related interests (Therkelsen & Halkier 2004:4-6). This feature has to do with the difference between advertising and branding. As Moor explains it:

> Indeed the significance of branding, as opposed to advertising, is precisely that the distinction between products and their representations in advertising fades … from this perspective, the ostensible moment of consumption can in fact be considered as just one of a potentially endless series of experiences with brand … (Moor 2003:47)

Secondly, there is a challenging task of negotiating local values in such fashion as to focus on a locally legitimate value base. A task one hardly faces when branding marketable industrial products, even in the context of 'green consumer demands' or 'political consumers'. Thirdly, branding places inevitably has to 'write on top' of existing notions of place and the historical place-based identities anchored in the location. Again a 'normal' product might be introduced to the market without any prior knowledge of it amongst the consumers. Fourthly, there is a more diverse segmentation of 'consumers' as urban branding has to serve as diverse groups of potential investors, residents, and tourists. Later we shall return to the issue of 'city users' and their relation to urban branding.

The 'master brander' of urban and regional branding, Wolff Olins, describes the difference between branding a product and a region like this:

> There's a big difference between branding a region and a company or a product. Product brands only have to please one audience, consumers. You don't have to ask the beans in the can how they feel about the label. Corporate brands have more audiences to please, such as owners, managers, workers and customers. Branding a geographically entity is still more complex, especially when it involves national characteristics and loyalties. Brands that involve whole populations need popular permission (Wolff Olins, http://www.wolff-olins.com/oresund.htm)

One of the places where the branding efforts of cities can be seen is in the 'city ranking' discourses in which city performances are measured on a number of variables and then they are compared. A case explored in detail is the famous American magazine *Money* and its list of 'best places to live' (McCann 2004). According to McCann there is a complex and mutually reinforcing relationship between the media representations and the efforts made by cities to boost their competitiveness. The quantitative rankings of cities are thus playing an active role in enabling the implementation of entrepreneurial strategies (McCann 2004:1913). This is not the place to enter the subtle contents of these urban rankings, but rather to pay attention to the fact that some of the most successful of the urban branding strategies making their way to the top 10 list are based on very long gestation processes. Austin, Texas for example has made it to the high end of the list but not over night. Accordingly, the Austin framing and branding takes off with the 1957 University of Texas report

recommending a shift towards 'light and clean' industries (McCann 2004:1920). The Austin case shows that the beginning of strategic visioning and planning starting up in the 1950's have developed into a somewhat successful contemporary urban branding strategy. Branding the city is thus not, in this example, a simple case of constructing 'tabula rasa' narratives. Rather it epitomizes a long articulation and framing process that must have a certain basis in the local identity and debates about the place called 'Austin' no matter how one sees the outcome. The second point worth remembering from McCann's research is that:

> … the media's normative discourse on what makes a place good for life and investment is powerful and political in the way that it aids in the production of local economic development policy (McCann 2004:1925)

According to Bailey (here quoted from Short 1999:51) there are three stages in the evolution of city marketing in the US:

> 1. Generation: *Smoke-stack chasing*
> 2. Generation: *Target marketing*
> 3. Generation: *Product development*

In the first generation of city marketing the main concern was attracting manufacturing jobs by means of subsidising or tax-reducing in-moving companies. In the second generation, the key concern was attracting manufacturing and service jobs in currently successful target industries by luring the companies away from existing localities in other cities. The predominant rationale of the third generation includes the latter two generations focus but adds the search for the 'jobs of the future'. According to Short, the message becomes increasingly sophisticated by each generation (Short 1999:51) as well as broadening its spatial scale to include the global marketing space today. Clearly, there is a question of whether or not the model also applies to Europe? At least there seems to be a bias towards building the urban frontier in the first generation activities, but that is an empirical question.

In the process of urban branding locations are turning into 'attribute brands'. These are brands that does not relate to a single product, but rather to a set of values, meanings and social roles (van Ham 2002:264). According to contemporary branding managers, there are generally at least four arguments in favour of developing branding strategies (van Ham 2002:251)

> 1. Products, services and locations have become so alike that they can no longer differentiate themselves by their quality
> 2. The emotional relationship between brand and consumer ensures loyalty to the brand
> 3. Branding offers a substitute for ideologies and political programmes – those that are not fashionable any more
> 4. The combination of emotions, relationships and lifestyle values allows the brand to charge a price premium for their products

From the research in tourism and destination branding, Cai brings an understanding of the brand as a node in a memory based chain of associations (Cai 2002:723). Thus building a strong brand image has to do with identifying the most relevant associations and strengthening their links to the brand. As is the case of the notion of 'place myth' (Shields 1991), the branding process is a process of creating an evocative narrative with a spatial referent through selective storytelling. This line of

thinking furthermore has strong affinity to the notion of 'geosemiotics' and the city as a complex bundle of interacting and overlapping semiotic systems and chains of signs (Scollon & Scollon 2003). Clearly the task of relating a successful brand to a city is an act of creating a particular 'index' in semiotic terms:

> To brand a destination, an image must be built choosing an optimal brand element mix and identifying the most relevant brand associations. Associations and their linkages to the brand identity must be consistent and strengthened by equally consistent and effective marketing activities (Cai 2002:737)

In an interesting analysis of the importance of 'Urban Lifestyle Magazines' in the role of urban branding Greenberg show that the commercial and quasi-journalistic lifestyle magazines that often circulate in urban environments are an important voice in the articulation of the city's self-perception and thus ultimately the urban brand (Greenberg 2000).

The branding of cities is, as have already been noted, not just a question of economic growth opportunity. Much more is at stake as the framing of places and the narration of the brand begs for the question as of whom will actually 'live the brand'? If urban branding is about imagining an urban future there is an issue of who will perform this and in accordance with which value base? Furthermore 'living the brand' is a question of the right to define urban identities:

> Branding asks everyone to speak with one, coordinated voice, a common language to express the brand's identity, a shared commitment to the brand's promise. Branding aims to inspire people to 'live up to' the brand's promise by 'living' the brand … copying … commercial pattern to location branding implies that the people living in a branded country (or city/region) have to stick to the privileged script of their brand-leaders (van Ham 2002:266)

With a reference to Disney's codified urban development of *Celebration* (see Ross 1999), Naomi Klein discusses this total conflation of brand and place-based activities. The families living in *Celebration* are thus leading the first completely branded lives (Klein 2000:156). Thus the essential issue of 'living the brand' seems to be unavoidable.

Clearly this understanding of urban brands as uniform scripts regulating urban living makes the question of who writes the script, and who are the 'heroes' and 'villains' in the performed everyday story important from the perspective of power and social exclusion. Needless to say, there is no automation in making inhabitants of a particular city or region perform according to the funding rationale of the brand vision. On the other hand, van Ham's 'script' metaphor is getting close to the point that urban narratives in general and brands in particular work in the way that they are fuelling the urban imaginary and thus also the more or less self-conscious understanding of what it means to live in the city. Finally, there is also the more instrumental way where brands and narratives can operate as the 'legitimate vocabulary' that one must adhere to in order to get political favours or economic subsidiary. The issue of 'living the brand' and it's political and identity formational perspectives will be taken up again in the end of the paper.

Krantz & Schätzl point to the fact that city marketing strategies and urban branding must be understood as a facet of the new orientation from the public sector towards the market (Krantz & Schätzl 1997:469). Thus urban branding can be seen as part of the urban government's reorientation

towards more flexible forms of market principles in public policy, or 'New Urban Management' as it was coined above. Short re-frames the question of urban branding and city marketing by asking the profound question; *How do we understand cities?* (Short 1999:38) The argument here is that the way we conceptualise cities determines how we might articulate visions and brands. We thus need to think about our 'spatial vocabulary'. Short takes his point of departure in the basic understanding of the difference between space and place as we know it from human geography. Accordingly;

> Space is turned into place through acts of discursive representation. The generality of space is turned into the particularities of place through acts of description and evaluation. Cities can be usefully seen as acts of embodiments of description and evaluation. The naming of cities, the mapping of cities, the written and spoken descriptions of cities all constitutes acts of urban representation (Short 1999:38)

This line of thinking clearly strikes a chord with Shields (1991) and his notion of 'social spatialisation' by means of which social agents appropriate places by inscribing them in a discursive and narrative order. Such narrative orders may come about as 'regimes of representations' (Short 1999:38) here understood as discourses of meaning that include whole sets of ideas, words, concepts and practices (whilst excluding others). Such regimes are rarely stable, but rather express the contested nature of diverse urban representations. Discussing the US however Short concludes that the business community always has dominated the place promotion activities (Short 1999:40). Furthermore, these acts of representing the city in a favourable light (urban boosterism) feed on two distinct discourses; one of positive portrayal the other of silence, control and ignorance towards the 'dark sides' of the urban reality (Short 1999:40). Clearly what one could term 'selective story telling'.

'Counter branding' – Towards progressive strategies for counter action?

Until now it has only been argued rudimentarily that urban branding is a potential contested field, and that there might be issues of power in the decision-making over the form and content of branding strategies. In order to qualify this discussion with some more tangible examples, we shall now turn to what might be termed practices of 'counter branding' or anti-branding strategies.

As Klein show (Klein 1999) what is the case for many civil society groups and NGO's that are targeting multinational's branding by means of '*cultural jamming*' there is a potential in reversing the branding strategies in order to speak on behalf of minority groups in the city. Here, the term 'cultural jamming' refers to the counter practices of reversing the ads by means of for example graffiti or '*adbusting*'. This begs for the question as of how the city will be the site of multiple contested visions and images of urban identity and liveability. The lessons learned from the notion of 'culture jamming' show that counter representations can be circulated in the physical space of the city's streetscape as well as in the virtual communication arenas offered by the www and other types of virtual publics that overlay the 3-dimensional city. Grundy shows an example of the growing resistance against branding as a way of capitalising on the sub-cultural diversity of minority groups. In the case of the gay community in Toronto, Grundy shows that there is an act of resistance from the community since they argue that they 'are not for sale' (Grundy 2004). This 'politics of resistance' comes into being as a reaction to the 'branding of difference' and marketing of the gay community - in the spirit of Richard Florida's 'gay index (Florida 2002). The story of branding Toronto as a diverse and open-minded city leans heavily on a selective and biased re-writing of the city's history. Thus the gay communities are not a 'previously overlooked' resource as the official story goes. The historic evidence of homophobic policing campaigns that were

criminalizing the gay community (one particular infamous campaign 'Operation Soap' containing bathhouse raids illustrates this painfully clear) counters this new revisionism in the history writing of gay Toronto. To bring further illustration to this new found marketable piece of Toronto civil society. Grundy quotes a glossy tourist guide produced by *Tourism Toronto* and the way it represents the city's gay district as;

> … a celebration of life, diversity and…shopping. Sip a non-fat-extra-foamy latte in a café, install yourself in a restaurant window, or quaff a cold one on an outdoor patio… the Gay Village is sophisticated, spirited, and…plays an essential role in making this a world class city. Be part of it! … Grab a Speedo and water gun for outdoor water parties filled with hunky, mostly naked studs …and after the parties end, the fun doesn't stop! Toronto's seven centrally located bathhouses will be jam-packed featuring a smorgasbord of satisfaction (Grundy 2004:3)

Ironically the same places that were targeted during the anti-gay campaigns are now being rehabilitated and celebrated as new hip places in the tolerant city. As a small twist to that story, the Danish newspaper Information brought an interview with the local politician from the Municipal Council of the City of Aarhus, Mr. Uffe Elbæk (Information 16th March 2005). In this interview Mr. Elbæk explains his proposal for Aarhus to develop a 'gay strategy' as a way of following up on Florida's research and in order for the city to brand itself as tolerant and cosmopolitan.

As Short rightly points out all discourses have their 'silences'. In urban branding, at least in the US, the big silence is about equality, social justice and an inclusive definition of the good city (Short 1999:53). Grundy argues that the same type of silence is found in the case of branding Gay Toronto (Grundy 2004). Sadly however, this does not seem to be an exclusive North American type of numbness. The question of representing the poorer people or the minorities in the city is just as important on the European urban branding scene as it is in the US. This silence actualises a need for alternative representations (Short 1999:53). In another critical contribution to the branding literature, Friedman operates with two models of urban development: City marketing vs. the Quasi City-State (Friedman 2002). The first one is described as being competitive, narrow and leaning on a technocratic power-base and with poor performance in terms of sustainability, or more directly: *'city-marketing is a model promising short-term material pay offs for some and long-term damage for most of the rest'* (Friedman 2002:21) – it is, according to Friedman, a rationale of 'grow now, pay later' (2002:29).

A Danish case of anti-branding is found in the example of Randers, a city in Jutland of 30.000 inhabitants that has been actively working with urban branding under the guise of an *INTERREG* project in the European Union. Randers is not only dwarfed by its next-door neighbouring city Aarhus, which is the second largest city in Denmark. Randers has also struggled with a negative image for many years – known to many as 'the city of violence' (Smidt-Jensen 2004:5). Furthermore, the city has faced the same economic transition logics as other medium sized cities that are depending on industrial production.

Hence, the Municipality hired a company to brand the city, and the outcome is a very comprehensive strategy of logos, fairytales, design manuals, letter heads, and the usual lot of merchandise. In this context, the most interesting feature of the Randers case is that an alternative and very ironic logo was produced to counter the official branding logo. The latter was given the shape of a capital R (a 'unical' in technical terms) as the name of the city begins with R. The logo

furthermore contained a number of symbols among other things the salmon of the Randers fjord. On the alternative logo, the fish is stripped of any flesh leaving the macabre silhouette of the raw fishbone. The alternative logo also contains a junkie's needle, beer bottles, motorbikes and stinking dog dirt. According to the local news paper the anti-branding logo is meant as a protest against what is perceived as a socially exclusive branding process that paints a picture that cannot be recognized by the protesting citizens.

Figure 1: The anti-branding logo in Randers

One of the branding antagonists (not officially related to the anti-brand though), Mr. Uffe Thorsen from the City Council, articulates the resistance:

> Branding! Just the word shines of advertising, and more or less conscious attempts to blow up things to look better than they are … [In the branding-report on Randers made by ElevenDanes] Randers is compared with a 50 year old man, who drinks cheap red-wine. I would prefer no label pulled down over a city that I very much like to live in. What is the point of all this besides entertainment? (Uffe Thorsen, member of Randers City Council for Beboerlisten, cited in Smidt-Jensen 2004:10)

The branding-campaign in Randers was running throughout 2004 and contains many other types of activities. But it is safe to say that the 'logo-fight' has captured the controversy and the sensibility that urban branding campaigns face whenever they embark on a mission of 'representing the city'.

Clearly the point here is not that cities should brand themselves by publishing police crime data and unemployment statistics. But an issue of how to represent the city in urban branding remains as these activities shape the potential future of the city to a certain extent. Thus the old debate about the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1974/91) still seems to be of relevance. One could ask if it is a naïve non-starter to think about urban branding in a socially inclusive way. Is the marriage between powerful urban stakeholders from the market and visionary and ambitious city fathers in urban government the mark of death to any broad participatory and socially inclusive articulation process in urban branding? Don't the citizens hold the imagination and vocabulary to brand their own cities – or at least be let into the articulation process? Leaning on the notion of utopian thought and critique articulated by Harvey (2000), Friedman (2002) and Sandercock (2003), this paper argue

that the quest for socially inclusive and fair branding is a legitimate agenda, even though the political realism might seem vague to say the least.

One way of making sense of such antagonist practices is by applying the concepts developed by DeCerteau, who differentiate between 'tactics' and 'strategies' in understanding contemporary urban everyday life (DeCerteau 1984). Accordingly, 'strategy' would here be understood as the official branding (of either Randers, Aalborg, or the Øresund region) whereas 'tactics' would be the counter practices anti-branding practices illustrating the citizen's attempt to valorise the urban life differently from the 'top-down' branding strategies. Contesting the abstract and detached 'concept city' (DeCerteau 1984:84) holds strong affinity to Lefebvre's critique of the visions and plans made by the 'doctors of space' (Lefebvre 1975/91:99). Furthermore, such notion of 'reversing' the establishment's code of urbanity is close to the more artistic expressions of the so-called 'situationists' among whom Guy Debord was one (Ritzer 2001). Clearly there is an issue of how to brand in accordance with the local diversity:

> It is one of the hard tasks of place branding to do justice to the richness and diversity of places and their peoples, yet to communicate this to the world in ways which are simple, truthful, motivating, appealing and memorable (Smidt-Jensen 2004:4)

So urban branding is an act of shaping the 'urban imaginary' and thus also an act of framing and articulating norms and visions related to particular sites. This often has to be done in a climate of social antagonism as the issue becomes a '*right to represent the city*'.

Framing urban branding as the 'representational logics of urban intervention'
Social agents 'appropriate' space through socio-spatial practices and identification processes. One of the ways in which places are given a specific meaning is through the creation of 'place images', which imply simplification, stereotyping and labelling (Shields 1991:47). Brought together collectively, a number of place images forms a 'place myth' (Shields 1991:61), urban branding being the creation of place images and place myths. In one respect, one might say that branding places in general and cities in particular is a way of inscribing a certain logic in space – both symbolically through logos, slogans and the likes, but also materially through construction of buildings, infrastructures and landmarks[3]. Branding places thus means inscribing them in a particular order of significance and at the end of the day a certain regime of territorialisation by means of the social appropriation of space.

How should we then start thinking about such examples of 'representational logics' in the act of urban intervention? A helpful notion has been developed elsewhere (Jensen 1999, 2000, Jensen and Richardson 2004a). Accordingly, brands must be understood as articulations within discourses. Discourses are articulated in specific vocabularies, and they are transformed into social realities through the actions of social agents within institutional contexts. Thus, a discourse is defined as an entity of repeatable linguistic articulations, socio-spatial material practices and power-rationality configurations (Jensen 1999:35). By mapping discourses and narratives onto this reading model, we are able to de-construct the underlying rationales and values of a particular strategy, product, intervention, plan, artefact etc. This is in accordance with the points stressed in relation to the issue of seeing the brand as articulated on the basis of a set of pre-defined 'core values' (corresponding to the 'rationale' in this author's conceptualisation). Flowerdew even go as far as stating that the core

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[3] Clearly this separation of the symbolic and the material should only be understood as an abstraction, as material space can serve as a symbol in itself.

value and the brand become more important than the product itself (Flowerdew 2004:584). This obviously does not make sense in terms of urban branding, since the physical city cannot be dispensed. However, it is in accordance with a broader shift from material to semiotic production in contemporary capitalism:

> … branding is essentially concerned with discursive processes. These discursive processes, developing from the linguistically defined core values, are directed towards the creation (semiotic) of an image pr set of images, along with a logo that will define the brand. The purpose of this semiotic process is social action, to persuade people to buy the product or service represented by the brand (Flowerdew 2004:585)

From this contextual illustration of the contemporary urban condition and a discussion of ways to interpret the practice of urban branding as a dimension of 'the representational logics of urban intervention' we shall now take a closer look at two cases of urban branding; the city of Aalborg and the Øresund region.

4. Cases
In this part two empirical cases of urban branding in the city of Aalborg and the Øresund region are explored in the light of the theoretical endeavour.

Branding Aalborg: Re-imagining the periphery
The City of Aalborg owes its existence to old historical developments of mobility and transport. According to the Municipal homepage:

> Aalborg emerged where the Limfjord was narrowest and consequently easiest to cross. The history of the city dates back at least 1000 years – the first mention of its name, Alabu, is found on a coin from c. 1040. The settlement on the northern side of the Limfjord, Lindholm Høje, consists of the remains of two villages, the oldest from c. 700. The burial place dates back to c. 400. The site shows that the crossing was of great importance already from the Later Iron Age and the Viking Age. In the Middle Ages, Aalborg was among the largest cities in Denmark. This was primarily because of the extensive trade in oxen, herring and grain. In 1342, King Valdemar granted the city a municipal charter, which regulated the relations between the king and the city. Aalborg had even more success in 1516, when the king granted Aalborg and Løgstør the salt monopoly of herring. Although the civil war from 1534 to 1536 caused an economic recession, Aalborg flourished again after the reformation. In the 18th century, the industrial revolution reached Aalborg, and in the 19th century the infrastructure was improved. In 1865, the first bridge over the Limfjord, the pontoon bridge, was built, and in 1869 the railroad reached Aalborg followed by the opening of the railway bridge in 1879. In 1933, the present bridge over the Limfjord was built; the same year the 105m long Aalborg Tower was erected. Today, Aalborg is the fourth-largest city in Denmark with approximately 162,000 inhabitants (Aalborg Municipal website: www.aalborg.dk)

Located in the Northern part of mainland Denmark, the city of Aalborg is a typical case of the transformation in which the old field of industrial production has been pressured by the global economic competition at the same time as local and regional stakeholders have shifted their attention towards culture, creativity and innovation. Major shipyards and other heavy production

facilities have been 'phased out' since the late 1980's. Parallel to this shift, the city has hosted Aalborg University since 1974. Being a regional motor in a number of activities as well as a branding icon, the university has clearly put its mark on the city in terms of spin offs in the retail, housing market, the night life etc. But the hard task of transforming the regional work force to highly employed knowledge workers is still a far cry from being carried out. The regional and local employees are still below national average when it comes to educational background (Nordjyllands Amt 2003). According to the County of North Jutland, there is a need for a regional and targeted innovation policy and a need for an increase in the use of research in the regional production, if Aalborg (and the region of North Jutland) is going to make a successful transformation towards the knowledge economy (Nordjyllands Amt 2003:80 & 83).

During the last few years there has been a lively public debate about how the city and the region should face the issue of globalisation and competition (see e.g. Hagerup 2004). In the new proposal for the Municipal Plan, the Municipality of Aalborg identifies the new economy and its restructuring of both the economic and the physical urban landscape as the pivotal theme of the future (Aalborg Municipality 2005a). Accordingly the future urban development in Aalborg should take stock of density, variety, urban qualities, and street culture in its attempt to re-orientate towards an 'experience city' with a large input of service, knowledge and culture (Aalborg Municipality 2005a).

Understanding this transformation, the Municipal Plan's statement section displays an analysis of the regional transformation of the labour market and economy towards less manual factory work and more public and private knowledge and service production (Aalborg Municipality 2005b). Furthermore, a number of business demands in terms of ideal location within the municipal plan area identifies the following attributes; high visibility (conspicuous office locations), central location in relation to the urban core, proximity to university and science parks, high accessibility (e.g. proximity to motorway), good options for expansions (as some point at odds with the wish of closeness to the urban core), and finally closeness to innovation milieus (especially amongst newly started small entrepreneurial businesses) (Aalborg Municipality 2005b).

In a recently published consultancy report, it is documented that urban growth is spreading across the map of Denmark, but with a clear tendency to be concentrated alongside the North/Southbound motorway in Jutland, and in the Greater Copenhagen area (Deloitte 2005:5). Aalborg is, according to this research, the municipality experiencing the highest increase in the number of newly started businesses. However, this trend is countered by the rest of the region in the County of North Jutland (Deloitte 2005:2). Thus making clear that Aalborg might be on a positive trajectory in terms of shifting into the 'new economy' but not in accordance with its neighbouring municipalities in the region. Among the best ranked municipalities in terms of increased economic growth, Randers has been ranked no. 2. The municipality of Randers subscribes its success (moving from being number 18 the previous year) to a branding process in which awareness about the strengths and potentials has been articulated (Deloitte 2005:6).

In a regional survey of the potentials for the culture industry and artists as business promoters in North Jutland Andersen et al. concludes that there is a certain reluctance and conservatism amongst the business community when it comes to incorporating the artist community in commercial projects (Andersen et. al. 2004). On the other hand, there seems to be a new and interesting awareness in the artist community that they might be able to offer the businesses in the region new ways of thinking about their products, images and brands. The next phase of linking the arts and the

commercial business sector will take shape as pilot projects aiming at shaping a mutual awareness of the skills and potentials within the arts (Andersen et al 2004:36). Thus, there is not an explicit policy agenda for constructing a 'creative city' link between business and art. But the first tentative beginning in this direction has been initiated.

In prolongation of the public discussion about the way in which the city should survive in the global competition, local stakeholders and politicians started thinking about branding the city in 1998. It is to this story that we now turn.

Branding Aalborg – the history and the process so far

According to the Municipal Branding Secretariat the idea for the 'Branding Aalborg' campaign dates back to 1998. Prior to that year, the City Mayor and the County Council Mayor (both Social Democrats) had discussed the future development of both the city and the wider region. In November 1998, Henning G. Jensen, the Lord Mayor of Aalborg, got in contact with the worlds' leading 'branding guru' Wally Olins during the Danish Ambassador in England and organised a meeting with him the following spring. In May 1999, a delegation from Aalborg went London to meet Olins. According to Branding Secretariat Chief Anni Walter this meeting was a 'real kick off'[4]. Everybody in the delegation were inspired by Olins' presentation and the fact that he used a whole day to discuss the issue of urban branding with them.

Hereafter, the process continued with a conference in Aalborg on the 'vision for the future' in August 1999 and was followed up by several meetings in 2000. In the beginning of 2001 where a working group starts planning the target, organisation and process for the Branding Aalborg campaign. After this, the rest of 2001 was used for setting up a steering committee for Branding Aalborg which was comprised by a number of local stakeholders within politics, business and culture as well as civil servants. In 2002 an exploratory investigation was made by the research institute (Jysk Analyseinstitut), and further work was carried out in the working group. In the spring of 2003, the steering committee's vision and value proposals were drafted up and a qualitative analysis of the 'product' was made. The Lord Mayor was presented with the work and after approval, the City Council approved of it in November. After this, it was decided to present the Branding Aalborg project as a public EU project tender. In the beginning of 2004, the Municipality met with the 8 selected stakeholder groups to hear their opinion about the competition material. In June 2004, 15 proposals were examined by an assessment committee and 3 proposals were selected for the final. In August the winner was found, and the regionally based marketing company *Dafolo Marketing A/S* won the first price.

The winning branding campaign proposal was presented for the Lord Mayor and the City Council and a press conference was held in November 2004. Hereafter there was an official kick-off presentation of the 'Branding Aalborg' campaign in the local concert hall on November 24th, which was followed up by a presentation of the campaign in Copenhagen later the same month. At the end of 2004, Aalborg Brand Board commiserated on the action plan for 2005. According to this the current phase (spring/summer 2005) is reserved for the search of two pilot projects, where two local firms are to implement the branding values and use the campaign explicitly in their professional work. Furthermore, there are plans of carrying out a future analysis, leading to the development of scenarios. During this process, the selected stakeholder groups are going to discuss the results on a

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[4] The information on the branding campaign and its content is based on notes from a personal meeting on March 7th 2005 at the Municipal Branding secretariat, information from the Branding secretariat website: www.brandingaalborg.dk and from written communication with the secretariat.

continuous basis. Interestingly, the branding material so far (April 2005) has only been written in Danish! The secretariat is working on a translation of both the branding booklet and the video. So it seems (and quite sensible indeed) that the work has been focusing on the 'internal side' of the brand articulation process first. At the end of the year, a number of 'products' for the 'electronic brand toolbox' should be finalised and placed at the website of Branding Aalborg. Among these products are design manuals, promotional videos, and templates for visual conference presentations. Also a branding course is held at a local business school. In the longer run, website development, primary school teaching material, photo and essay competitions are planned.

The Municipality of Aalborg has allocated 1 mill. Danish Kroner pr. year for the next five years to support the branding campaign. Simultaneously, the branding board is working on getting sponsors from the business community in the city to join forces as well.

'Aalborg – seize the world' - the content of the branding campaign

The Branding Aalborg campaign has chosen '*Aalborg – seize the world*' as the motto for the campaign (Aalborg Municipality 2004). Under this heading four 'values' are identified that supposedly are quintessential to the identity of Aalborg[5]:

- Diversity
- Wide prospects
- Teamwork
- Drive

On the basis of the four values a short vision is presented;

> Aalborg wants to be an anti-dote to the traditional metropolis. Larger by heart, smaller by extension – and with wider prospects. We will nurture the contrasts and make room for diversity. Seize the world. And through teamwork and drive create the conditions for a life in development (Aalborg Municipality 2004, my translation, obj)

Unsurprisingly, the very wording and articulation of the identity pillars has been critiqued heavily in the public debate and media[6]. Some find them just too generic and general to be specific to Aalborg and thus not emblematic of the place bound identity and character of the city. The main critique raised on this point has therefore mainly been an issue of identification and what sort of city the citizens think they live in. Others find that the four values are too broadly formulated, and thus not able to guide future branding actions accordingly. One of the other issues in the public debate has been whether the money spent (5 million Kroner) would have been better used on other types of public services like care for the elderly or maintenance of the municipal infrastructure – an argument to which the Lord Mayor countered '*it's no use that someone points at holes in the road when we are working to make more jobs*' (cited from Nordjyske, November 26th 2004).

The motto '*Aalborg – seize the world*' is accompanied by a logo that also met a fair amount of critique (see figure 3). One of the main critiques was centred on the abstractness of the graphic re-presentation. However, the claim for 'realism' in a graphic logo like this is probably close to

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[5] Although the final translation of the branding booklet is not yet released (by mid May 2005) these four concepts are, according to the Branding Secretariat, the official translation.

[6] This assessment is based on the debate in the local newspaper *Nordjyske* from November to December 2004.

impossible as a strategy for urban branding. Rather, and this seems to the general trend, it is a matter of capturing some of the symbolism present in the motto as well as in the 'real city' – the latter clearly being the most challenging.

Figure 2: Logo for Aalborg – seize the world

The logo does seem (without this being any form of qualified semiotic analysis) to try to capture the idea of the outward looking and global perspective phrased in the motto 'Aalborg – seize the world' as the colourful squares open up and connects to the wider global space. However, others have noted that this might be 'read' as a city in disintegration and lack of coherence rather than the positive connotation to the medium sized city with an eye to the global potentials.

Coming back to the content of the four values, the vision and the motto, there are a few things that ought to be noted in a balanced hermeneutic reading. As usual in branding matters, the tone is set by arguing for the very special and unique identity of the place. As the booklet says '*we are not like anyone else*'. From this premise, the four values are described. First of all, the notion of '*diversity*' can bee seen to be expressing a reading of the city as one of opposites – small and yet globally connected, the rural countryside and the city core, the buzz of the big city and the quietness of small villages, peaceful enclaves and upbeat entertainment districts. In short (to quote the branding text); '*Culturally Aalborg has the whole palette – from fine culture to subculture and avantgarde*'. This clearly articulates an understanding of the local identity as being polychrome and diverse. But it might also be read as an act of indecisiveness and thus less precession – a major problem in framing the identity as this triggers the before-mentioned reactions to the generic and empty categories which the inhabitants rarely identify with.

The second value is '*wide prospects*'. This is a very interesting value as it indexes both the normative value of open mindedness and inclusiveness, but also the physical and geographical region in which the city is located. Thus, there is a conflation in the semiotic 'work' carried out by the discourse as it both refers to norms and place (see Scollon & Scollon 2003 for an interesting analytical geosemiotic frame that runs parallel to this argument). So, for generations there has been a public notion of North Jutland as being special in terms of its blue sky and its wide horizons. Here the branding discourse taps into some of the folkways that could pave the way for a positive frame of identification. However, some of the critiques in the local media have been exactly from inhabitants that were disappointed in finding out that this probably was more of a physical and geographical referent than anything else – and clearly not thinking that wide horizons were enough to articulate a specific identity from.

The third value '*teamwork*' draws heavily on the local self-perception based on the 'strong and peripheral'. Accordingly since the region always has been on the margins, a particular culture of collaboration and cooperation has developed (out of simple necessity the story line implies). It is even highlighted in the accompanying text that the transition from industrial city to knowledge city

should be emblematic of this feature. Thus, the way in which the university, business community and local government has faced the challenges of industrial re-configuration is emphasised. Finally, the virtue of collaboration is also said to be detectable in the many links that Aalborg nurture with 'friendship cities' (twin cities) on a global level. This furthers the impression of the globally aware medium sized city. On the other hand the value of teamwork seems hard to understand as something profoundly belonging to Aalborg. Compared to other cities, Aalborg probably does not perform better or worse. Again, the framing discourse taps into more empty and generic concepts that void what really matters; local specificity and identity.

The fourth and final value is '*drive*'. Again the peripheral identity of the national underdog is articulated but this time with a twist as the merchant history of the city is included into the narrative of the city of high performance and activity. The before-mentioned transformation from the industrial society to the information society is again used as an example of a particular entrepreneurial culture. The main major events in the cultural sphere like the carnivals and Tall Ships Race are furthermore substantiating this claim to action and doing. This value, as it is also the one with the most specific examples attached to it, is probably the value with the best argument behind it. However, public critique of using words of a too high level of generalisation has also been articulated. More interesting is probably that the notion of Aalborg as being characterised by 'drive' is articulated against the Capital city of Copenhagen. It is said that Aalborg is not just a merchant city of some weight in the region, it is an '*anti-dote to Copenhagen*'. Clearly, this goes to illustrates the underdog complex and self-perception in the region. Furthermore, constructing identities by means of antagonist discourses like this are minor acts of progressive and inclusive brand narratives, and they are more akin to the regressive 'resistance identity' that Castells identified as the negative hallmark of our time (Castells 1997).

To understand how these four values merge into the vision one should pay close attention to the above interpretations. Clearly this is not an authoritative interpretation, but probably still the only comprehensive interpretation made to this date in the case of Branding Aalborg.

The first thing to notice about the vision springs directly from the before-mentioned issue of 'resistance identity'. Again we find the articulation of being an '*anti-dote to the traditional metropolis*' as a rather negative branding practice that does not point forward in any particular direction. Knowing what one does not want to be can obviously be an advantage, but in the game of branding, a more positive attitude towards one's own assets and less of a critique of 'the other' might be a cleverer tactics. The notion of being 'larger by heart, smaller by extension' also captures the modest self-perception. However, the argument is spun around a positive interpretation of this 'small is beautiful' argument as it is said that the city may be small but it is 'with wider prospects'. In coherence with the main plot and storyline, the contrasts are merged into a narrative of 'room for diversity'. The global orientation and consciousness of the importance of being outward looking is captured in the phrase that also coheres with the logo; 'Seize the world'. The last two values are articulated in the vision as mere add-ons when it is stated that '*through teamwork and drive activities create the conditions for a life in development*' (Aalborg Municipality 2004, my translation, obj).

At the end of the day, the values, the vision, and the logo do seem to expose some degree of coherence. Especially the elements articulating the global-local nexus and the importance of Aalborg as outward looking works well. What works less convincingly is the widespread use of generic and general terms and descriptions of what should have been the identity-building place-

specifics of Aalborg. Moreover, the downright negative labelling of 'others' as a way of promoting oneself does not seem to be in accordance with the cultural climate favouring tolerance and inclusion. So even though the city stakeholders in Aalborg are aware of Florida's 'third T', it is difficult not to fall back into the old habit of 'blaming the Capital' for all the evils of today. Such branding practice might backfire violently since Aalborg still is depending upon good relations to all its urban contacts – including Copenhagen.

Figure 3: 'Badges, Stickers, posters and T-shirts' – the Aalborg branding merchandise

As a final clue to the understanding of the branding process in Aalborg, one should also pay attention to the fact that a variety of different types of merchandise has been produced, which the that the Branding Secretariat use for public relation purposes, but which also can be bought by firms and others that wish to brand themselves by virtue of the new branding artefacts. With a quote from the British rock-band *Dire Straits,* one could speak of the commercial flow of '*Badges, Stickers, Posters and T-shirts*' – key elements in the marketing campaigns of any travelling rock-n'-roll show.

The branding story of Aalborg and how this medium sized city tries to articulate a discourse of global connectivity as well as local identity illustrates an interesting example of how urban interventions are dependent on a specific representational logic. Here the attempt has been to represent the globally aware city with an eye to the 'new economy' in parallel with not escaping the old antagonisms of national under/over-dog narratives. The next branding case that will be discussed is exactly this 'Other' of Aalborg as we dip into the branding of the Øresund region. The story here will be on a more general level, as it is based on previous research and as the main interest for this paper is the story of Branding Aalborg.

Øresund: Branding the national darling[7]
Located completely opposite the Aalborg case in the very centre of the Capital region, the Øresund region is an interesting urban branding case for many reasons. Located across the nation state borders of Sweden and Denmark, the new region takes on more than just the ordinary urban branding effort. Branding the Øresund region is akin to challenging the national identities in the hosting countries – which, by the way, probably explains the willingness of the European Union in supporting the 'experiment' (Jensen & Richardson 2004a).

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[7] For a more elaborate version of this branding case see Jensen & Richardson (2004a & 2004b). The factual information on the Øresund Region is based on this web site: http://www.oeresundsbron.com/press/index.php?code=1.

The region itself includes some 3.5 million inhabitants and covers an area of 21,000 sq.km. The Øresund Region comprises Zealand, Lolland-Falster and Bornholm on the Danish side and Skåne, the southernmost part of Sweden. Its core competencies are listed to be: Provisions, research, medico, biotechnology, tourism, environmental industry, design and distribution. The fixed link between these areas is the most tangible symbol of the new trans-national metropolitan construction to date. The 16 km long bridge opened in July 2000. This fixed link for road and rail is part of the bigger trans-national infrastructure project of the TEN-T. The growing expectation of increasing flows of cars and trains across the bridge, epitomised by an expected 16% rise in traffic on the bridge and 222,000 more cars across the bridge in the first half of 2002 clearly illustrates the very tangible practices of European integration as this new 'transnational mobility region' (Jensen & Richardson 2004b) built as an expression of the 'cult of flow' (Löfgren 2000:46-47) increasingly integrates.

Besides its trans-national features the region is put together by two rather uneven urban entities – the capital of Denmark and the much smaller peripheral city of Malmoe. The respective urban governments are very conscious about the reconfigured role they will get after the construction of the region:

> At the beginning of the 1990's, the Øresund Region was located at the periphery of the European Communities. Now, at the end of the 1990's, the situation of the region has changed. It is still, formally, a Danish-Swedish border region, but in the European Union, it is also a region that transcends boundaries, a laboratory for a trans-national city construction and a model for European integration (City of Copenhagen and City of Malmoe, 1999:16)

> Where else in the world can you choose to spend the evening in an outdoor café in your hometown and be in a world city thirty minutes later? Without a doubt, the Øresund bridge has created new, exciting possibilities (Malmoe City, 2002)

Branding theme I: 'Medicon Valley'

The Øresund region has been branded under two slogans or mottos. The first one to be mentioned here is the notion of 'medicon valley'. As the Øresund Region is pictured as 'Medicon Valley' associations to one of the most iconic mega-regions of global competitiveness; *Silicon Valley* are formed. Such a kind of place promotion practice can obviously be criticized both in terms of being yet another copy of the US's knowledge intensive region and also in questioning who really decides and wants this type of regional development. Having said that, it is worth noticing that the notion furthermore is based on a strong regional competency within the field of medical research and business (Clausen, 2000: 54). Moreover the branding of 'Medicon Valley' incorporates all the five dimensions of an alleged successful strategy for global competitive regions (metaphorically richness, geographical positioning, existing local competencies, legitimised analogies and supportive regional agents) (Boye, 2000: 215-216). As usual, however, there is scope for a more cautious interpretation:

> Only within fields where a region processes a strong and distinct scientific base do R&D intensive firms stand a chance of sustained growth and competitiveness. It may therefore be questioned whether it would be reasonable to expect that the Øresund Region could become a European Silicon Valley or a Boston in the 21st Century (Maskell and Törnqvist, 1999: 56).

Moreover, by naming the region and repeating it time and again in all sorts of statements, at meetings etc. the region becomes recognised as something 'real' (Berg, P. O., 2000: 77). The 'Medicon Valley' brand is articulated with reference to the successful US role model as well as to the region's endogenous potential. However, there are even more complex notions of branding the region in the second branding theme 'The Human Capital'.

Branding theme II: 'The Human Capital'
The Øresund Region and the accompanying brand 'The Human Capital' has been branded by the Wolff Olins company. According to their own description of the branding exercise, the major challenge was in the fact that it was the world's first cross-border region to be branded (Wolff Olins, http://www.wolff-olins.com/oresund.htm). The Brand of 'Human Capital' is said to be based on research that shows that the region's strongest characteristic is a 'unique attitude to life'. Taking its cues from the Welfare-state context of both Sweden and Denmark, the Human Capital brand is furthermore articulated around notions of a high investment in people and a 'humanistic attitude' (Wolff Olins, http://www.wolff-olins.com/oresund.htm). Working with the 'brand architecture', Wolff Olins identified four key audiences: investors (business), visitors (leisure), the research community (science) and people living in the region (inhabitants) (Wolff Olins, http://www.wolff-olins.com/oresund.htm).

Figure 4: The Øresund Logo

It has now become the official policy to brand the region under the label 'The Human Capital' (Øresund Network AB, 2002). This is an attempt to add a more 'soft' dimension to a project that often seems to be more about infrastructure and business. This is also a contribution to the identity construction in the region - a work in progress that is supposed to identify a particular 'Øresund Way of Life'(Øresund Network AB, 2002):

> Balance and harmony are keywords for life in the Øresund Region. The people of the Øresund live in one of Northern Europe's fastest growing business areas, while the good life awaits them right on their doorstep ... According to an American survey based on 160 countries, Denmark is the best country in the world to live in. Sweden is not far behind in fourth place. The social systems are well developed and take good care of the sick and the old. Crime is limited and unemployment is low. Interest in taking care of the environment is expressed in the unspoilt countryside and in urban development ... Accessibility characterizes the Øresund Region. The tailor-made road and rail network blurs the borders and puts the entire region within reach ... The quality of working life an leisure activities makes the Øresund Region peerless (Øresund Network AB, 2002: 9)

Clearly, the 'welfare city' is used as a marketable commodity in this quote. However, the branding is also directed outwards in terms of global competition. So the Øresund region can be seen as a new 'trans-national metropolis' and as a potential role model for a new 'Europe without borders' (Berg, P. O. and Löfgren, 2000). Given the magnitude of the region and the vast numbers of potential economic players, there is a scope for negotiating the more precise content of the brand and the direction towards which it is moving. Some have even found that the new lingo of the region seems to be the only common agenda:

> The only thing that actually unites many of the actors it that they agree upon working under the label 'the Øresund Region' and that they often share a specific optimistic rhetoric we call *Ørespeak* (Berg, P. O. and Löfgren, 2000: 12) Italics in original).

The Øresund region is clearly a matter of concern for those who envision an increased flow of goods and people within the internal market of the European Union and is as such part of the dream of the 'frictionless society' that frames and underlies the main bulk of European Union policies (Jensen & Richardson 2004a). However it is also a question of offering new role models for identity building at a spatial scale that potentially will challenge the nation state hegemony. Hence, there is reason for caution since the construction of a common identity - being on the nation state level or at the urban scale - is a long term project:

> It took generations to build national identities and establish complex national innovation systems favouring growth and prosperity, including at a regional level. It will take years of hard work to amalgamate two countries' distinctive innovation systems into one, even when most formal barriers have been eroded. It will take even longer for a common cross-border regional identity to form. Only then will the full potential of cross-border synergy begin to materialise (Maskell and Törnqvist, 1999: 11)

From these examples of urban branding in Aalborg and the Øresund region, this paper has now come to a close. Needless to say, more concrete research into these cases must be conducted (more research needs to be carried out in the first case rather than the latter).

5. Concluding remarks

This paper has explored the phenomenon of 'urban branding' within the context of cities transforming from industrial cities towards cultural, creative and knowledge-based urban environments. The paper explored the contemporary urban situation of globalisation, the re-structuring of urban economies and what is termed 'New Urban Management'. By exploring notions of creative cities, the 'Creative Class', knowledge cities, culture cities, shopping, fun and leisure cities this paper argued for an understanding of the contemporary city and the transformation processes it faces. The two empirical cases of urban branding in the Øresund Region and in Aalborg have been explored. So the time has come to make some concluding remarks in relation to the phenomenon of urban branding as a potential regional growth agenda. Furthermore, there are some tentative observations to be made on the relationship between branding 'from above' and branding 'from below'. So the paper deals with four main issues; the Welfare city as asset, local identity, social inclusion, and the issue of 'living the brand'

As argued throughout the paper, branding should take stock of prevailing local identities. Furthermore, in a Danish context of neo-liberal de-regulation it is worth stressing that the 'welfare

city' might be seen as an asset rather than a burden. One point is that the 'Welfare City works!' (Kiib 2004). But it is just as important that the 'welfare city' epitomises some of the urban qualities that the branding experts are arguing in favour of (from Landry to Florida). According to branding critic Joel Kotkin, cities face two options; either to work to become more competitive in terms of jobs or alternatively to refocus their efforts on providing *playpens for the idle rich, the restless young and tourists'* (Kotkin 2005). This latter strategy is perceived as a 'bread and circus' strategy that tourist and culture branding cities often follow when creating similar urban landscapes or 'Potemkin cities' – that is facades of flashy urbanism without real life behind them. Based on a critical reading of the American urban branding experience, Kotkin instead argues in favour of cities to 'work on their basics', like public safety, regulations, taxes and sanitation. In other words a strategy of less branding and more focus on the standard urban amenities. Taking a cue from this critical analysis, this paper would argue – not directly against urban branding – but for a branding exercise that is scaled to a sensible level of expenditure, leaving public funds for the everyday needs of the city. This implies thinking about the 'welfare city' in terms of potential rather than as burden.

Taking into account the regional and local competences and attributes of for example Aalborg, an equation like this makes more sense: *Welfare City + Creative City = Aalborg Brand*. It is socially inclusive and strategically smart! According to Jensen-Butler (1999:899), there is an argument to be made in favour of seeing the welfare city as an asset and thus as an active in a world of interurban competition. Furthermore, research from the Canadian context shows that branding in relation to 'hard' assets such as infrastructure or technical assets such as tax regulation do not suffice as there is a clear added value in referring to health, social stability and education facilities (Gertler 2004:7). Key markers of the 'Welfare City' one might ad. Or put more poignantly:

> There is a growing body of evidence that creativity shapes the competitive character of a city by enhancing both its innovative capacity and the quality of place so crucial to attracting and retaining skilled workers. Public policy plays a critical role in nurturing a city's creative assets and infrastructure … (Gertler 2004:11)

Linking branding to the 'welfare city' is one obvious strategy in the case of Aalborg (and the Øresund region). However, branding also has to do with mediating between branding 'from above' and branding 'from below'. This means connecting to the locally existing place based identity (here such a thing is still believed to exist! See e.g. Savage et al (2005) for this argument). There is a real risk of producing 'brand alienation' instead of stories of socio-spatial identification with a broader appeal. This means that urban branding and cultural planning must face the local:
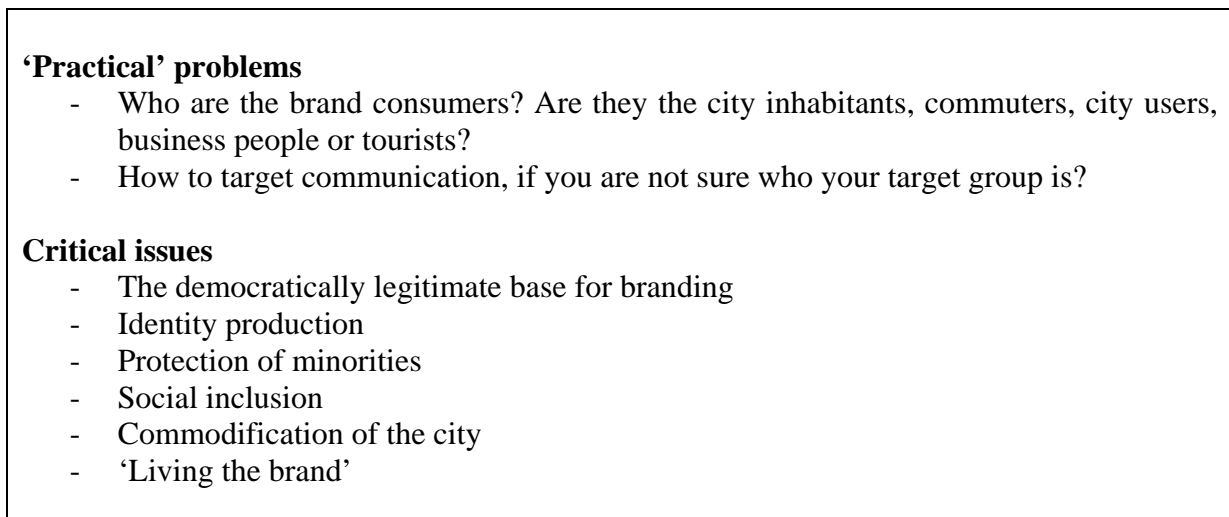
> Cultural planning and city marketing thus needs to take a point of departure in local cultural resources understanding that cities are cultural entities where people meet, talk, share ideas and desires, and where identities and lifestyles are shaped and re-shaped (Bianchini 1993:212).

There is no such thing as a mechanic relationship between the glossy brands and the lived realities of urban everyday life. In fact, much urban branding leads to no more than expensive wishful thinking. However, having said that it is important to take notice of the fact that urban dwellers in fact 'live out' the various representations and images of their cities. Not in a simple deduced manner, but in a complex expression of the importance of circulating ideas and brands to everyday life understandings. With the concept of Raymond Williams they contribute (positively or negatively) to the local and regional 'structure of feeling' (Taylor et. al 1996). Thus, there is a need

to take urban branding out of the corporate quarters and into the local and regional publics. We need to think in terms of public participation, voice, tolerance of difference as the new rationale and value base for branding as a regional growth agenda (Ghilardi, no publication date). We need to build socially inclusive processes of re-imagining the city. It is in this field of tension between the 'official culture' and the 'other' urban cultures that there is scope for new types of intervention (Thomsen 1996:9). Hence, there is a need to erode, or even reverse, the division between strategy (NUM branding) and tactics (counter practices like the anti-brands).

What has been termed the issue of 'living the brand' earlier in this paper is thus very essential. This links to the practical question of the urban dwellers recognizing the brand and living their daily life 'in the image of the brand'? But clearly it also links to the issues of power, identity and democracy as well as to the complex dialectics of material space and discursive re-presentation. If city-residents increasingly are being exposed to the articulation of their identities and spatial attributes as 'assets', they are prone to, however subtle, changes in their self-perception in the direction of a more market oriented and instrumental thinking. Thus, the urbanites may come to think of their city as a commodity and ultimately (worst case scenario) as being commodities themselves. Not wanting to sustain a hard-nosed Marxian reification thesis, this seems to be a topic worth discussing as there are an increasing number of commercialised symbols and brands in circulation. In the words of van Ham: '*There is … a risk that location branding reduces the democratic process to market research and SWOT-analysis, but little else*' (van Ham 2002:267).

Coming to an end, there are two broader sets of issues; practical problems and critical issues that must be thought of (figure 7). There are ethical issues related to urban branding for sure, but there also seems to be a number of more mundane and practical problems to be thought of. One such issue is the question of the 'consumer'. Who is the consumer of the 'thing called a city', and at the end of the day, who is the receiver of the message which the urban brand makes?

'Practical' problems
- Who are the brand consumers? Are they the city inhabitants, commuters, city users, business people or tourists?
- How to target communication, if you are not sure who your target group is?

Critical issues
- The democratically legitimate base for branding
- Identity production
- Protection of minorities
- Social inclusion
- Commodification of the city
- 'Living the brand'

Figure 5: Practical problems and critical issues of urban branding

Clearly, there are more complex agendas related to urban branding. However, these issues are at the crux of 'good urban governance' and should be considered carefully if urban branding is to be added to the toolbox of regional growth agendas and strategies.

So next to Florida's third T of tolerance there is an issue of branding the city from the point of view of 'mixophilia' (Bauman 2002). Not just to invoke social and spatial justice in the city, but also because all evidence seems to suggest that the 'city of difference' has the potential of innovation and news contributions to the economy. If that is the case, then branding the post-industrial city is one dimension of a regional growth agenda. However, as it is practice in the cases shown in this paper (and in numerous others), the existing branding practice is only halfway realising the fusion between branding the dynamic and prosperous city and branding of the just and tolerant city. On the brink of an increasingly competitive and interdependent global urban situation this theme is worth thinking carefully about, both for politicians and planners, but also for the wider audience of regional and urban scholars at this conference.

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