

Creativity at Work:

# Authenticity-in-Context: Embedding the Arts and Culture in Branding Berlin and Singapore

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# Abstract

This paper compares the branding strategies of Berlin and Singapore. The respective authorities in these cities are actively marketing, branding and transforming their cities, so that these locations will be perceived as culturally vibrant, technologically advanced and attractive for investors, tourists and creative workers. While Berlin and Singapore share the same goals, they also share similar problems – how can they convince a world that is critical and cynical about the commercial images presented through their place brands? How can they convince the world that their cities are really exciting and truly creative? The arts and culture – both popular and high – are used in place branding to address some of these challenges. This paper also concludes that place branding and its authenticity must be understood in context. The emerging reality of the place means that the brand should also reflect the local entangled social, economic and political issues; the brand, in order to be authentic, should also communicate the commercial and the vision of the place.

# Keywords

place branding, brand authenticity, brand Singapore, brand Berlin

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## **Authenticity-in-Context: Embedding the Arts and Culture in Branding Berlin and Singapore**

*The Economist* has a city liveability ranking (*The Economist*, 2007). Smaller cities, like Vancouver, Melbourne and Vienna are ranked the highest. Besides recreational and cultural activities, other factors such as crime rate, threat from instability and terrorism, healthcare and education availability, state of transport and communications infrastructure are included in this ranking. Big cities such as Paris, London and New York are not ranked highly because they face problems such as traffic congestion and higher crime rates, which also being potential targets for high-profile terror attacks. Anholt and his city branding consultancy, on the other hand, rank Paris, London and New York highly because of the city buzz, people and facilities (Anholt, 2006). Florida offers yet another way of ranking cities through his Creativity Index (Florida, 2003). Florida focuses on three different criteria: technology, talent, and tolerance. Urban places are ranked on the number of patents per head, the density of bohemians and gays, proportion of immigrants and number of knowledge-workers (Florida, 2003; Peck, 2005).

The ranking of cities has not only raised awareness that cities compete; the ranking also encourages cities to actively manage their image. In this context, city branding becomes important. City branding has become an exercise to improve the image of the city and also transform the city. So for instance, based on Florida's ideas, culture and creativity have become important to city managers, development agents and planners (Kunzmann, 2004). Many city and national authorities are convinced that members of the creative class are now the key driving force for economic development and these authorities are actively devising ways to seduce the creative class (Jensen, 2005).

This paper compares the branding strategies of Berlin and Singapore. The respective authorities in these cities are actively marketing, branding and transforming their metropolises, so that these locations will be perceived as culturally vibrant, technologically advanced and attractive for investors, tourists and creative workers. While Berlin and Singapore share the same goals, they also have similar problems – how can they convince a world that is critical and cynical about the commercial images presented through their place brands? How can they convince the world that their cities are really exciting and truly creative? Before going into the cases, this article will explain why the arts and culture – both popular and high – are used in place branding, following which the discussion shifts to the problem of authenticity in place branding. An analysis of the concept of authenticity based on lessons learned from Berlin and Singapore will follow the two cases. Alternative ways of thinking about authenticity in place branding will tie up the paper.

### **The arts and culture in place branding**

A comprehensive place branding campaign usually entails three related tracks (see (Anholt, 2006; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2004). The first branding

track is to package and promote a comprehensive brand image that tells a powerful brand story, so that outsiders can understand the place in a positive light. For example in the long-running “Malaysia - Truly Asia” campaign, the Malaysian tourism authorities present the country as multi-cultural, traditional and yet modern. It is a place where foreigners can experience different cultures of an exotic but fast modernizing Asia. Through the destination brand, foreigners are to understand Malaysia as a culturally dynamic and advanced country.

The second branding track is based on the creation of high profile icons, such as hosting internationally popular sporting events or celebrating iconic features. Barcelona and Sydney are successful in associating themselves with the Olympic Games they hosted. The seven-star Burj Al Arab Hotel in Dubai, the Grand Canyon, the Eiffel Tower, the Sydney Opera House and the Pyramids are all iconic sights. These icons focus people’s mind and promote the associated places. Places are increasingly being marketed and branded via new and spectacular icons.

The third track is to brand the place through endorsements and recognitions from other authorities. The above-mentioned rankings of cities inadvertently endorse some cities. UNESCO heritage sites, such as the Angkor Temple complex in Cambodia and the Croatian medieval city of Dubrovnik, accentuate the historical and cultural values of these places. Similarly, the very presence of major banks in London and New York inadvertently endorses these cities as global financial centres.

Regardless of the tracks used, the branding of cities and countries, increasingly, incorporate the arts and culture into the brand stories. There are several reasons why the arts and culture is used in place branding. The first reason is that the arts and culture offer special messages for the place. History, heritage and the cultural life are often unique to the place because of the intertwining historical, contemporary, social and geographical circumstances. Uniqueness in the place brand is essential in making the place stand out in the competition – arts, culture and heritage serve that function well.

The second reason is that most place branding messages want to give a rather comprehensive and humane picture of the place. For instance, Germany is well known for its technological products but in its new branding that was launched before and during the Soccer World Championship 2006, the main place branding authority FC Deutschland GmbH told the world that Germany is also a people-oriented and a sexy country. They used the image of pop-icon Claudia Schiffer; her naked body was wrapped by the German flag.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Land of Ideas (2006) “Claudia Schiffer promotes ‘Germany - Land of Ideas’” (available at [http://www.land-of-ideas.org/CDA/investment\\_promotion\\_cs,6359,0,img-2,en.html](http://www.land-of-ideas.org/CDA/investment_promotion_cs,6359,0,img-2,en.html); last retrieved on April 27, 2007)

The third reason why the arts and culture are used in place branding is that performances, exhibitions and various art and cultural activities communicate vibrancy, excitement and happening. A dull place will not attract tourists, the creative class nor investments. As will be discussed later, Singapore is frequently perceived as sterile and boring and the government has embarked on a cultural enhancement programme that ranges from setting up three national museums to attracting the Ministry of Sound of London to its shores (Ooi, 2007).

The fourth reason is that residents want to perceive their places as spaces for the arts, culture and life. Place branding is not just about communicating with the outside world, it is also an internal search for a local identity. Branding authorities want to present the local history and culture because they and the residents imagine themselves in those ways (Ooi, Kristensen, & Pedersen, 2004).

While the arts and culture are accentuated in almost all place branding exercises, do the brand stories really reflect the place? This is an issue of authenticity. How do branding authorities convince the world that their stories are real?

### **Inherent Authenticity Challenges in Place Branding**

Although a place brand will tap into the arts and culture to support the image of excitement, the issue of authenticity of the brand still surfaces: Does the brand describe the place accurately? Is the brand just a ploy to seduce investments, tourists and foreign workers? There is a difference between the place and presented images of the place. Authenticity is an inherent issue in place branding. A place brand is often assumed to be the identity of the location, this means that the brand story should accurately reflect the place's culture (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; see s in Morgan et al., 2004). This is difficult, if not impossible, for three interrelated reasons.

Firstly, a place brand cannot provide a complete and honest story of the place. Because a place brand is commercial and is catered largely to foreigners, these motivations usually taint the brand story. Place brands, like brands for other products, tell stories, sell emotions and stimulate the imagination. Places are branded to attract tourists, talented foreign workers, investments and businesses (Lund-Hansen, Andersen, & Clark, 2001; Morgan et al., 2004; Olins, 2000). For a place brand to achieve its commercial and image modification goals, it packages the society and presents only nice parts of the location. For instance, Denmark is promoted as modern and trendy, a creative country at the fore-front of technological break-throughs. Such images are aimed at attracting research and development investors, as well as scientists. Marginalised are the social problems such as gang wars, drug abuse and racism (Ooi, 2004a). So, just as cities can be measured and ranked in different ways (e.g. The Economist's ranking differs from Anholt's), place brands are inevitably selectively framed to seduce different markets. The commercial goals and framing process often prevent branding authorities from telling the whole story.

Secondly, the place branding campaign may eventually destroy the original spirit of the place. Besides selecting brand images that make commercial sense, the place brand may also lead to “commodification” of life in the community. Events, activities and locations may be promoted as brand icons. Popular local places may become expatriates’ and tourists’ haunts; the social make-up of the place would change and may lose its local appeal. For example, Slovakia promotes the Bojnice Castle, which has taken a very different character now that it is promoted as an icon for the country and for tourism (Ooi et al., 2004). Activities, such as the annual International Ghosts and Bogeymen Festival, are invented to make the castle more eventful and exciting. This newly founded brand icon does not reflect how Slovaks used and viewed that place originally (Ooi et al., 2004). Therefore, brand icons may lose their authenticity because they have become popular and have been transformed into objects that no longer relate to the wider local society.

Thirdly, a place brand is also normative; it can function as a vision that transforms the location. Activities and attractions are created to support the brand. In tourism research, MacCannell observes that not only does commodification and touristification destroy the authenticity of local cultural products and human relations, but a surrogate, covert “staged authenticity” emerges (MacCannell, 1976). Cultural products are invented and re-invented – they are eventually staged as authentic for ignorant foreigners. For example, in the context of branding China, the Chinese navy has now been roped into improving the image of the country. The official Chinese press, the People’s Daily, reported that from 2006, recruits must be “good-looking, tall and polite” (People's Daily, 2006). This requirement arises because the Chinese navy visits other countries and also receives foreign naval vessels. The navy must thus do its part in presenting China in a positive light to the world. Mangled in the seriousness of national defense, good-looking, tall and polite Chinese sailors are to be the faces of China. Has the Chinese navy become a catwalk for an image-conscious China? In unexpected and insidious ways, manifestations of local society may actually be driven by the brand vision.

In sum, the issue of authenticity arises because of the fear of forgery and fabrication when the consumption of culture is increasingly appropriated for economic purposes (Richards, 1996). The higher purposes and values of culture will then succumb to the logic of the production process and the market (Featherstone, 1991; Watson & Kopachevsky, 1994). The place brand may then lack evidence and local support. The place brand may also eventually transform the local society and thus changed the relations locals have with their own location.

Branding authorities are aware of these concerns. Authenticity in place branding is an embedded issue. If the brand is not considered authentic, then the messages will not be accepted and the campaign is a failure. This is highlighted by the global country branding consultancy FutureBrand (2006). It states that authenticity is a key branding component because people demand it

(FutureBrand, 2007). The branding authorities of the cities of Berlin and Singapore are no different. How these cities brand and maintain the authenticity of their brand stories will be discussed next.

## **Brand Berlin**

Berlin is both Germany's capital and one of the country's 16 federal states (Länder). In the German system, policies related to culture, education and science are under the jurisdiction of the federal state. There is thus no national German cultural policy but instead, a policy framework that is open to different interpretations and actions by the 16 German federal states. Berlin, however as a capital city and also a federal state, has unofficially and inadvertently attracted the attention of both the local and national governments. While many German cities want to become more culturally vibrant, many scholars, such as Gorning and Häussermann, are already viewing Berlin as the most liberal and diverse in the country (Gorning & Häußermann, 1998; Gorning et al., 1998; Gorning et al., 1998).

The image of Berlin has evolved over the years (Cochrane & Jonas, 1999). In the 1920s, Berlin was both glamorous and wicked. That view changed during the Second World War when the capital was the power centre of Nazi Germany. After the war, Berlin was devastated and divided; a victim of the Cold War. Today, Berlin is a city that is winning the world over through its promoted images of trendiness and vibrancy. The road to its current status has not been smooth; resources were and are used to rebuild the city into its current glory. Branding the city is part of this city's rebuilding strategy.

Berlin is being branded as "Berlin - City of Change" by the private-public setup, Berlin Partner. This organization is also the de facto branding authority of the city. Berlin Partner wants to showcase the city's creativity internationally; the brand therefore focuses on contemporary art, music and fashion.<sup>2</sup> The new city brand and city's policy of making Berlin into an exciting cultural centre are closely intertwined. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Berlin's situation changed drastically not only politically, but also economically, socially and culturally. While the Western part of the city lost the financial support previously granted to it by the West German government to retain firms, East Berlin lost its special trade relations with Eastern Europe and its state-subsidies for manufacturing production (Häussermann & Colomb, 2003). The initial euphoria after reunification was coupled with high expectation of economic growth and expansion but those were short-lived (Gorning et al., 1998). The city lost a large number of traditional industries, which led to an enormous increase in unemployment (Krätke, 2004). The image of Berlin was fast becoming that of a down-trodden, rust-belt city. The city authorities

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<sup>2</sup> Berlin Partner (2007) "Branding exercise for Berlin", (available at <http://www.berlin-partner.de/index.php?id=642&L=1>; last retrieved on November 20, 2007).

deployed a new plan to revamp the city economically. Berlin was to definitively move away from the sunset industries and into the service and cultural industries. The city embarks on a programme to reclaim its lost roots and cultural role in Germany and Europe. Such a strategy requires a new image modification programme of convincing Germans and the world that Berlin is again a happening city. That process is ongoing. The art market, music industry, publishing and journalism, film and TV, architecture, the performing arts, advertising and software developing sectors is currently generating around 20% of Berlin's gross domestic product.<sup>3</sup> "Berlin - The City of Changes" is a vision that reflects the direction of change, directed by policies and intent.

Knowing fully well that people are often critical and cynical of marketed images, Berlin Partner tries to make the promoted brand story believable and plausible. There are two related strategies used to validate and strengthen Berlin's brand messages.

The first strategy is to show that Berlin is indeed a culturally exciting city. The city re-claims and promotes existing cultural icons and producing new exciting ones. For example, Reichstagsgebäude - Parliament House - with its dome designed by Norman Foster has become an icon of the city. The City Mayor of Berlin, Claus Wowereit, has become a new icon of a tolerant and vibrant Berlin. He first came into office in 2001 by declaring: "I'm gay and that's a good thing!"<sup>4</sup> These are living icons, reflecting the real exciting Berlin, not just a picture staged one.

The second way that the branding authorities strengthen the message of Berlin as a true art and cultural city is by boasting the city's many international recognitions. For example, UNESCO awarded Berlin the title of "City of Design" in January 2006. It is the first city to be awarded in continental Europe. Berlin is recognised because:<sup>5</sup>

"The surroundings, space, and excellent basic conditions here lay the foundation for creative work and the development of innovative products. Designers, fashion designers, photographers, and architects find artistic

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<sup>3</sup> Berlin.de (2007) "Kreativ- / Kulturwirtschaft in Berlin" (available at retrieved

<http://www.berlin.de/sen/waf/register/kulturwirtschaft.html>; last retrieved on January 3, 2008)

<sup>4</sup> Crossland, D. (2006) "Is Germany Ready for a Gay Chancellor?", Spiegel Online (available at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,437943,00.html>; last retrieved on September 24, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO (2005) "Berlin to be City of Design" (available at [http://portal0.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=29376&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal0.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=29376&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html); last retrieved on January 3, 2008).

freedom, affordable office space and living costs, networks, and a public interested in design”.

Today, the UNESCO logo is consciously used in the Capital city marketing by Berlin Partner. Such independent endorsements are useful in ascertaining the authenticity of the brand stories. On endorsements from the popular cultural front, Universal Music moved to Berlin in 2002, which also led to MTV Deutschland moving from Munich to Berlin. Among many celebrities, Berlin Partners asked MTV Deutschland’s CEO Catherine Mühlemann to participate in an image campaign to promote the Creative Capital City. The campaign aimed not only at promoting the city, but also at highlighting the settlement of MTV in Berlin. This testimonial campaign, which started in 2001, was promoted through various media, including Time, Business Week, Newsweek and Der Spiegel. Prominent Berlin entrepreneurs vouched for Berlin as “a major capital city and decision-making centre as well as a strategic location for young and creative industries”.<sup>6</sup> Such positive messages are substantiated by respected persons, increasing the validity that Berlin is indeed a creative and cultural city.

Berlin Partner’s branding strategy for Berlin focuses exclusively on the contemporary aspects of the city. The then-marketing manager Joachim Grupp confirmed (personal communication with Birgit Stöber, 2004):

We are not a historical organisation [...]. Primarily, we are interested in the development after 1989 and the potentials developed from that. Our job as marketing organisation for Berlin is neither to point out the city’s history nor the existing problems. [...] Our job is to ensure the positive impulses are underlined and visualised. The communication of advantages is our job. Disadvantages are known enough through the press.

Regardless, as the discussion above shows, the positive stories and images must be shown to reflect the city accurately. Berlin – City of Changes points to a place of vibrancy and excitement. The changes are managed. Policies are established to attract cultural, media and art institutions. The image is carefully orchestrated by identifying icons and seeking endorsements. While the Berlin place branding strategy is closely tied to the city’s plan to promote the creative economy, the Singapore case will show that the relationship can be much tighter.

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<sup>6</sup> Berlin Partner (2008) “Location marketing” (available at <http://www.berlin-partner.de/hauptstadt/?L=1>; last retrieved on January 3, 2008)

## **Brand Singapore**

Located one degree north of the equator, Singapore is an island city-state. It has no natural resources, and is only 700 square kilometers in size. Although the Singapore economy is doing well and is the wealthiest in the region, the authorities are steering the economy away from its manufacturing and electronic bases and towards the financial services, telecommunications, life sciences, tourism and the creative industries. This is the envisaged economic future of Singapore (Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA), 2005):

In the knowledge age, our success will depend on our ability to absorb, process and synthesize knowledge through constant value innovation. Creativity will move into the centre of our economic life because it is a critical component of a nation's ability to remain competitive. Economic prosperity for advanced, developed nations will depend not so much on the ability to make things, but more on the ability to generate ideas that can then be sold to the world. This means that originality and entrepreneurship will be increasingly prized.

This new economic drive requires Singapore to be re-branded. Over the years, Brand Singapore celebrates the city's multi-cultural population and embraces the city's blend of the exotic East and efficient West (Ooi, 2004b). By presenting Singapore as efficient (in the image of the West) and promising (as in a new emerging Asia), the brand aims to draw in foreign investments. Competition from neighbouring countries such as Malaysia, Thailand and China, however, have made the branding of Singapore more challenging because these countries are making similar claims and have learned from the Singaporean experience. Singapore is no longer a cheap investment destination. As a result, the government has formulated a new "East + West plus" approach to branding Singapore. This is also dubbed as the World.Singapore strategy (The Straits Times, 2007). The "plus" refers to unique Singaporean qualities, which include "the trust others have in Singapore's ability to get things done; its knowledge base; its global network of transport and people links; and the high standard of living it offers to those who make their homes [in Singapore]" (The Straits Times, 2007). The Singaporean government has set up a National Marketing Action Committee to "guide government agencies in designing marketing campaigns that balance the harder aspects of Singapore, like efficiency and technology, with the nation's softer side, such as lifestyle and innovation" (Goh, 2006).

Brand Singapore may tell of an exciting place but Singapore is constantly seen as a sterile "cultural desert" (Kawasaki, 2004). The authorities acknowledge that Singapore is inadequate in offering cultural activities to draw highly skilled foreign workers to work in the city-state (Yusuf & Nabeshima, 2005; Wong, 2002). The Economist Intelligence Unit found that Singapore ranks behind Tokyo and Hong Kong as a sought-after place for expatriates because of

its dearth of cultural activities (Burton, 2002). To achieve these goals, a vibrant art and culture scene is considered essential to enhance the attractiveness of Singapore to global talent and businesses (Economic Review Committee - Services Subcommittee Workgroup on Creative Industries (ERC-CI), 2002; MITA, 2005).

Promoting the arts and culture is part of the push to develop Singapore's creative economy (ERC-CI, 2002; Ooi, 2007). This is not only a new brand image for Singapore but also a vision for the city-state. Based on the government's blueprint to re-make Singapore, there are at least four inter-related strategies to jointly bring the Brand Singapore story and the goal of an exciting Singapore into reality.

One, in recent years, the Singaporean government has relaxed its regulations to encourage a livelier art and cultural scene. During a parliamentary sitting on 13 March 2004, a few Members of Parliament voiced their worries about the loosening up of regulations in Singapore to attract foreigners and to present a livelier image of Singapore. The then-Minister of State for Trade and Industry, Vivian Balakrishnan, replied that he agrees that Singaporeans "must not lose our values, and we must not lose our compass" and he continued explaining why it is important to signal that Singapore is open and tolerant to the rest of the world (Singapore Parliament Hansard, 2004):

There was an article that Professor Richard Florida wrote, entitled "The Rise of the Creative Class". [...] His research found that cities, which are able to embrace diversity, are able to attract and foster a bigger creative class. These are key drivers in a knowledge-based economy. The larger lesson for us in Singapore is that we need to shift our mindset so that we can be more tolerant of diversity. To achieve this, we have begun to take small but important steps to signal that we need a new respect for diversity and openness to ideas. So these examples that the Members cited, e.g., night spots to open 24 hours, bar-top dancing, and bungee jumping, are just part of that signaling process."

Two, various government authorities search and help bring exciting events to the country. Things are supposed to happen in Singapore at all times. Besides hosting pop concerts by international mega stars (e.g. Hong Kong singer Andy Lau and US pop sensation Janet Jackson), popular musicals (e.g. Mama Mia! and Phantom of the Opera), and block buster exhibitions (e.g. treasures from the Vatican and collections from the Louver), Singapore hosted the 2005 International Olympic council meeting (London was named the venue for the 2012 Olympics then). In 2006, the World Bank and IMF met in Singapore and the Singapore Biennale was launched to coincide with the meetings. In 2008, Singapore will host the first Formula One night races. These events generate buzz and media publicity for the city-state.

Three, like Berlin, the Singaporean authorities seek investments and endorsements from the industry to brand Singapore as vibrant. Besides searching for events, state agencies actively seek out opportunities to make Singapore into the hub of global and regional organizations, including those in the media, design, telecommunication, pharmaceuticals and financial sectors. Singapore is fast becoming a regional hub for the global media industry. MTV, Discovery Channel, HBO and BBC have already made Singapore their regional headquarters. Singapore offers a conducive business environment, which includes political stability, tax breaks, free training of workers and attractive packages for expatriates. In establishing Singapore as a place of choice for the creative industries, the government also hopes that Singapore-centered and Singapore-slanted contents will also be promoted in the international media when the city is the regional headquarters. For instance, with the MTV Asia New Year's eve celebrations in Singapore, images of Singapore are telecasted throughout the region, as a result, MTV Asia does not only transmit a happening image for Singapore, it also endorses Singapore as a vibrant city.

Four, Singapore has also established a number of cultural institutions. Three national museums were established in Singapore in 1997, and in 2002 Esplanade - Theatres by the Bay was opened. In 2009, Singapore will have two spectacular mega-resort complexes that house casinos and entertainment centres. The Singaporean government wants the city-state to be the cultural capital of Southeast Asia (Ooi, 2007). As Singapore is to offer the best of the East and West in its brand story, the various cultural institutions will showcase and promote cultural events that reflect the multi-cultural, cosmopolitan city.

In Singapore, living the brand and making the brand real is part and parcel of promoting the arts and culture industry in the city-state. The brand is part of the vision and blue print of what Singapore is to become. It asserts a future Singapore. Armed with regulations and resources, the authorities are determined to realize a new funkier city-state.

## **Discussion**

Earlier in this article, three inherent factors that gave rise to the authenticity issue in place branding were highlighted: One, a place brand cannot provide a complete and honest story of the place; two, the place branding campaign may destroy the original spirit of the place; three, a place brand is also normative, it often functions as a vision that eventually change the location. Let us review these factors from the two cases and reconsider the notion of authenticity.

Based on the first factor, can a place brand be honest and present a comprehensively accurate picture of the location? This concern assumes that a place brand must be comprehensive and honest before it can be considered authentic. But place branding, by definition and purpose, aims to communicate a glowing picture of the location. It is inevitable that the images and stories provided will be slanted for that purpose. It is because of this in-built goal that the place brand can never be totally accurate nor complete. So, by definition then, the place brand is always less than authentic because the brand messages sent will always be limited.

On the other hand, this criticism that a place brand is engendered and can never be comprehensive is trivial because no message – whether it is a brand slogan or an encyclopedia-length book – can actually present a totally comprehensive and accurate picture of the location. Any story of a place will remain a representation, and that representation can only approximate the reality in the location. As Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge points out, a message is always embedded in a context. In the message, some ideas and knowledge are accentuated, while others marginalized (Dean, 1994; Foucault, 1972; Pickering, 1997). There will always be an agenda behind an act of communication; accentuating the arts and culture in the branding campaigns serve the function of presenting an image of vibrancy and creativity for the locations. From the two cases on Berlin and Singapore, we see that place branding is tightly linked to the social, economic and cultural policies of these cities – these cities are actively pursuing the creative economy, they want to attract investments, visitors and workers; place branding and the enlivening of the arts and culture in these cities are part of the marketing strategy to achieve the said goals. The branding campaigns are never meant to be independent and extracted from commercial interests. To criticize the brand story for not being authentic on the ground that is not comprehensive and engendered is like criticizing lions for not being herbivores.

Is the concept of authenticity then still meaningful in place branding? As shown in the two cases, the city branding authorities are still dealing with the issues of authenticity and credibility in their branding campaigns – they seek endorsements and intensify the presence of these cities in the global media, for example. Audiences around the world are aware of the commercial agenda behind marketed messages. It is essential for us not only to contextualize the place branding campaign in the social, economic and political milieu, the concept of authenticity, which is still obviously important, must be framed in a way meaningful and relevant to the practice of place branding. This takes us to the next point.

Moving to the second authenticity-eroding factor, to what extent does a society lose its authenticity through the processes of commodification and commercialization? In studies that deal with host societies and how these societies are affected by touristification and commodification, many researchers call for a balance between the preservation of authenticity and commercial interests (Chang, 1997b; Chang, 1997a; Newby, 1994; Ooi, 2002; Teo & Li, 2003; van der Borg, Costa, & Gotti, 1996). An absolute rejection of commercialism might mean that historically significant but derelict buildings may disappear because of the lack of financial support. The attempt to enhance and revitalize the arts and culture in a city to attract investments, tourists and foreign workers – as in Berlin and Singapore – may mean that resources are available to keep esoteric or less popular art forms alive. Traditional cultural forms provide the unique selling proposition for the marketing of the city and these are frequently exploited. In Berlin, the Museum Island, for instance, was highlighted as the historical link to the modern cultural life of Berlin. In Singapore, vanishing Asian art forms such as Teochew operas and Malay street shows are being staged and publicized. The separation of culture and business is not meaningful when one considers the intertwined relations between commerce and culture.

The entanglement of commerce and culture is also felt deeply in the age of globalization. Goods, knowledge, fashion, people and ideas cross state borders – often for economic reasons. People around the world gather news through CNN and BBC, listen to pop music by Madonna, and desire to participate in the film festival Berlinale in Berlin and the MTV Asia New Year celebrations in Singapore. There are commercial

motives behind these activities. Around the world, people consume global products which have become part of local everyday life; the differences between what is constituted as cultural and what is commercial, and what is local and what is foreign are fast dissolving (Lash & Urry, 1994; Tomlinson, 1999). Commercial cultural practices are actively localised and made meaningful not by rejecting intrusive global structures of political economy, but by consciously engaging them, appropriating what is available within them and making it part of local life (Robertson, 1995).

Societies have always evolved with the mish mesh of social, cultural, political and economic forces, which may originate locally or from afar. It would be a rather inauthentic picture if a modern society is presented as static or one that it is changing without commercial influences or foreign engagement. Place branding commodifies society but this exercise is contributing to an “emerging authenticity” (Cohen, 1988). The concept of authenticity in place branding then must acknowledge place branding as one of the social economic processes that are part of the evolving society.

The last factor that gave rise to the fear that place branding will destroy the authenticity of the place is that the brand is also normative. To what extent then does a society lose its authenticity when social changes are engineered and directed in a desire goal? World cities like London, New York – and also Berlin and Singapore – are characterized as such because of their cosmopolitan vibrancy. And they want to be world cities. These cities will not be considered world cities if they have not absorbed external influences, welcome foreign workers, companies and visitors and embed themselves in the global psyche. To many Berliners and Singaporeans, the trappings of a world city would bring about a higher quality of life. And as world cities, these places are also world players that draw attention and exert economic, political and cultural powers in the world. Society and culture are intentionally engineered in desired direction. The place branding processes of Berlin and Singapore are part of the strategies by the authorities to improve and enhance these cities. Culture and place are ceaselessly reconstructed (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Oakes, 1993). Brand Singapore and the promotion of the arts and culture are part of the creative-turn that the government wants the country to move. Similarly, in Berlin, the authorities want to revive the flagging economy. By embracing commercial and popular cultures, new cultural forms are promoted. If a place brand is normative, then it is also one of the social engineering processes in the society. All governments are engaged in social engineering – through the education system, mass media, policies and regulations. As we can see from the cases of Berlin and Singapore, place branding is part of the strategy to transform these cities. The Singaporean government takes a more proactive approach in making Singapore more friendly for the creative economy by changing regulations and becoming more tolerant to deviance. Politics and engineering change is part of the emerging authenticity of the society.

The fear that the place brand is not authentic or that the place branding campaign will destroy the authenticity of the place hold various assumptions: One, a place brand must be comprehensive and honest before it can be considered authentic; two, a society would lose its authenticity if commodified and driven by commercial activities; and following which, three, a place brand should only be descriptive and cannot inspire and direct changes to society, otherwise the society would lose its original authenticity. We have responded to these assumptions with our lessons from Berlin and Singapore. What are the lessons learned?

## Concluding Remarks

Places get branded because the authorities want to promote their places. Cities learn from each other, in terms of urban planning, regulating traffic, attracting tourists, drawing in investments and inviting talented foreign workers. Place branding is a commercial exercise. But the authenticity issue is still of paramount importance in place branding; branding authorities are concerned with it. One must however contextualise the concept of authenticity to reflect the emerging reality of society. Based on the discussion, there are two implications on the concept of authenticity. The first implication is that place branding and the issue of authenticity must be understood in context. The authenticity debate however will not be fruitful if one views the branding campaign in isolation and extracted from the entangled social, economic and political issues behind a place branding campaign. A place does not lose authenticity if its culture and social life are influenced by economic and political forces – in fact, these changes in society are the reality. To what extent and how should a society change is a decision made partly by leaders, partly by residents and partly by the influx of various influences. As we can observe in the cases of Berlin and Singapore, the authorities in Berlin seek endorsements and try to promote a good image of Berlin and the Singaporean authorities do the same but engineer Singaporean society further. The Singaporean authorities change regulations and establish numerous cultural institutions to give a funkier image to Singapore. These plans are inextricably part of the move to develop the local creative economy. The place brand is then part of the making of an evolving society, embedded in the various social, economic and political forces. Instead of seeing place branding as a source of authenticity corruption, the place branding process is part of the emerging authenticity.

In the various ranking of cities, the main issues addressed in the surveys are contemporary and current quality of the cities. As cities attempt to climb up the rankings, they are intentionally trying to lose their past and become better. Having a livelier art and cultural scene is now essential in making a city more liveable, more attractive for residents and workers and trendier in the global media. The authenticity of the brand messages rest in how these messages measure up in the present, not in how the past has disappeared or how external influences have impacted in those cities – these in fact are good, according to the desire of the branding authorities and many of the local residents. Place branding and the resulting changes that come about from the place vision is part of the emerging society. Doing place branding is part of doing the place. That surely makes place branding an authentic part of society.

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