



Les défis de développement pour les villes et les régions dans une Europe en mutation

Place Branding as Spatial Fetishism

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Résumé / Summary

Place branding impinges upon, affects and ultimately fashions the spatial entities towards which it is addressed. It develops as the concerted elaboration by a locality's most powerful socio-economic, political and cultural players of the aspirational vision that, when applied concretely at the level of the socio-spatial formation, would best serve their interests. Assisted by professional communication managers and image making technicians, such players, often rather innocuously referred to as stakeholders, are able to marshal the necessary material and symbolic resources enabling them to colonise space, to impose their option of spatial reconfiguration, in short, to produce space.

This paper attempts to examine the possible affinities between the production of space as engendered by place branding and the general production of material goods and services in the economy at large. The metabolic process obtaining in the prevalent socio-economic formation is premised on the production, distribution and consumption of commodities. Labour is applied as a transformative means, not simply to restructure the material elements of resources, to optimize their use values, but, primarily, and more significantly, so as to maximize their exchange value, to ensure their most profitable absorption by the market, in effect, to turn them into commodities. Ubiquitous in the metabolic process, commodities express the severance of the outcome of work from its direct producers. Subjected to the imperatives of profit maximisation, they permeate all aspects of social and economic life. On the production side, they impose types, modes and rhythms of fabrication. At the level of consumption, they define the content and form of what is on offer. Becoming the subjects of the metabolic process and turning producers and consumers alike into its objects, they perform the alienating inversion. Revered for their abstract, totemic force, they are fetishised.

Can a similar process of fetishisation be traced with regard to branding-induced spatial production? Are spatial entities modified and fashioned by branding exerting a fetish-type impact on residents and visitors? Are they extraneously conceived socio-spatial constructs aiming exclusively at rent maximisation, the spatial

equivalent of profit? How are they perceived by their direct users? Commodities are considered ready-for-consumption final products. Are branded spatial entities similarly perceived as final configurations from whose formation all but some select stakeholders and image-makers serving the profit imperative have been excluded? To what extent has subjectified space turned residents and visitors into objects within a branded enclosure? Is the alienating inversion here equally at play?

Keywords: place branding, commodity fetishism, spatial fetishism, alienating inversion, spatial entities as commodities

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