

# Is it place making or advertising?

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## **Introduction**

One of the key roles of public art is to redefine public space and provide a sense of place. Hence public art plays an integral role in place making and the formation of character. Public art unlike art in public or private art negotiates the critical issues of context. Thus it is vital that public art is 'public'; therefore it needs to be freely and physically accessible by the public. The key issue public art needs to address is its relationship with its context and its constituents. Hence through processes of inclusion, public art debates the idea of who constitutes the public and how are they represented? This fundamental difference between public art and other forms of art is the primary reason of how public art is formed and accepted within its wider community.

Within the current context of competition between cities, art and culture are used as vehicles to differentiate between cities. As cities compete for tourism revenue, jobs, migration and investment, art and culture is used as a point of difference. The measure of success and failure of investment in art infrastructure is determined by its contribution towards the city brand. Therefore investment in public art is justified through its role in brand identity and used as attractors for future growth and investment.

## **How did this come about?**

In the 1980's people recognized and began to associate the city with its character. Themes such as 'Paris, the world's most romantic city' captured people's imagination. World events such as the Olympic Games and the Edinburgh Fringe festival came to be seen as vehicles to raise the profile of a city. Over the last 20 years cities such as Glasgow in 1999 and recently Liverpool in 2008 used the theme 'Cultural Capital of Europe' to establish the position that arts programming can be used to raise the profile of the city and regenerate parts of it. The key measurement

for success of such forms of programming is through the attraction of future investment within the city. Thus cities such as Glasgow and Liverpool used art and culture as a point of difference to compete for investment within a national and global market.

The need to attract financial support, media attention and raise the tourist profile of the city is particularly relevant for post industrial cities or cities with large post industrial areas. Such cities have major shifts in employment from industrial and engineering based jobs to service and tourism based employment opportunities. These cities face ongoing issues with high unemployment rates, high rates of anti-social activity, low rates of tourism, significant drops in land values etc. Within the current political climate cities increasingly are competing for job and urban growth. *“Modern public policy attains to social inclusion can be achieved though the third wave through investment.”*(Giddens, 1998, p76) Thus investment and urban growth are seen as a necessary vehicle to allow opportunities to participate in a prosperous economy and remedy some of the larger social issues faced by cities.

This is particularly relevant with Bilbao and Newcastle upon Tyne where public art in particular flagship design occupied a central position in regenerating the post industrial city. The result is public art takes the position of the *“Guggenheim effect where the symbolic nature of iconic objects generates urban tourism”*. (Plazza, 2000, p264) In the aftermath of Bilbao and Newcastle upon Tyne, regeneration through symbolic and flagship architecture has become a successful model to be replicated. Thus the need for flagship or iconic developments has set a precedence with its primary purpose to attract further capital investment. As a result, policy makers often emphasize the most spectacular aspects at the expense of the more innovative and locally representative forms of public art. Within such a strategy, monumental cultural gestures raise the city profile, however also limit the role public arts have in engaging with its context and constituents.

### **Character or is it brand**

When creating and locating public art projects policy makers use the term character and sense of place. *“Public art is art which has as its goal a desire to engage with its audiences and to create spaces ... within which people can identify themselves, creating a renewed reflection on community, on the uses of public spaces or on our behavior within them.”* (Sharp, Pollock, Paddison, 2005, p 1003-4)

Cities are often made up of several key characteristics; hence, the need to have a clear character strategy. Through the use of public art projects, artists and policy makers aim to address character issues of local distinctiveness and local ownership of public space, however by investment in flagship art projects the brand of the city is enhanced. Flagship art projects do not add to character, but rather they contribute towards attracting investment, boosting cultural tourism, enhancing land values and creating employment. Public art is the physical manifestation and part of a process in the branding and marketing the city. As identified earlier within a global market brand managers are required to provide image-based differences to distinguish competing cities. Thus the purpose of marketing the city is to create strategies to promote or sell parts of the city for living, consuming and productive activities. *“The incorporation of major public art projects into regeneration schemes has become a key factor in rebranding a city’s image, especially in post industrial towns – in the UK, ... culture including public art has been vaunted as a force in changing a cities fortunes .... The power that public art can yield as a tool in changing the perception of the post industrial to the cultural city.... May of the artworks are concentrated in areas of social deprivation and this highlights how public art has been used as a tool to re-aestheticise areas within a city as well as the city at large.”* (Sharp J, Pollock V, Paddison R p1012-13)

*“If we start with the notion that the aim of marketing is to create the strategy for selling, then satisfying a customer requires the production of a good or the delivery of a service to be of high quality at an affordable price and readily available.”* (Smyth, 1994, p63) This is where public art plays a key role in the delivery of a marketing strategy for the city. Public art is stage one of product delivery. Public art projects physically transcend the marketing strategies of an area or the entire city. Hence they promote parts of the city for activities based around economic participation. Without flagship art projects the market strategy for a city cannot be sold to the public. Flagship art project provide a visible product that can be sold to a customer who will provide future investment through tourism or employment. Hence flagship art projects aim to create an exchange by linking demand to supply. Where post industrial cities such as Bilbao and Newcastle upon Tyne are concerned the two key flagship developments have enhanced the perception of the city. ‘The Guggenheim Museum’ and ‘The Angel of the North’ have provided visible attractors for the city. In both instances the city has been marketed for service orientated activities where the flagship development has changed the perception of the city.

## Flagship development

In the aftermath of both Bilbao and Newcastle upon Tyne flagship developments established a new economic model for regeneration. Due to their high profile nature flagship developments play an influential and catalytic role in urban regeneration. Flagship developments have become an important commercial vehicle of public policy to encourage private sector initiatives as part of a larger wave of property led regeneration. *“The emphasis of marketing in management has begun to influence the way in which the city is portrayed and considered. The flagship development has been part of such thinking and more importantly has become a vehicle for the development and testing of marketing strategies for an area and for a project.”* (Smyth, 1994, p19)

*“Flagship developments are:*

- *‘A development on its own rights*
- *A marketing tool for an area or city*
- *A point for further investment*
- *Seen as an important expression of the cities culture* “(Smyth, 1994, p21)

Bianchini, Dawson and Evans point out that investment into flagship developments can be justified due to their multi-dimensional nature and its potential for future investment. The implied message of flagship developments is - this is the place for others to invest or spend. The flagship development is acting as a large advertising sign. Investment in flagship developments has with it the primary purpose of drawing attention to other developments in order to stimulate further investment. This allows for an improved perception of the city and generating confidence internally. Thus the image of city and the role of the image to be seen as competitive in securing investment towards development are critical.

Sharp, Pollock, Paddison highlight that socio-economic inequalities make capital investment less attractive and undermine their ability to maintain any form of competitiveness. The use of flagship development to re-aestheticise urban environments can create waves of investment leading to changes in population and increased real estate values. The much discussed example of Anthony Gormley’s ‘Angel of the North’ highlights the importance of the skyline as an attempt to refashion the image of the city as a whole. This is where flagship artworks and

culture come together as “*they are clearly intended to enhance the image of the city, repackaging it as a commodity for consumption in the post-industrial age.*” (Urry, 2001, p3) It is through the implementation of flagship developments that this vision for the city is physically manifested. “*The flagship is part of the selling of an area and marketing the city.*” (Smyth, 1994, p4) The flagship development plays a significant role in the development of the marketing strategy of the development. It also sets the social, economic and political conditions of the development. The flagship development is the first stage of product delivery. It sets the parameters for the project and implements the marketing approach. Hence the marketing process dictates the vision for the development and is manifested through the flagship development.

### Public art and advertising

There have been a number of cities over the last 10 years that have sought to transform their post industrial areas in the hope of providing new forms of employment, standards of living and economic growth. Such is the case of the Melbourne Docklands; once a centre for industrial employment and vital lifeblood of Melbourne, activity has slowly disappeared taking with it employment and economic activity. Following the key of several urban cities throughout the world, Melbourne undertook the task of regenerating a post industrial area into modern urban hub with mixed uses including employment, leisure, housing and pleasure. This transformation was undertaken under the context of an economic boom with public art and modern public realm providing the character for the public living and working within the Docklands. Two of the key projects used to brand and market the docklands were *Eagle* by Bruce Armstrong and *Cow Up A tree* by John Kelly. They were commissioned in 1998 and 1999, three years before the first inhabitants moved into the docklands. Neither project has any direct relationship to the context or the inhabitants; *Eagle* has a limited relationship to the aboriginal character it has come to represent while *Cow up a tree* wasn't originally commissioned for the docklands. Thus the only conclusion for the commissioning of both projects is for the purpose of enhancing the image of the docklands and Melbourne. As the competitive pressures between cities push them to prioritize image and investment over civic and local claims on public realm, art is produced under the constraints of a corporate environment integrated into a publicity and marketing machine. Thus Habermas the German philosopher's conception of the public sphere as an ethical space of rational debate and encounter has been superseded by corporate encroachment and control.

The success and failure of regeneration schemes is dependent on creating an appropriate market position which neither denies existing activities nor rules out any future activity. Thus the introduction of the 'attitude' brands where a product is sold on lifestyle marketing and associated social attitudes is fundamental. The key here is not to build the marketing process around products rather to build the process round 'reputations and culture' which would add value to the brands. *"If brands are not products but ideas, attitudes, value and experiences, why can't they be culture too?"* (Klein, 1996, p30) Hence, products are not just accepted as advertising, but rather they are seen as art and part of the cultural arena. The journey of integration between ad and art, brand and culture has resulted in the formula *"take a cool artist, associate that mystique with your brand and hope it wears off."* (Klein, 1996, P44)

The use of public art in the urban regeneration experience builds on the need for culture to be employed as a part of the process for revival. Within the current process for regeneration the relationship between advertiser and artist has become symbiotic with the artist providing the cultural identity to enhance the brand. The re-imaging of cities has been around a new skyline with the object of making the city more competitive through public art projects that provide the distinctive and cultural qualities. Public art provides a physical manifestation or a physical product that transcends the market position being sought. This relationship between culture and urban growth fundamentally questions the role of public art. Art is devalued because in the investors mind, the key is symbolism. The artwork exists to promote. *"It is not Art for Art's Sake as much as Art for Ad's Sake. In the public's eye, art is yanked from its own separate and theoretical autonomous domain and squarely placed in the commercial. Every time the commercial intrudes on the cultural, the integrity of the public sphere is weakened because of the obvious encroachment of corporate promotions."* (Mathew McAllister p177) Sponsorship investment elevates the corporate and simultaneously devalues what it sponsors.

## **Conclusion**

The current process of marketing and creating an identity for the city is built around the value and reputation presented by culture and public art. This process is particularly relevant for cities with significant post industrial areas. The execution of public art projects under this framework, fundamentally questions the role of public art and its relationship with its context and its constituents. The cities need for a clear

brand strategy that will attract future investment and elevate it from its competition has taken precedence over the relationship between art, context and constituents. The formation of identity and character has been forgotten and the need for symbolic gestures has prevailed. Public art presented as advertising devalues its role in place making and elevates the need for marketing. Therefore the success of public art is measured by its ability to attract further investment, tourism and jobs justifying the large expenditure on public art.

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