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URBAN MARKETING: A REVIEW

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Urban places increasingly compete with each other to attract their share of visitors, businesses, and investment. Although by no means a recent phenomenon, it is only during the last ten years that geographers, planners, and marketing specialists have devoted attention to the study of marketing efforts by urban places and regions. In 1993 and 1994 a number of books dealing with the subject were published. There is, however, a wide spectrum of definitions and approaches.

This paper aims to review the subject, variously labeled as city marketing, urban marketing, place marketing (or selling places by some authors). It will be demonstrated that the application of marketing principles will have consequences for all aspects of urban planning, and indeed will help urban places to develop their resources and competitive advantages in a more systematic way.

Introduction

This paper is dealing with marketing of urban places. It is a recent addition to the geographical discipline and has been presented under different names. Authors not only disagree about the labels to be used for this new field, but also have widely differing views on what the subject is about. Even worse, quite a number of geographers think that there is nothing really new about the subject, and that its value is very limited anyway.

Nevertheless, the last few years have seen a substantial number of publications dealing with marketing of urban places, which in itself justifies a closer look at the subject. In this paper we will first investigate the different labels under which the subject has been presented in recent publications. Secondly, it will be demonstrated that a consensus about what marketing of urban places should include is lacking so far, with many authors having a very limited understanding of the nature and consequences of marketing. Finally, a plea is made for a better integration of marketing principles in geography. The application of marketing principles has consequences for all aspects of urban planning, and indeed will help urban places to develop their resources and competitive advantages and unique selling points in a more systematic way.

A kaleidoscope of urban marketing

For most established specializations within a discipline there is at least some agreement on the names to be used. Within geography 'urban geography', 'economic geography', 'regional geography' and many other 'geographies' have

become accepted, even if the exact meaning of each term leaves room for varying views and definitions. This is not (yet?) the case with urban marketing. Limiting ourselves to books published during the last few years, the mere titles suggests a wide variety of views. An early book publication is *Selling the city: marketing approaches in public sector urban planning* (ASHWORTH & VOOGD 1990). This was followed by the proceedings of a conference session at the Annual Conference 1990 of the Institute of British Geographers, published in 1993 under the title *Selling places; the city as cultural capital, past and present* (KEARNS & PHILO 1993). The same year saw a publication by the well-known marketing specialist KOTLER with two co-authors: *Marketing places; attracting investment, industry, and tourism to cities, states, and nations* (KOTLER, HAIDER & REIN 1993) and in 1994 an edited volume by geographers was presented under the title *Place promotion; the use of publicity and marketing to sell towns and regions* (GOLD & WARD 1994).

It will be observed that there is quite some variety in wording, although all titles seem to indicate a similar field of study.

Apart from English-language titles, similar examples can be quoted from other countries. Dutch geographers have favored the seemingly English term 'city marketing' which nobody else seems to have adopted. Examples are an edited volume titled *Citymarketing en geografie* (BORCHERT & BUURSINK 1987) and a small textbook *Steden in de markt; het elan van citymarketing* (BUURSINK 1991). In Germany the first publications date from 1987 and are summarized in *Stadtmarketing, Kontouren einer kommunikativen Stadtentwicklungspolitik* (Helbrecht 1994).

We have limited this listing to publications dealing with general urban marketing. It would be easy to add other titles discussing specific applications of urban marketing: for example for urban renewal (HOYTE, PINDER & HUSSAIN 1988), for recreational cities (ASHWORTH & GOODALL 1990), or for residential suburbs (GOLD & GOLD 1994). However, for this review we stick to urban marketing in general.

New or old?

Before dealing with the contents of urban marketing as understood by different authors, we want to pay attention to the question whether or not we are dealing with a subject which is new to the geographical literature, as is the suggestion from our selection of recent titles. Even if this selection is by no means exhaustive, it can be safely stated that urban marketing literature has been booming for the last seven or eight years, with only a very few contributions before 1985. How can this sudden rise be explained, and does it not indicate that - contrary to the opinion of many critics - urban marketing is indeed a 'new' subject?

In an influential article one of the earlier writers on the subject, Jacquelin BURGESS (1982), remarks that in the seventies various public agencies became involved in advertising to promote places as good sites for companies considering new

investment. Notably Development Corporations in Britain started having substantial expenditures for place promotion. Nevertheless she remarks that thus far local authority advertising received little attention from either the advertising industry or from academics concerned with regional policy and locational decision-making (BURGESS 1982: 1). She succeeds in tracing only a few relevant studies, amongst others a study of the promotion of five West Midlands overspill towns (GOLD 1974). Nevertheless, the conclusion that urban marketing is a new subject in the realm of geography seems somewhat paradoxical in view of recent publications demonstrating that the conscious use of publicity and marketing to communicate selective images of specific geographical localities or areas to a target audience has a long history (WARD & GOLD 1994: 2). WARD & GOLD point out that during the age of colonial expansion, west European and east coast American newspapers contained many advertisements aiming at enticing migrants to venture into the unknown. Seaside resorts in search of tourists and suburban housing areas looking for well-to-do inhabitants (GOLD & GOLD 1994) are among the well-known examples of early advertising.

These promotional activities all were intended to have spatial consequences. Therefore one would have expected that geographers had been amongst the first academics to study the effects of these early demonstrations of urban marketing. As this was not the case, we have to conclude that we are not dealing with a new topic, but rather with an old one, that is only a new field of study within geography, because it has been neglected in the past. To explain why this is so, we have to take a closer look at what is meant by urban marketing. We have to be more precise by what we mean when we use this terminology. In doing so we will discover that marketing of (urban) places is a relatively unexplored new field, whereas promotion of places is a very old activity indeed. Unfortunately, the relation between the two seems obscure for some geographers and therefore will need clarification.

The marketing concept

According to the marketing concept, an organization should try to provide products that satisfy customers' needs through a co-ordinated set of activities that also allows the organization to achieve its goal. Customer satisfaction is the major aim of the marketing concept. First an organization must find out what will satisfy customers. With this information, it then attempts to create satisfying products. But the process does not end there; the organization must continue to alter, adapt and develop products to keep pace with customers' changing desires and preferences (DIBB et al. 1991: 13).

In recent years it has been debated whether the marketing concept is still an appropriate organizational goal in an age of limited resources, environmental deterioration, population growth and other major problems facing the world. This has led some marketing scholars to include societal goals in the definition of the

marketing concept. KOTLER introduced his concept of societal marketing, which holds that the organization's task is to determine the needs, wants and interests of target markets and to deliver the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors in a way that preserves or enhances the consumer's and the society's well-being (KOTLER 1984: 29). This seems an important addition to the traditional marketing concept, as it makes clear that marketing policies are not only directed by organizational goals and consumer want satisfaction, but also by society interests. It certainly makes the application of the marketing concept more applicable to non-profit organizations and public authorities.

Although the marketing concept may seem an obvious approach both for running a business producing goods or services and for non-profit organizations geared to the satisfaction of needs and wants of people, it nevertheless was in the past not generally accepted, not even for commercial firms. A famous example is Henry FORD's marketing philosophy for cars in the early 1900s: "The customers can have any color car they want as long as it is black".

According to DIBB et al. the **marketing era** was preceded by the **production era** and the sales era. Starting with the Industrial Revolution and its mass production the main concern for a firm was to manufacture its products more efficiently. This production orientation continued into the early part of this century until in the 1920s the strong consumer demand for products subsided. By this time the production was organized efficiently and firms realized that further improvements could be reached by more effectively selling their products. Therefore, from the mid-1920s to the early 1950s, businesses viewed sales as the major means of increasing profits. As a result this period came to have a sales orientation. Business people believed that the most important marketing activities were selling and advertising.

By the early 1950s it was gradually recognized that efficient production and extensive promotion of products did not guarantee that customers would buy them. Firms found that they must first determine what customers want and then produce it, rather than simply make products first and then try to change customers' needs to correspond with what is being produced. As more firms realized the importance of knowing customers' needs, businesses entered into the era of the marketing concept -- the era of consumer orientation. Surprisingly, forty years after the marketing era began, many businesses still have not adopted the marketing concept (DIBB et al. 1991: 13). This is even more the case with non-profit organizations. There is evidence that public authorities actually are just beginning to enter the marketing era. The marketing concept has been developed primarily for business organizations, and therefore a time lag for the marketing of urban places is self-evident.

The question has been raised whether at all the marketing concept can be applied by public authorities. Firms are different from public authorities in many aspects and have all kinds of freedom in selecting various marketing instruments, whereas public authorities are limited by many constraints. Taking the classical elements of the marketing mix, i.e. product, price, place, and promotion, some critics question whether these can be applied in the case of a public authority. Can they change their

products? And what is their product anyway? At least urban places have to offer different values for different target groups, which seems incompatible with the simple term 'product'. Price is another problem, as public authorities are hardly in a position to manipulate the price as an instrument in the same way commercial firms can. In quite some cases there is no price at all which can be used as a marketing instrument. And what can public authorities do with the marketing element of place? Even if they don't like their place on the map, there is no way to change it. Only promotion seems to be an element of the marketing mix that public authorities can apply, but even in this case promotion specialists and advertising agencies working for public authorities have less freedom than their business colleagues.

These objections seem to be based on simplified and old-fashioned notions about marketing. Most firms, whether producing goods or services, are part of complex organizations, and are normally dealing with a multitude of goods for different target groups. Like public authorities they cannot direct their marketing to a well-defined product. Actually many firms are marketing images while the products to which they relate remain vaguely delineated or are even non-existent (ASHWORTH & VOOGD 1994: 42): "'Hearts and minds' campaigns, for all sorts of objectives, not only gave public sector organizations another demonstration of marketing, but also showed that a diffuse, complex and vaguely-defined product did not rule out the application of marketing techniques". This implies that urban marketing can be effective by using generalized images even though the actual goods and services to be sold are difficult to specify and the overall goals are equally varied and non-economic. Such non-economic goals, rather than direct financial profits, are indeed incorporated in the notion of *marketing in non-profit organizations* as formulated by KOTLER. Even if important differences between for-profit organizations and public sector organizations cannot be denied (BORCHERT 1989: 80) there is no reason to reject the application of the marketing concept for public authorities, and thus its value for the marketing of (urban) places.

Marketing concept and marketing techniques

The application of the marketing concept in the case of urban or place marketing can be summarized only briefly within the context of this paper. It implies the use of different marketing instruments or marketing techniques. Selecting marketing opportunities implies marketing research, measurement and forecasting, segmentation, targeting, and positioning (SWOT-analysis: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). A sound marketing strategy must take into account, however, not only the market, but also all functional aspects of the organization that must be co-ordinated. These functional aspects include decision making procedures, finance, personnel, and environmental and social issues. In the case of public authorities the traditional planning procedures will make place for a strategic market plan, which outlines the methods and resources required to achieve the organization's goals

within specified target markets. As a next stage the marketing tactics have to be decided, including decisions concerning pricing, promotion, publicity and advertising. After the implementation has taken place, marketing control (monitoring) is necessary, and will function for the next round of the continuous marketing activities.

Urban marketing in this sense is a complicated activity, and has consequences for all aspects of spatial planning. It results in a planning system that takes into account wants and desires of relevant target groups (firms, visitors, inhabitants) right from the first stages of the planning process. As urban places increasingly compete with each other to attract their share of visitors, businesses and investment, a stronger market orientation is necessary. Increasingly public authorities have to co-operate with private enterprises, for example in the form of public-private-partnerships, which can only function when both parties are market oriented. Traditional planning systems tend to overlook the needs of a changing market. A case in point is the production of industrial estates in the Netherlands, where during the late seventies many municipalities eager to earn additional income offered industrial sites, resulting in a total supply which far outreached the actual demand in the country (KROESKE 1987). Market orientation will help in avoiding planning disasters (HALL 1980). What contribution has been made so far by urban marketing studies?

A classification of urban marketing studies

In this paragraph a crude classification of urban marketing studies will be presented. As with many typologies and classifications the main objective is to present some order in a bewildering variety of approaches and concepts. Although in most cases some examples of studies are mentioned, one has to realize that more often than not, specific studies cross the vaguely-defined boundaries, and some injustice to authors cited seems therefore unavoidable.

In the previous paragraph we have been more specific about the meaning of urban marketing, a term that often is used rather vaguely. Our later conclusion will be that not all types of studies under review can claim to be rightly labeled urban marketing studies. Actually, in our opinion only few can. This, however, does not imply a degradation of any of the studies whose claim to be an urban marketing study is questioned, or challenge their usefulness in their own right. Rather, it points to the necessity to make a better distinction between the various types of studies, and above all, to adopt a more distinctive terminology.

1 Place promotion studies

Promotion probably is the most visible part of the marketing process, albeit by no means the most important part. Actually in the modern interpretation of the marketing concept introduced in the previous section of this paper, promotion only contributes to the ultimate goal in as far as it is fully integrated in the rest of the marketing strategy.

A review of the urban marketing literature leaves no doubt that studies on promotion outnumber those on other aspects of urban marketing. This is why we start our review with promotion studies.

Why are promotion studies favored so much by geographers? One obvious explanation could be that promotional activities of public sector organizations and local authorities are more numerous than other activities forming part of the marketing concept. Actually, the abundance of promotional evidence does not necessarily prove the existence of modern marketing principles amongst public authorities. Indeed, promotional activities may be numerous because they very much belong to the selling era of the past, and even today one gets the impression that only part of the promotional evidence is vested in modern concepts in marketing.

The problem with this explanation is, however, that it fails to explain why geographers only recently jumped on the study of promotion. As was indicated earlier, the first publications dealing with promotion date from the mid-seventies (GOLD 1974), but most of those were published ten years later after the trend-setting article by BURGESS (1982). Should the explanation quite simply be that the fundamental changes taking place in marketing theory and the breaking through of a new era of marketing practice went by unnoticed? Do geographers still consider marketing as an activity to sell things, and for which promotion is one of the main instruments?

The title of a recent book published by geographers *Place promotion; the use of publicity and marketing to sell towns and regions* (GOLD & WARD 1994) could hint in this direction. A further indication can be seen in the fact that the editors in no way explain why in the 1990s they chose this specific book title, which would have been in place only in the sales era up to the mid-fifties. A further indication is the lack of any theoretical justification for limiting the selection of essays mainly to promotion. To be fair, some contributions, notably the one by ASHWORTH & VOOGD (1994) stress the point that promotion should be seen as one (small) instrument within the market-planning process as a whole. The editors, however, do not seem to embrace this vision wholeheartedly: "The conceptual problem (of applying marketing approaches to place [J.B.]) derives from the fact that marketing is a business practice devised to promote a tangible and clearly defined product that is literally sold to clearly defined consumers. The maximization of sales provides a very specific objective of conventional marketing. It is not possible to market places in these ways for several reasons. One immediate problem is that it is not readily apparent what the product actually is, nor how the consumption of places occur. Though marketing practices make places into commodities, they are in reality complex packages of goods, services and experiences that are consumed in many different ways. In turn this means that the clear marketing objective of sales maximization (sic!) is easily lost sight of, except in the still very uncommon circumstances of a place designed specifically as marketable commodity - a Disneyland for example" (GOLD 1994:

9). This argument seems to be based on an outdated vision of what modern marketing is, and may well be part of the explanation of the overrating of promotion in the geographical literature.

In view of the vast amount of place promotion studies a further subdivision of this category is made. Only a few studies will be mentioned in each case as an example.

1a Urban advertisement studies

There are interesting examples of studies dealing with advertisements of local authorities. In many cases there is a content analysis, comparing statements in advertisements with actual qualities of the places concerned. BUURSINK (1987) studied the slogans of more than seventy places in the Netherlands, and came to the conclusion that most advertisements were geared to potential business investments. The catchwords not always succeeded in presenting other qualities than for example a central location.

Another approach is adopted by WARD (1994) who tried to identify foci of promotional activity over time and space. His conclusion is that place promotion has boomed during depressions, although the more successful strategies were those which have been conceived or sustained during conditions of general economic growth. FRETTER (1993) also found that growth in local authority promotional activities could be traced back to the mid-seventies when economic recession started to hit the traditionally successful manufacturing and mining areas of the Midlands, the North and South Wales.

1b Image studies

Image studies concentrate on the way in which places have projected themselves for promotional purposes. An example is a study by BARKE & HARROP (1994) analyzing the promotion of industrial towns in the UK that were looking for new identities in a period of a changing economic climate. Other examples include ZWART (1987), MEESTER & PELLENBARG (1986) concentrating on images entrepreneurs connect with different places, and HOLCOMB (1993). Of course not all studies dealing with the image of the city can be classified in this category: in many cases there are no marketing connotations at all, not even in cases where the relation between the image of the city and its ability to attract businesses is the main theme (see for example RUHL 1971).

1c Historical heritage and architecture as promotion

Architecture as an advertising tool for urban places is a well-established topic in geographic literature (CRILLEY 1993). Historical heritage is an important asset for local authorities wishing to attract visitors, tourist industry and other businesses. In some studies heritage sites itself are the central theme (HERBERT, PRENTICE & THOMAS 1989), and the discussion includes the tensions arising between successful promotion and conservation.

1d Urban promotion through public art and festivals

The relation between culture and cities is almost a classical theme. The intentional use of art, culture and festivals for urban marketing purposes has been known for a long time, although in recent years the phenomenon has gained momentum (BOOGAARTS 1992), as is demonstrated by the increasing number of art exhibitions, musical festivals, trade fairs etceteras all over the world. Urban policy makers are well aware of the favorable impact such activities may have on the economic health of their cities in the long run, even if large initial investments are involved. In some cases culture is welcomed to change the image of one-sided industrial or commercial cities. Frankfurt made a determined effort in the mid-seventies to catch up with other European cities by creating seven museums and rebuilding its opera house, spending eleven percent of its urban budget on culture, a higher per capita sum than any other city in Germany. It has been demonstrated that the existence of cultural facilities can have an important impact on economic and spatial developments of the cities concerned (TAUBMANN 1987).

This topic offers a wide field for geographical research, and indeed many geographers have been attracted by the relationship between culture in the widest sense and the economy of the city (KEARNS & PHILO 1993, CRILLEY 1993, GOODEY 1994, WYNNE 1992). Also in this case, however, there is not always a connection with marketing; the marketing connotation may be weak or even absent.

2 Selling urban places

Although the selling era has long ago been succeeded by the marketing era, nevertheless there are quite a number of recent publications with titles referring to selling the city (ASHWORTH & VOOGD 1990) or selling places (KEARNS & PHILO 1993). These studies, in most cases, are more market oriented. The city is considered to be a commodity which has to be marketed, and therefore has to be competitive with other cities in the same country, or even on an international scale (DATAR 1989). Comparative research can trace the strengths and weaknesses of cities. The weaknesses have to be remedied before the activities to sell the city are embarked upon. This strategy may not contain all stages of the modern marketing concept, but at least some of the marketing techniques are applied in a consistent way. For that reason in our classification they form a class of their own, in between the mere promotion studies and the full-fledged marketing studies.

One obvious problem in considering the city as a commodity is the complicated character of the product to be sold. Although - as was indicated earlier - modern marketing theory has solved this problem, it certainly is an explanation for the fact that many studies of this type are dealing with specific qualities of the city rather than with the city as a whole. Occasionally residential qualities are put

forward to attract (new) inhabitants, but most concern is about touristic and industrial activities, or about economic activities in general. In Germany it has been proposed to indicate this type of approach as Standortmarketing rather than Stadtmarketing which should be reserved for a more comprehensive marketing approach - NR 3 in our classification (BfK-Büro 1993).

2a Attracting tourism and hospitality business markets

Studies dealing with planning for (urban) tourism and recreation have a long tradition. Nevertheless, the determined integration of marketing concepts is a new phenomenon; in the past this had been applied intuitively at the most (JANSEN- VERBEKE 1987: 39). The actual state-of-the-art is summarized by ASHWORTH & GOODALL 1987 and ASHWORTH and GOODALL 1990.

2b Selling the industrial town

Many local authorities are eager to attract businesses. The reasons vary between countries and are connected with the specific tax and financial system. As a general rule more economic activities are welcomed in order to create a sounder financial basis, to improve employment opportunities, provide existing consumer services to a larger number of customers, or to create possibilities for re-using old buildings. Classical location theory has been used by geographers to investigate the changes different places have undergone in competition for a limited amount of investments, but also behavioral aspects have been taken into account (MEESTER & PELLENBARG 1986).

3 Urban marketing strategies

A final approach of urban marketing incorporates the marketing concept in all phases of urban planning. This implies that spatial plans for cities are of the same order as marketing plans in the case of firms. A plea for this approach has been made especially by ASHWORTH & VOOGD (1987). Similarly KOTLER, HAIDER & REIN (1993: 79) stress that "places must begin to do what business organizations have been doing for years, namely *strategic market planning*. ... *Strategic market planning* starts from the assumption that the future is largely uncertain. The community's challenge is to design itself as a functioning system that can absorb shocks and adapt quickly and effectively to new developments and opportunities. The community must establish *information, planning, and control systems* that allow it to monitor the changing environment and respond constructively to changing opportunities and threats. The aim is to prepare plans and actions that integrate the place's *objectives* and *resources* with its changing *opportunities*. Through the strategic planning process, a place decides which industries, services, and markets should be encouraged; which should be maintained; and which should be de-emphasized or even abandoned" (*italics* KOTLER, HAIDER & REIN).

These authors acknowledge that managing strategic market plans is more difficult for communities than for individual companies. However, they believe that the strategic planning process can work in most communities.

As this approach is new to urban planning, it is no surprise that case studies with full-fledged strategic market plans integrating all aspects of the community, are hard to find. There are however several encouraging examples of piecemeal strategic market plans, that is plans for specific planning areas (KOTLER, HAIDER & REIN 1993, BROWNILL 1994, HELBRECHT 1994). It certainly is not coincidental that in the case of public-private-partnerships in the USA and urban development corporations in Britain, this approach has been widely accepted. Urban redevelopment projects are other examples. According to HELBRECHT (1994) the Internationale Bauausstellung Emscher-Park [IBA] is a good example of the application of the marketing concept to the redevelopment for a larger region which has been going on from 1988 onwards.

The situation of urban marketing in Germany seems to be strongly modeled after a pilot project in a number of smaller towns in the state of Bavaria (CIMA Stadtmarketing 1992). Rather than an integral market orientation of urban planning per se, it is narrowed down to a communication-political system intended to develop plans acceptable to all parties of the local community. Although communication and societal consensus are prerequisites for the application of the marketing concept to communities, the term urban marketing (Stadtmarketing) is not justified in these cases.

Conclusion

The recent interest in the market context of places, especially in Europe, has resulted in a large number of publications by geographers on subjects variously indicated as 'promotion of urban places', 'selling of cities', 'marketing places', 'citymarketing', 'Stadtmarketing' etceteras. A remarkable rise in the geographical interest for these topics developed after 1987. A generally adopted explanation for this sudden emergence of a new field of study within the geographical discipline, is that competition between places is much stronger than it used to be. This has been caused by shifts in planning attitudes by governments, resulting in many cases in reduced state influence. Another explanation is based on the structural changes taking place in the character of regions and cities. With a decreasing share of production and an increasing share of service activities, competitive resource-based spatial advantages are becoming less important, whereas favorable conditions for the service activities seem more ubiquitous and connected with qualities of cities as places to live and work. Increased competition between places necessitates local authorities to market orientation. This in turn would explain the explosion of geographers' studies about urban marketing.

A closer look at recent publications by geographers demonstrates that this explanation has to be revised. In most cases there exists only a weak relation with modern developments in marketing theory. The majority of recent publications are at best limited to some aspects of marketing, especially promotion. Modern developments in marketing theory are in many cases neglected. However, there are some promising exceptions in which the marketing concept is used to transform urban planning into strategic urban market planning. It is suggested in this paper to apply the term urban marketing for the latter approach only.

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