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URBAN IDENTITY, CITY IMAGE AND URBAN MARKETING

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This paper examines what types of city images are required by urban marketing. They have to reveal the identity of the city as a whole, but without personifying it, nor considering it as an organism, in that the city is composed of actors, groups and social networks with their own, partly conflicting, identities. This does not justify, however, the opposing conception of the city as a "crowd", which denies its identity as a whole. It is suggested that the city can be considered as networks of autonomous systems, using the concepts of non-banal machines (VON FOERSTER) and autopoiesis (MATURANA and VARELA). This scheme allows the city to be thought of as made up of different identities, interacting together in competitive, co-operative and conflictive forms, according to relatively stable organisational principles even with continuous variation in its structure. This organisation would correspond to the identity of the city. It is generated as the production of images aimed at creating the internal connections through which the city reproduces itself over time as a complex system. This hypothesis, applied to specific examples of urban marketing allows the assessment of the differing effectiveness in the processes of urban development. In this context, the internal and external images referring to the urban territory as a dynamic milieu show themselves to be more effective than those referring to the territory as mere "patrimony". In conclusion, it is upheld that urban geography, in order to respond to the demands of urban marketing, must extend its studies to the meta-geographical level of the construction and deconstruction of images.

1. Urban marketing and the geography of the invisible

It is well known that the benefits that cities can offer their inhabitants, visitors and investors are indivisible use values, externalities produced collectively, starting from the preconditions accumulated in the course of history. The expression "urban marketing" should therefore be considered as hyperbole, which by analogy recalls business marketing, extending and restricting certain of its connotations. Among these, the most hyperbolically distorted is perhaps the spatial connotation. As J. BOUINOT observed (1994: 177): "We should underline a fundamental difference between a town hall and a company; for the first, communal territory is the prime object of its activity; for a company (...), space only serves to support its own activity". While the product of a company can be sold alone, no "urban product" can be isolated from its physical environment (VAN DEN BERG and VAN DEN MEER 1994). All the various operational stages in business marketing (product definition, target specification, image, promotional strategy, response monitoring), if referred to urban marketing, always necessarily concern, even if not exclusively, the city territory.

This also explains how urban marketing, from being a mere means of external promotion of the city's comparative advantages, has been transformed increasingly into a form of strategic planning, complementary and in part a replacement of conventional urban planning (VAN DEN BERG et al 1990; CORSICO 1994; BORCHERT in

this book). At the beginning, the knowledge required was summarised simply in the formula SWOT: Strength and Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (AVE 1994). Today, this is just the start of a complex analysis which examines the relationship between territorial endowment and dynamics, urban identity and image of the internal and external actors, of their agency and the consequent territorial transformations.

Physical space is the starting and finishing point of this analysis, precisely because it is the means by which the various meanings and values of the city are represented, expressed, reproduced, destroyed and regenerated.

The space of urban marketing is not, therefore, the simplified space of conventional geography. It is, rather, "le lieu où des hommes d'idéologies différentes cherchent à imposer leurs représentations, leurs pratiques et leurs intérêts" (BAILLY 1992: 380). The geography of this space must deal with subjects such as identities and images, which do not belong to the external world; they are invisible, but necessary to the understanding of how the visible ones change.

2. Identification and identity

The expression "urban identity" assumes different meanings according to whether we adopt an internal or external viewpoint of the city considered. Four possible definitions (Table 1) derive from this, which will be examined here and in the following sections.

Table 1

	External viewpoint	Internal viewpoint
Objective reference	1 IDENTIFICATION	2 IDENTITY AS SELF- ORGANISATION
Subjective reference	3 EXTERNAL IDENTITY (MARKETING IMAGE)	4 IDENTITY AS SENSE OF BELONGING

The difference between identification (1) and identity (2, 3, 4) should be noted first of all. All cities can be identified precisely, but not all of them have a precise identity; on the contrary, it is said of many cities today that they have an identity crisis or even lack an identity. To identify a city it is sufficient to identify some exterior attribute, such as size, shape or even just the geographical co-ordinates, which distinguishes it from others. In order to recognise the identity of a city, it is necessary to identify a unitary set of attributes capable of representing something similar to the personality

of an individual (BRUNET and FERRAS 1992). But this will never be anything but a metaphor, just as to talk of the city in a physical sense (*urbs*), to indicate a system of actors and social relations (*civitas*), is a metonym. The expression "urban identity" thus contains a dual metaphor. This increases its ambiguity enormously: the realities that it can signify are innumerable, and escape any definite description.

If we look at the past of urban identity, it appears reflected by the physical form and the material organisation of the city. If we look at the present or possible future scenarios, the urban identity can only appear as an image, as a "second reality" which echoes an only presumed non-measurable "first reality" (RACINE 1994), as a signifier whose signified does not depend on any substantive reference.

The possible reference to a substantive reality, even if objectively grounded, as in the marketing image "Köln Wirtschaftszentrum West" (SCHMIDT 1994), is purely rhetorical and evocative. Its purpose is not to inform us about the economic geography of the Rhineland but about the identity of Cologne. In the same way, the image "Montpellier capital of Occitain Florida" states something that is obviously false (Florida = Languedoc), while it tells us something true about the identity that Montpellier has given itself in the last twenty years. Naturally, the reference to an external reality can be completely missing: "Toulouse la ville qui gagne" (VOLLE and FERRAS 1994) is a purely self-referential image, and yet with a performative effectiveness, equal if not greater than the others.

3. The city: neither group nor crowd

Can the personification of the city, implicit in the concept of urban identity, have any objective basis?

Psychologists define identity, in its essential features, as that which gives internal coherence and teleological tension to a social being with its own existence (MUCCHIELLI 1986). This social being can be an individual or a group. The different definitions of "group" agree on certain essential traits. A group is a partial aggregation of individuals who interact stably with each other and who, while not being organised formally, are capable of pursuing common objectives (GALLINO 1989).

The identity of a city, even if seen through its external forms, refers to the urban collectivity which has expressed itself and continues to do so in these forms. In other terms, we imagine identity as what gives coherence and continuity to the life of this collectivity, what makes the city appear as a structured and stable set of actors and relations which bind them together and to a given physical environment. The identity of the city thus understood would therefore be that of a group with a territorial base. The same can be said of regional or national identity.

But attributing identity to a territorial group means admitting that informal spatial sub-systems exist (i.e. different from associations and institutions) capable of relatively autonomous behaviour, not reducible to simple parts of the global system.

This idea is shared, as well as by geographers, also by sciences such as sociology (local communities), anthropology (local cultures) and ecology (ecosystems). But this is anything but obvious. For example, it is not accepted by "normal" economic theory, which does not admit the existence of intermediate territorial organisations between the global market and individual actors (households and enterprises) (BECATTINI 1989).

For economic theory, the individuals who make up a city are simply a "crowd". The same conclusion was reached at the beginning of the century by the most renowned critics of the modern metropolis, such as G. SIMMEL, M. WEBER, W. SOMBART and W. BENJAMIN. They saw the metropolitan "crowd" as the result of the definitive break in pre-capitalistic *Gemeinschaft*, following which the individual cities were nothing but the local expression of the vaster and more general *Gesellschaft*, regulated by the laws of the market and capitalist instrumental rationality (CACCIARI 1973). This pessimistic vision questioned individual autonomy and with it responsibility and values. The dominant culture reacted to them in the mid decades of the century. In its various expressions, from organicism to functionalism, Marxist structuralism and system theory, it attempted to rethink the city as a unitary whole and to translate the old idea of the urban community into the language of modernity. This regressive nostalgia was also expressed through a strong rationality, which tended to reduce the city to what H. VON FOERSTER would call a banal machine, predictable and controllable from outside. The instrument of this control was comprehensive urban planning, which had the same conceptual background as Fordist organisation. In the eighties, with the crisis of Fordism, the city began to be seen as a chaotic aggregate of fragments, of networks, of nodes belonging to different networks, of partial projects and conflicts.

Current interpretations of the post-Fordist or the post-modern city, however diverse they are, avoid the two extreme models of the anonymous crowd and the organic unitary group. The idea is progressing of a complex aggregate of actors and groups - the bearers of different projects, images and thus identities which can, according to the circumstances, stimulate competitive, conflictive, or co-operative actions.

If, therefore, the metaphor of urban identity has an objective foundation, today it should be sought in the representations of the city as a complex system, or to use VON FOERSTER's terminology (1981), as a non-banal machine.

4. Identity as self-organisation

VON FOERSTER (1985) has calculated that a non-banal machine which has only four inputs and four outputs can have 10^{2466} different configurations. This obviously makes its behaviour incalculable. As an urban system is much more complex than a machine of this kind, to think of the city as a complex system means that a full analytical description of it cannot be given and therefore that its future states cannot be predicted. It also means that a universally valid observation point external to the

city system does not exist. The urban planner and the public authority which legitimises his action are not a system of control distinct from the system, but a component of it. There is a local rationality, which, to be accepted as universal, has to interact, changing itself, with the rationality of the other components.

This is, in fact, the philosophy of urban marketing, which denies the certainty and the objectivity of conventional planning, and confirms instead that the approach to the city as a non-banal machine promises to be more realistic and effective.

This approach is logically coherent with the concept of urban identity illustrated earlier (see Section 2). What we can reasonably expect from a city depends on its rules of internal transformation; in other words on the hidden realities which are commonly thought of as its identity. This also explains why, when urban identity is translated into images, their meaning is not referential but self-referential. It does not refer to things, but through the image of them represents the internal coherence of the system and its possibilities. Furthermore, it has also been seen that the concept of urban identity is not applicable either to the city "personified" as an organic collectivity, nor to the city as "crowd". It is, instead, pertinent to the city as an interactive network of autonomous systems, in that it can refer to the "operator" (in VON FOERSTER's sense) of the connections which allow this network to act as a system. This does not mean drawing a simple intersection of sets, but of creating intersections, even conflictive ones, between the different identities within the city.

Among the models of complex systems, the autopoietic ones that H. MATURANA and F. VARELA (1980, 1987) have derived from Norbert WIENER's autonomous systems are particularly interesting. These are operationally closed self-referential systems which are created as networks of interactive processes capable of reproducing the system, producing its components and modifying its structure as a response to external stimuli. The identity of these systems (what enables the identification of them as entities distinct from the environment) does not, therefore, concern their structure, which is a contingent and variable aspect, but their organisation, which is the range of the structural transformations that the city system can undergo without dissolving itself. If we think of a city as an autopoietic system, its identity will not consist therefore in neither a particular physical form nor in a given set of functions, but in what allows the city to continuously produce itself, modifying both its form and its functions in time.

Thus, for example, recent research on the identity of Geneva (GALLAND et al 1993, 1994) reveals how behind certain great transformations (the Reformation, the establishment of the international organisations etc.) and environmental characteristics (the lake, the quality of life etc.), there are invariant attributes (universalism, tolerance, attitude to abstraction, irenicism etc.) and some recurring themes (aperture/closure, the *carrefour*, the outsider etc.).

It should be noted that the city components (actors, groups, local networks etc.) are also assimilable to autopoietic systems, with differing organisational principles that can give rise to interactions of various types: competitive, co-operative, conflictive etc. In addition, there can be components of the urban system that are at the same

time components of other systems (e.g. the branch division of a multinational or the local branch of a political party, a religious sect etc.). Thus, in order to talk about "organisation" of an urban system it is necessary to suppose that within it is possible to generate a certain degree of connection between components which present different identities. This connection, which corresponds to the system's operational closure, can be of variable strength, involve a varying number of components, manifest itself continuously or only in exceptional circumstances (for example, during major projects, such as the Expo 92 in Seville or the G7 summit in Naples). What must be underlined is that the more an urban system presents itself as operationally closed, the greater its self-organising capacity, the stronger its identity and the more effective its external action (CONTI et al 1994).

We can thus conclude that the identity of a city finds its objective foundation (Table 1, no.2) in the fact that it presents itself as a self-organised system according to principles that are invariant in the long term, allowing us to describe it as an operationally closed auto-poietic system. Recent studies confirm this interpretation. B. GALLAND, J.-Ph. LERESCHE and A. DENTAN (1993, 1994) define the identity of the city as a sort of software (*logiciel*) or "cultural algorithm": "matrice culturelle qui consciemment ou inconsciemment participe à la structuration de son développement" (1994, p.33). J.-B. RACINE (1994) talks of a "supposed reality" corresponding to "quelque chose qui ajuste les pratiques aux structures, qui se situe entre les structures qui organisent la ville et les 'dispositions' qu'elle produit" (p.55).

5. Internal and external images

In urban marketing, the production of images is not an activity distinct from the production of the city. It is not a simple communication strategy to obtain something more from the outside. The production of images, which is directed at both external actors (investors, visitors) and internal components, is a constituent means necessary for the functioning of the city: it is its identity as a complex network which self-represents itself in order to self-reproduce. As P. GUÉRIN (1994) has observed, urban marketing concerns more the being of the city than its mere having. This is true since cities have existed. P. SICA (1970) observed that the configuration of the Greek city communicates an image which is both ontological and operative: already clearly defined in the rites of foundation, it founds urban identity and controls the later evolution of the city.

The images of urban marketing, in order to be effective, must therefore represent urban identity in the three meanings already mentioned (Section 2, Table 1): (a) as an organisation or domain of the possible connections between its components; (b) as empathy or belonging of these components to the city; (c) as the integration of external values in the process of production of internal components. These are three sides of the same reality which interact in the process of production of the city: the (b) images are necessary in order to produce (a), which in turn has to produce (c).

When urban marketing deviates from this model, it loses its capacity to contribute to reproduction and long term urban development and becomes mere advertising or to the strategy of an elite which relegates the other social components to a role of passive adaptation.

The experiences of urban marketing fall between these two extremes. Among those closest to the complex system model, we can cite the urban promotion of Barcelona through the Olympic Games (BUSQUETS 1992). The British urban development corporations, such as the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation (TWDC) also seem to move in this direction in their programs of promotion and regeneration in collaboration with the local city councils (TWDC 1993).

These and other examples are characterised by the strategic nature of their projects and by the breadth of the social components involved. Other projects display a strategic character, but include a limited number of actors. A typical example is the Euralille development programme (ENGRAND 1994), where the construction of an integrated centre with 300,000 m² of floor space over 70 hectares, aimed at making Lille an international city on the European scale, was promoted by public and private actors, but separately from 80 other projects, aimed at fighting the social ills of the marginalised quarters (BONACORSI 1994). In this case, the objective of fighting the "two-speed city" is not pursued through the inclusion in the Euralille of the less privileged urban components, but by trying to compensate the negative effects of their exclusion.

A similar case is that of the Expo of Seville, where the strategic exploitation of a prestige redevelopment project (the World's Fair Expo 92) had scarce effects on the increase in housing opportunities and has not significantly reduced an unemployment rate of 30% (PARKINSON 1994). Another example of clear-cut separation between contrasting identities and interests of different urban components has been the promotion and creation of the London Docklands (GOULD 1990).

Rather different is the image promotion campaign for the Ruhr, conducted by Kommunalverband Ruhrgebiet (RECHMANN 1994): starting out from a comparison between the internal and external images, it managed to reduce the enormous initial discrepancy between the two and to increase self-confidence and instil a positive thinking attitude in the internal components. At the opposite end of the scale are the promotional campaigns based on a generically self-referential external image of the "Bezier, on va gagner" type (BOUINOT 1994) or on an internal image which only expresses the desire of local politicians to be re-elected.

An image of the city as a complex system is also always an image of its territory as a source of identity. First of all, because the territorial borders, although being variable for the different urban components, they are an essential factor of identity, in that they allow the system to distinguish itself from others. Secondly, because the territory presents itself both to those who observe from outside and those who live there as an endowment of resources and of useful conditions, both natural and cultural, material and immaterial, which are the legacy of history. They appear to us

as belonging to a given urban territory in a given historical period, in that they are specific to it, not transferable or reproducible at will.

One can have a rather static and closed vision of this endowment corresponding to the concept of "patrimony" (RACINE 1994; BOURDIN 1994) or a more dynamic and open one that refers to the concept of "milieu" (AYDALOT and KEEBLE 1988; BERQUE 1990; CONTI et al 1994).

The internal images of the urban territory as "patrimony" are of a symbolic nature, are the foundations of the subjective identities (Table 1, no.4) as a sense of belonging and empowerment. Their limit is that of looking more to the past than to the future, of favouring defensive mobilisation, localistic closure, and sometimes internal fragmentation rather than cohesion (BOURDIN 1994). For example, in cities such as Venice, Naples, Liverpool or Marseilles we have strong identities of this type and poor capacity of common agency.

The images based on milieu see the territorial potential and restraints as "affordancies" (BERQUE 1990), that can be valorised through the competitive and co-operative interactions between the urban components; images are seen as the substrata of networks of the city's internal and external links, that can be activated to respond to challenges from the external environment and to promote urban development. These images connect the sense of belonging with mobilisation aimed at change, and the subjective identities of the individual components with the collective identity of the city as self-organised system. Images of this type were used to promote cities such as Glasgow, Toulouse, Annecy, Antwerp and others (AVE and CORSICO 1994), even if they do not always manage to mobilise all the social components, connecting the different and often contradictory identities together.

6. Conclusions

"Like geography, urban marketing is based on representations (...); this enables us to tackle not the city itself, but its meaning in a symbolic and ideological context. The city, which is both real and imaginary, becomes the subject of both geographical research and urban marketing. The geography of 'knowledge of knowledge' (L. Prieto), conscious of its own subjectivity, tackles both arguments involving cities and their influence on spatial practices" (A. BAILLY 1994: 476).

"The practice of the geographer, from when not only the material nature of a territory, but also the perceptions, representations and symbolic mediations which run through it are recognised as subjects, continuously tackles problems of construction, negotiation, transformation and imposition of significant orders" (L. MONDADA and J-B. RACINE 1992: 271).

"The only quality that makes my geography unusual is that it does not limit itself to the study of visible things. Instead, it tries to foreshadow a cartography of thought" (G. OLSSON, 1991: 181).

"Surveys certainly do give important help for directing town planning. Nevertheless, we still increasingly need a democratic 'culture of struggle', i.e. an opinion-forming process which creates transparency and identification with the city" (K. SCHMIDT 1994: 195).

These quotations seem to me to summarise well the new directions which urban marketing indicates for urban geography. In order to tackle a city which has to be described and interpreted from different points of view, with avowedly partial and even contradictory images, it is necessary to know how to "describe one's own descriptions". This means exploring the *terrae incognitae* of urban meta-geography, i.e. of the geography which questions itself over how, why and for whom images of a city are constructed; a geography that becomes conscious of its role as a "provider of identity" (BRUNET and FERRAS 1992), of the enormous evocative force of its "concrete" images in the attribution of meaning and the construction of consensus, of its close links to power, in that it is the art of making the invisible visible and also of the risk of reduction to the rhetoric of persuasion, if not mere propaganda. This is, however, a risk common to all the social sciences and today also to planning, which discovers itself to be increasingly a "rhetorical activity" (THROGMORTON 1993). But this risk can in fact be avoided by developing a consciously meta-geographical discourse which makes urban geography capable of both constructing pertinent and effective images, and of deconstructing their meanings, so as to contribute to the development of a democratic "culture of struggle".

In order to achieve this, urban geography must have the courage to become a fully-fledged social science, opening itself up to sciences such as anthropology, psychology, linguistics, semiology and political philosophy as well as to history, economics and sociology: to all those sciences which enable not only the understanding of the substance and the nature of the things represented, but also the meanings and the values that they assume in the representations and the projects that they implicitly suggest.

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