

Selling Newcastle to the world, and to Newcastle: A Case Study of the Official and Unofficial Rebranding of Newcastle, NSW

Laura Crommelin

Australian Graduate School of Urbanism, University of New South Wales

Abstract: Like many industrial cities, Newcastle confronted significant economic challenges in the late 20th century, culminating in the BHP steelworks closure in 1999. While some feared the closure would mean the demise of Australia's 'steel city', Newcastle has instead seen its economy diversify, its industrial waterfront redeveloped and its unemployment rates decline. Accompanying these economic, social and physical changes have been various attempts to reshape Newcastle's image, to overcome the city's lingering association with crisis and decay. This paper provides a case study of two key players in this process, the official Brand Newcastle rebranding campaign and the unofficial revitalisation project Renew Newcastle, drawing on interviews conducted in Newcastle during 2012-2013. Looking at these two projects, it is evident that both seek to promote Newcastle to the outside world, but also to promote their vision of Newcastle to Newcastle itself. As such, although Renew Newcastle functions primarily as a physical revitalisation project, it can also be understood as a participant in the rebranding of Newcastle, and one that has arguably been more effective than the official campaign. Given this conclusion, the case study highlights the need for the urban branding literature to incorporate broader perspectives on who participates in urban branding and how.

1. Introduction

Long defined by its gritty industrial heritage (Winchester et al., 2000), Newcastle has experienced significant economic, cultural and physical change in recent decades. As industrial restructuring during the 1980s and 1990s led to rising unemployment and increased inner city property vacancy, the city became associated with a narrative of crisis (Metcalf and Bern, 1994). This narrative reached its peak with the BHP steelworks closure in 1999, then the largest industrial shutdown in Australian history.

Since then, however, Newcastle has diversified its economy with growth in health and medical services, tourism and education (Wilkinson, 2011). The Honeysuckle redevelopment has converted the defunct industrial foreshore into apartments, retail space and tourist attractions, and gentrification has reshaped some inner city areas (Rofe, 2000). Not all of the city's challenges have been resolved; in particular, retail vacancy persists in the CBD, as various redevelopment proposals have stalled. But for a city that has long embraced its 'battler' reputation, observers are noticing an unfamiliar sense of optimism (McCarthy, 2011). Having often felt ignored by outsiders (Hogan, 1997), Newcastle is now also enjoying positive media coverage (e.g. Rhodes, 2011; Squires, 2012), including a Lonely Planet nomination as a Top 10 City to Visit in 2011.

These developments have coincided with a number of projects which have sought to reshape the city's image. While official image-making efforts are not new to Newcastle (Dunn et al., 1995; Stevenson, 1999), unofficial image-makers like bloggers, artists and cultural brokers are now also reshaping the city's image in ways that warrant further investigation. This paper explores these official and unofficial re-imaging processes through a case study of two recent Newcastle projects: Brand Newcastle, the City of Newcastle's official rebranding campaign launched in 2011, and 'Renew Newcastle', an unofficial revitalisation project which began in late 2008. Through a comparison of the contrasting approaches Brand Newcastle and Renew Newcastle use to promote the city, both to the outside world and to Newcastle itself, the paper highlights how informal image-making is occurring in cities like Newcastle and raises questions about how the existing literature characterises these practices.

2. Method

This case study is drawn from a broader study examining the role of official and unofficial urban branding in Newcastle and another post-industrial city - Detroit, Michigan. In Newcastle, thirteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews of 45 to 90 minutes were conducted during 2012-2013 with official and unofficial image-makers and key observers, including:

- participants in Renew Newcastle and other unofficial revitalisation projects;
- official branding and place-making participants from government and advertising; and
- local writers, bloggers and public intellectuals interested in rebranding and city image issues.

The interview transcripts were reviewed using narrative analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in how these themes were narrated by interviewees. The case study also draws on a collection of over 100 mainstream and social media articles from 2011 onwards which explore image and identity in Newcastle. This secondary data source provided a counterpoint and adds complexity to the first-person accounts offered by interviewees.

3. Rebranding the entrepreneurial city

Many scholars have explored the trend towards entrepreneurial urban governance in recent decades, as neoliberal ideology has reshaped city management practices (e.g. Harvey, 1989; Hall and Hubbard, 1998). Central to this trend has been the idea that cities must compete for limited resources and investment (e.g. Anholt, 2006). This notion of interurban competitiveness has driven an increased focus on image-making, as city governments promote their advantages to attract the 'four T's': tourism, trade, talent and treasury (investment) (Govers and Go, 2009). As a result, "new media and marketing tactics, and the culture workers who devised them, [have come to be] understood as essential to the growth and governance of the neoliberal city" (Greenberg, 2008, p.28). For industrial cities in transition, such re-imaging practices have also been seen as a way to shed an association with crisis and decline by highlighting new development, industry and cultural attractions (Holcomb, 1993; Short, 1999). At the same time, as Broudehoux (2004) and Colomb (2012a) argue, many such strategies have sought to convince local communities of the value of certain redevelopment strategies, as well as to promote the city externally. These two perspectives – external and internal – offer a useful framework for exploring the goals and outcomes of the re-imaging practices now commonly referred to as urban branding.

Urban branding is the most recent iteration of place-based image-making practices, having emerged as "a natural extension of corporate brand theory" (Allen, 2007). In the burgeoning academic literature, urban branding is predominantly understood as an official top-down practice, coordinated by city government working with key urban stakeholders (Kavaratzis, 2012; Ketter and Avraham, 2013). What this literature has yet to consider in detail, however, is how independent urban image-makers might also promote the city in ways that reshape a city's brand. While scholars have begun examining the role of public participation within official branding campaigns (see Kavaratzis, 2012 for an overview), the literature rarely explores how informal image-making can also occur independently of official branding efforts (cf. Colomb, 2012a; Braun et al., 2010).

By exploiting the wide-reaching digital networks of Web 2.0 and social media technologies, individuals and small-scale organisations can now present their vision of the city and its culture to the world. While some independent image-makers seek to deliberately undermine official city brands (Braun et al., 2010), others simply wish to portray their personal experience of the city, or to promote aspects of the city that appeal to their niche audience. In doing so, these independent image-makers arguably reshape the brand of the city in ways that can both complement and complicate official place branding efforts. As Colomb (2012a) suggests in her recent work on the rebranding of Berlin, the role of these independent image-makers remains under-examined.

Of course, not all independent image-makers would view their efforts as branding, and doing so requires adopting a broader understanding of place branding than the top-down model proposed in much of the existing literature (e.g. Ashworth, 2009). However, some theorists do define place branding broadly enough to incorporate independent image-making, seeing place branding as “a process that derives from interpretive, rather than managerial, techniques” (Pryor and Grossbart, 2007, p.294). Place branding is thus understood as “the process of inscribing to a place symbols and images that represent that set of central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics that actors have ascribed to that place, thereby creating a focus of identity” (Pryor and Grossbart, 2007, p.294). While this process may traditionally be driven by government, it seems possible that a network of smaller, independent image-makers may also achieve the same outcome.

This paper explores the potential for Renew Newcastle to be seen as precisely this kind of independent image-making project, which leads a network of individuals and small organisations in rebranding Newcastle both externally and internally. Yet while these goals match those of the official Brand Newcastle campaign, the two projects differ in approach, vision and influence. A brief overview of the two projects provides a useful starting point from which to explore these differences and their potential significance.

3.1 Brand Newcastle

The ‘Brand Newcastle’ campaign was launched in July 2011 with funding from state government and the City of Newcastle (‘TCoN’). Local firm Peach Advertising was engaged to develop the brand in a consultative process which included workshops with industry and community members. The process yielded the following key outcomes:

Brand essence	“City of Opportunity”, distilled from key characteristics: <i>hardworking, genuine/real, world-class stories, and ever-changing</i>
Tagline	“See Change”
Logo	 <p>The logo was designed to represent Newcastle’s diverse opportunities and assets.</p>
Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 branded info kiosks in the CBD • Updated tourism materials (maps, brochures etc.) • A competition to suggest ways to display the logo around the city • Logo released for local businesses/organisations to use on promotional material
Web presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branded website including six short videos explaining the ‘brand story’, i.e. how the brand was devised • Facebook page

Figure 1: overview of Brand Newcastle campaign features (source: interviews and <http://seechange.visitnewcastle.com.au/>).

Local responses were mixed, with some residents complaining that the logo was simplistic, or that the \$88,000 price-tag should have covered other city expenses (Gregory, 2011; Wilson, 2011). Among the informal image-makers interviewed, the concept of rebranding Newcastle was generally well received, as was the logo and tagline. The implementation, however, was not as extensive and strategic as some had hoped. Despite these criticisms, the campaign was recognised with the Best Brand Marketing Award at the Local Government Communications Awards 2012.

3.2 Renew Newcastle

While Newcastle is home to a range of independent image-makers, Renew Newcastle ('Renew') has been the most prominent of late. It is the brainchild of former Novocastrian Marcus Westbury, described on Renew's homepage as a "writer, broadcaster, festival director and media maker". A not-for-profit venture, Renew fills empty spaces in Newcastle's CBD by arranging low-cost licences for artists and community groups to use spaces temporarily until permanent tenants are found. This process is designed to benefit Newcastle by: (1) reducing the negative commercial and symbolic impact of retail vacancies; and (2) providing low-risk opportunities to test out new creative businesses. Renew provides advice and coordinates arrangements between property owners and 'Renewers'. The project is supported by many property owners, including GPT Group, which owns much of Hunter Street Mall.

Westbury is Renew's creative director, while day-to-day operations are handled by general manager Marni Jackson, with support from an advisory board and a small staff. Funding from TCoN, Arts NSW and the Hunter Development Corporation helps to cover Renew's operational costs. In March 2013, Renew celebrated having installed over 100 projects in Newcastle's CBD, some of which have become commercial businesses (Green, 2012). Renew won the 2010 Australian Business Arts Foundation's Partnership of the Year (with GPT), and its model is being replicated across the country with advice from Westbury's national organisation, Renew Australia.

Renew promotes itself via a website (www.renewnewcastle.org), an email newsletter and a Facebook page. Westbury is prolific on Facebook (4500+ friends), Twitter (8500+ followers) and his blog (www.marcuswestbury.net), writes occasionally for traditional media like *The Age* and the *Newcastle Herald*, and regularly speaks at conferences and festivals. Both Jackson and Westbury have given numerous interviews in local and national press. These channels provide opportunities to promote not only Renew itself but also its physical, social and cultural impact on Newcastle.

4. Selling Newcastle to the world

As noted above, urban branding can be understood from one perspective as an attempt to promote a city externally, to attract trade, tourism, treasury and talent. So how do Brand Newcastle's and Renew Newcastle's promotional efforts compare in terms of achieving this external outcome?

4.1 Brand Newcastle

The external impact of the Brand Newcastle campaign is somewhat difficult to discern. This is perhaps surprising, given that aspects of its launch suggested the campaign was designed to sell Newcastle to the world in classic urban entrepreneurial style. As advertising executive Adam Lance explained in an introductory video, the goal was to attract "the best talent, the best people, the best energy, the best ideas, the best investment, the best tourism", echoing the '4 Ts' rationale. This competitive logic was also indicated on Peach Advertising's webpage:

The new Newcastle is a vibrant, multi-layered, exciting city – a city that could and should hold its place on the world stage. The project to sell Newcastle to the world is timely and critical...

A similar argument was made in another launch video, which listed Newcastle's assets and declared that "when you package that all up, it really is something that can compete with some of the larger cities on a global scale".

Looking at the campaign's implementation, however, few aspects seem designed to promote the city externally. Adam Lance confirmed that an external advertising campaign was not part of the launch, and while the website and Facebook page are obviously widely accessible, other key launch elements were locally focused. As such, other than inviting journalists on expenses-paid city tours (called 'familis'), it is not

clear how the brand has been disseminated externally. This raises questions about the campaign's ability to fulfil its stated goal of making Newcastle more internationally competitive.

4.2 Renew Newcastle

While primarily a physical revitalisation project, it was always anticipated that Renew might also shift external perceptions of Newcastle. Westbury suggests this prospect has informed not just Renew, but much of his work:

I mean I've always been, you can trace in everything I've ever done, I've always been an advocate for Newcastle, I've always been an advocate for a different way of looking at Newcastle and its potential and what it is.¹

Likewise, Jackson has long recognised Renew's potential in this regard:

I don't think we sat down at the beginning and that was number one on the agenda but I think it became very clear that that could be part of the story, and so it was very much something that we're thinking about when we started building it...I think in the very early days we could see that it was going to have that impact so we were kind of finding ways we could massage that a little bit more and more.

Given these expectations, it is unsurprising that both Jackson and Westbury claim to have witnessed a shift in how external observers view Newcastle since Renew began. What is perhaps surprising is that both also claim Renew's branding power sometimes outpaces its real-world impact. As Westbury explains:

...where it always gets a bit challenging is when your mythology gets ahead of your actions, so we have developed this mythology which I think is like 95% true, and often what happens is that...people coming at that without much context or knowledge don't necessarily appreciate what has been happening. So the classic one is that no-one remembers what it was like before where we've been working, so everyone looks at the after and says 'I thought there was meant to be more here than this!'

Jackson makes a similar point, noting that "...we've had it when people have come up and go, 'Oh I thought they'd fixed everything. It's a bit shit, it's a bit shit still really'". Renew board member Petra Hilsen also made a similar observation:

...when it all first started we definitely had quite a few tourists, and we've heard it in the street, who would come because they've read [about] it. I mean Marcus was successful, they had it in the Jetstar magazine, you know, people would come after it was in the Lonely Planet ...Whether we've always been able to deliver, that might be different.

While these comments offer anecdotal evidence of Renew's external impact, there are also other indications that the project is drawing visitors. In TCoN's recent Destination Management Plan, Hunter Street Mall ranked second in the "Top 10 attractions visited by survey respondents", an outcome likely to have been influenced by Renew's presence in the Mall. In addition, SGS Economics conducted an economic assessment of Renew in 2011 which quantified its gross economic impact in Newcastle since 2008 at \$1,265,200 (SGS Economics, 2011, p.29), of which \$202,000 was attributed to "improved regional brand value":

¹ All unattributed quotations in this paper are drawn from personal interviews conducted by the author.

The city has gained national and international recognition in the mainstream media due to [Renew Newcastle]...Newcastle has also gained an international reputation as a tourist destination and ranked in the top ten cities to visit in 2011 from the 'Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2011 – the best trends, destinations, journeys and experiences for the upcoming year'. This alone could generate significant tourist value to not only Newcastle but Australia (p.13).

SGS calculated this improved brand value as follows:

It was estimated that visitation to the city of Newcastle increased from 927,000 in 2009-10 to 1,010,000 by 2010-11...[I]t was estimated that 5% of this increase, i.e. 4,150 visitors were attributable to the 'Renew Newcastle' projects and would not have visited had it not been for the project. This estimate is judgment based...(p.28).

While this statement highlights the challenges of quantifying place branding's financial value, the SGS report nonetheless supports the conclusion that Renew contributes not only to physical revitalisation, but also to external branding.

As the SGS report suggests, a key reason for Renew's brand impact has been its appearance in positive press profiles like *The new Newcastle* (Milne, 2012) and *Five global hipster meccas even cooler than Seattle* (Barrett, 2012). Jackson attributes this press attention to strategic efforts:

...what has started is the 'famils', like getting journalists from newspapers and magazines to come up and be shown around and be treated out at all the restaurants, and there's always Renew on the agenda, and we're hearing that people are asking them, you know they say "ok I want to make sure I find out about Renew and this and this". So we're on the list of what people know about Newcastle, and want to find out more, which is great ...

Simon McArthur, TCoN's former tourism and economic development manager, acknowledges Renew's role in this respect:

[Renew] not only performs critical property and economic development roles, it also plays a key role in positioning and thus marketing a competitive brand for Newcastle. The galleries, shopfronts and events offer an authentic approach to arts that continually captures the attention of our travel media (Renew Australia, 2012).

Interestingly, while Renew had a low profile in the original Brand Newcastle campaign, it is now a feature. Jackson's photo is in the Brand Newcastle image bank, and the branded tourism website labels Renew a 'must do' activity, claiming that it "is finding uses [for empty shops] that are often so interesting they are becoming tourist attractions." This official acknowledgement reinforces SGS Economics' assessment that Renew's external branding impact has been significant, and beneficial to Newcastle as a whole.

5. Selling Newcastle to Newcastle

While this external perspective suggests Brand Newcastle's re-imagining impact has been limited compared to Renew's, a more complex picture emerges when comparing the two projects from the internal perspective Broudehoux (2004) and Colomb (2012a) identify. Looking at Brand Newcastle and Renew Newcastle through this lens, important distinctions can be discerned in how they represent the process of urban change, and what this might mean for current debates over the redevelopment of Newcastle's CBD.

5.1 Brand Newcastle

A top-down logic can be discerned in various aspects of the Brand Newcastle campaign, including its funding model and role within a broader strategic governance framework (see Figure 2, highlighting added).

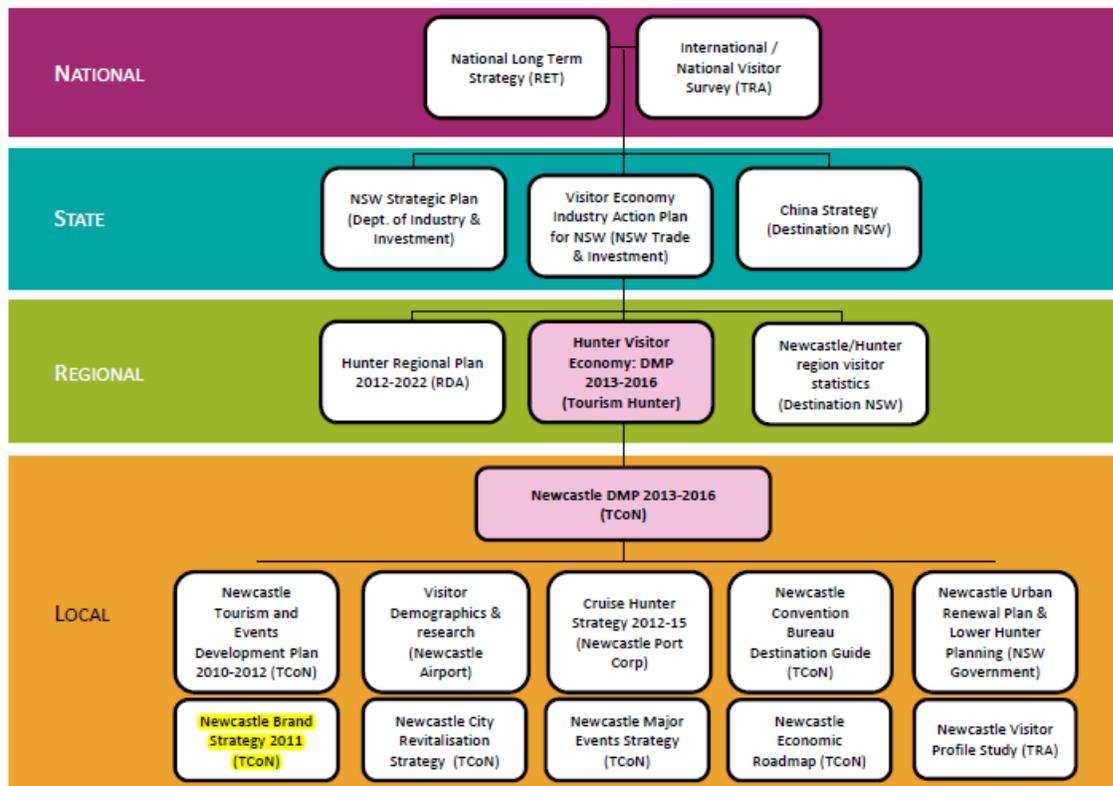


Figure 2: Newcastle Destination Management Plan (source: Newcastle Tourism Industry Group, 2013).

Furthermore, while Brand Newcastle involved community participation, it was closely controlled by the brand strategists – participants were invited, predominantly from traditional urban power groups like industry, tourism and major institutions.

The campaign's top-down logic is also evident in its implementation. While the logo is made available to local organisations, it is subject to approval by TCoN's marketing manager. The importance of this centrally-controlled approach is emphasised on the brand website:

It's interesting to think of a city brand like a world-class choir.

Each member of the choir must sing the same song, to the same tune, at the same time to ensure they deliver a clear, strong, powerful and uniform message. The same can be said for supporting a city brand.

This statement suggests that encouraging locals to promote the brand was an important element of the campaign's design, and that TCoN saw its role in this effort as directive and educational. Perhaps the clearest evidence of the project's top-down change model, however, is found in the description Simon McArthur gave the *Newcastle Herald* after the launch (Gregory, 2011):

It's not going to change the whole city centre overnight, but it's the mortar behind the bricks. We can build things, but unless people want to work together, the bricks are simply a pile.

This statement succinctly captures the underlying concept of the brand as a change agent. According to this logic, successful urban change requires all city stakeholders to be united behind a common vision of the city's assets and future, as represented by the brand. The Brand Newcastle approach thus reflects an understanding of urban change that assumes all city stakeholders must work together in a coordinated fashion, with government dictating the overall direction as the 'choir conductor' (to borrow a metaphor).

While this centralised understanding of urban change is to be expected within the broader context of entrepreneurial urban governance, it is worth emphasising in order to highlight the contrast with the vision of urban change promoted by Renew.

5.2 Renew Newcastle

Renew presents urban change as a far less coordinated process, developing over time out of incremental DIY interventions. As Westbury explains:

...what I tend to see with most initiatives and plans and things that are all about branding and selling the city or building...it's all about the macro scale first, so you build the big advertising campaign and then you kind of backfill to find the details...what I've argued all along is that it's the kind of micro foundations of that stuff that actually build the thing that - whether it's reputation or economic development or cultural life, it's making the small stuff work that makes the big stuff work.

Westbury and Renew promote this vision of unplanned, bottom-up change to Newcastle in a number of ways. The message is often communicated visually in presentations and through online channels, using before-and-after images of the Mall to document the impact of small-scale, incremental interventions. A good example is the video on Renew's homepage, entitled "DIY transforming a dying city". The message is contextualised within a broader narrative of a city that is largely incapable of implementing official redevelopment projects. To achieve this, the 'city' is implicitly redefined to mean the CBD, thus excluding major renewal projects like Honeysuckle from the narrative. Again, this approach is evident from the video title "DIY transforming a dying city", which also reflects how DIY is presented as an alternative to official redevelopment. To reinforce this DIY message, Marcus also frequently mentions that Renew was initially funded using his credit card (Westbury 2010a, b). The narrative of Renew's unofficial, DIY nature is also promoted by Siobhan Curran, Renew's media officer, who explains that "one of the reasons why I wanted to move up here too, was just knowing that there were people up here that...against the city, just tried to give something a go anyway."

Together, these visual and narrative strategies seem to have appealed to an emerging local 'movement' that supports a DIY vision of urban change. As local writer Matt Endacott argues:

In my experiences, Facebook and blogs drove that whole movement. It drove Renew Newcastle, and if you want to put it in some sort of linear fashion, Renew Newcastle is the component of that movement that you can't do without...It was also a tangible thing that people could blog about as proof that hey, you know, this place is coming back.

While Renew may have inspired this movement, Jackson argues that Renew has always tried to encourage others to adopt the DIY vision, so that "it's not 'someone else does it, and you watch', it's 'you get in and do it yourself'." Yet despite these efforts, it seems not all Novocastrians have embraced the DIY narrative:

there are people who just want us to do more, "oh but it'd be better if this was going to happen", you know, it's like 'argh!' That's great, I'm glad you want to see more, but you know, maybe someone else could do something?!

Similarly, Jackson notes that *Renew* is sometimes perceived as an official project rather than a DIY effort:

And people are sort of saying things like “you guys are in charge of revitalization, aren’t you?” You know, just that, in that language, it’s like - we’re not in charge of anything, we’re just doing a little project, it’s having this impact, but we’re not the boss...

One interpretation of these responses is that while *Renew* has helped reshape Newcastle’s external image, it has yet to completely convince the broader Newcastle community of its vision of DIY urban change. If so, Brand Newcastle’s coordinated change vision may ultimately prevail, and *Renew*’s external success may actually help shape the conditions for large-scale commercial redevelopment of the CBD. Westbury himself acknowledges this as a possibility:

I think we’re creating a layer of value that wasn’t [there before]. Creating a layer, but also acknowledging a value that wasn’t there before, and *I’m hoping that that inevitably has to be acknowledged in what happens next*” (my emphasis).

6. Discussion

From this brief overview it is apparent that *Renew* Newcastle is seeking to reshape external perceptions of Newcastle and to present itself as playing a meaningful role in Newcastle’s image shift. As such, it is arguably demonstrating traditional external urban branding aspirations, albeit with different target markets to the Govers and Go (2009) ‘4Ts’ model adopted by Brand Newcastle. At the same time, it seems *Renew* is also seeking to inform local debates over redevelopment, in a way that can be seen as echoing the urban branding logic Broudehoux (2004) and Colomb (2012a) propose. As such, there seem to be valid arguments for critically examining *Renew* Newcastle not only as a physical revitalization project, but also as a participant in urban branding.

As noted, considering independent projects like *Renew* as participants in urban branding requires a shift from viewing urban branding as a defined, top-down process to seeing it as a broader, more complex re-imaging process. This approach undoubtedly does create tensions: on one hand, it involves viewing independent projects through a lens of urban commodification that some observers or participants (including the *Renew* founders²) may consider problematic; on the other hand, it creates challenges for those seeking to model urban branding as a replicable practice.

At the same time, however, this broader perspective offers a number of benefits. It enables a more nuanced exploration of the burgeoning impact of social media on how places are represented and perceived – a trend supported by this case study, given the apparent effectiveness of *Renew*’s social media-based image-making strategies compared to Brand Newcastle’s approach. More importantly, however, viewing urban branding through a broader analytical frame highlights the complex underlying dynamics of how entrepreneurial governance and neoliberal redevelopment strategies are reshaping urban life.

While *Renew*’s DIY change vision presents an alternative to large-scale, corporate redevelopment, it is an alternative that nonetheless largely reaffirms the prevailing neoliberal paradigm scholars like Harvey

² Westbury raised concerns that overuse of the idea of branding had made it “meaningless”, and that much of what was considered branding was really the result of more “organic” processes, although he did distinguish between the value of branding outcomes and some processes behind them. Jackson noted a somewhat related hesitance about *Renew*’s commercial aspects, “because I’m not necessarily about the idea that we should be building more temples to consumerism”, but noted that the “small-scale, handmade, locally-made” nature of *Renew*’s stores was important, rather than it being “mall for mall’s sake”.

(1989) and Short (1999) have critiqued. As such, Iveson (2009) convincingly argues that Renew is best seen not as a radical alternative to entrepreneurial governance but as “progressive entrepreneurialism” – a hybrid approach which highlights problems in the existing system without fundamentally challenging it. The inherent tensions of such hybridity are neatly encapsulated in Westbury’s uncertainty about Renew’s long-term influence on future development in the CBD.

At the same time, however, Renew offers an interesting example of how independent urban participants may be able to leverage the informal branding power of online channels and visual and narrative strategies to help build degrees of local influence that might previously have been unobtainable. This observation adds a layer of complexity to Colomb’s (2012b) research on the incorporation of informal urban projects into top-down ‘creative city’ branding discourses. While some of Colomb’s case studies try to reject such incorporation of their image, Renew highlights the possibility of informal image-makers also adopting alternative approaches like strategic participation or even explicit competition with official rebranding campaigns. While leveraging such alternative branding power requires informal image-makers to accept the prevailing entrepreneurial governance paradigm that gives urban branding its power, it may also diversify the public conversation about a city’s brand.

7. Conclusion

While brief, this case study highlights the possibilities offered by adopting a broad perspective on what constitutes urban branding, exploring both external and internal perspectives, as well as the role of new influences like social media and informal image-makers. Such broad perspectives could also facilitate further research on other emerging trends which have the potential to reshape how urban branding occurs, including the growing public interest in DIY urbanism and place-making (Ho, 2012) and the rise of creative city discourses as public policy drivers (Colomb, 2012b). This approach may also give rise to research that links place branding theory to a number of other strands of urban theory, including everyday urbanism (Crawford, 1999), place theory (Relph, 2008), network analysis (Castells, 2000) and complexity theory (Comunian, 2011). Adopting this kind of perspective may allow for greater insights into how informal image-makers are reshaping the processes of re-imagining and revitalisation in 21st century cities, particularly those undergoing major transition like Newcastle and Detroit.

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