

Chapter 13

Whose City Is It Anyway?

Limits of City Branding in Harare amidst the Storm of Economic Hardships in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is describe why and how a multiplicity of especially diverging forces, ‘voices’ and rationalities can work against effective place branding. Specifically, it aims to demonstrate by the case of Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe, that economic hardships are the major place shaper rather than the wishes and marketing strategies that may be put in place by the state. An ailing economy will naturally see the terrain and fabric of a place, in this case, a city deteriorating both in terms of its service performance and in terms of outlook. This is in contrast with the main urban planning philosophies of order, amenity, functionality, aesthetics and convenience. The post-colonial Harare has suffered major blows of trying to retain its vividness and functionality due to a number of forces including state control and interference, the consistently perturbed political economy that explains rising retrenchments, unemployment and underemployment, which has seen the ushering in of rampant informality. Both the state and the non-state actors, including politicians and households have laid claim on the affairs of the

city without approaching the same with a sense of place stewardship. Proper city branding presupposes shared visioning and moving on an agreed path and trajectory. However, characteristic of Harare is disparate and fragmented efforts, most of which work against the cause of city branding. Street vending, of late, is the major cancer haemorrhaging the city fabric and outlook. Even the politicians, who have assumed a major seat in the decision-making of the affairs of the city, seem not to agree on the way forward. Although, the city is under the leadership of the opposition – MDC-T councilors, their role has not been subsumed, within the council chambers as one that matters. The councilors have largely been silenced, if not technically, co-opted. The role of physical planning, on the other side of the story, has become increasingly nullified. Some real estate investors are considering reducing their portfolios. The dramatis personæ and the effects it is inflicting on the ground needs adequate scholarly interrogation hence the line of the argument in this paper: Whose city is it anyway? Unless, the city is seen as a collective responsibility), efforts to brand will simply prove futile and a waste of time. Overall, there is an economy that needs first to be fixed and players that need aligning their inspirations, aspirations and actions for achieving a branded city. Planning has to be given its place because it provides a solid foundation upon which actions are built.

INTRODUCTION

City branding has, in recent years, become a prevalent activity within city management discourse and practice. Cities and towns, all over the world, are making ardent attempts to employ various strategies to promote themselves to relevant audiences such as investors, visitors and residents and in their efforts they commonly include striking logos and captivating slogans that feature in welcoming websites and advertising campaigns in national and international media (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009). At the same time, a substantial debate over the usefulness and proper application of city branding has accumulated among academics, consultants and government officials. City branding has become a local government of contemporary design practice for promoting city competitiveness in recent years. Its application, largely through tourism marketing, to the definition and communication of the characteristics of locations suggests an alternative line of inquiry beyond building criticism. Also, so call place-marketing is the process of applying the branding process as applied to commercial products to geographical locations and is an activity within advertising and marketing. By conceptualising in terms of public design, reach beyond the superficialities of city brand-marketing or built form in pursuit of an understanding of the role of culture in urban regeneration and identity formation. Communications for city brand marketing link the meanings of both private and public design consumption within the metropolis and may provide good ideas for the performance of everyday life. This present chapter seeks describe and explain how a multiplicity of especially diverging forces, ‘voices’ and rationalities can work against effective place branding. Specifically, it aims to demonstrate by the case of Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe, that economic hardships are the major place shaper rather than the wishes and marketing strategies that may be put in place by the state.

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