



Possibilities and limits of brand repositioning for a second-ranked city: The case of Brisbane, Australia's “New World City”, 1979–2013



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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of city brand repositioning in the economic and sociological transformation of a second-ranked city, developing a conceptual framework that identifies the possibilities and limits of city brand repositioning to enhance a city's global status and reputation. Brisbane, a second-ranked Australian city, is selected to study the influence of city brand repositioning on the process of urban transformation over a 34 year period from 1979 to 2013. The findings of this historical analysis highlight the efficacy of targeted rebranding campaigns and incentives for different market segments (i.e. tourism, investment, education). In particular, positive demographic and economic outcomes for the city were associated with real and psychological repositioning of the city brand. These repositioning strategies communicated substantive changes in the city's demographic and industrial structure, underpinned by multi-level government policies and programmes to cultivate a few globally connected clusters where the city could be competitive – tertiary education and professional, scientific and technical services – both within Australia and globally.

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1. Introduction

Successful global cities hold “disproportionate geo-economic power in the world-system” (Beaverstock, Smith, & Taylor, 1999, p. 446), evidenced by their disproportionate share of the world's global service firms, transnational elite and immigrant workers. Research into this phenomenon¹ has taken a predominantly globalist perspective (Chubarov & Brooker, 2013, p. 181), focusing on a small number of exemplar, top ranked global cities (e.g. London, New York, Tokyo) and the economic factors shaping their evolution (Benton-Short, Price, & Friedman, 2005; O'Connor, 2002). Limited attention has been given to second-ranked or second-tier cities which perform important functions in their region and in the global economy (O'Connor, 2002; Rimmer & Dick, 2009), but face challenges rivalling leading global cities (Rimmer & Dick, 2009; Short & Kim, 1999).

To improve their visibility, gain a favourable position in the minds of target audiences and enhance their global city status, many of these cities have adopted city branding strategies (Anttiroiko, 2014; Short & Kim, 1999). However, the role of city brand repositioning as a mechanism to achieve these goals and act as a catalyst in their urban development and transformation is not clear. This article contributes to the

literatures on place branding and urban development in two main ways. First, a framework conceptualising city brand repositioning is developed to assess the possibilities and limits of city brand repositioning for second-ranked cities. Second, this framework is applied to assess the efficacy of successive city rebranding campaigns and associated repositioning strategies in the process of urban transformation. Focusing on the experience of Brisbane, one of Australia's second-ranked global cities, this study explores the role of city brand repositioning that occurred in Brisbane between 1979 and 2013 as the city overcame deep-seated demographic stagnation to become a genuine global city.

Brisbane's transformation, we will demonstrate, was associated with three distinct rebranding campaigns each of which sought to offset declining employment in the regional economy's traditional staples – agriculture and mining – and reposition the city as a competitive service-based economy. While the correlation between Brisbane's social and demographic transformation and the various state and City Council rebranding campaigns is not proof of causation, it is difficult to see how this process of urban transformation could have occurred in their absence. In essence, Brisbane found itself in a virtuous circle wherein demographic and occupational changes reinforced the message of various public sector agencies involved in rebranding the city.

This paper is divided into five sections. The first two sections present the study's relevant literature, key concepts and the conceptual framework, while the third explains the methodology chosen for this study and the reason for selecting Brisbane City. The fourth section is dedicated to the analysis of the repositioning of Brisbane's city brand. The final section synthesises the findings to extract lessons from the study and

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¹ The two terms, ‘global city’ and ‘world city’ tend to be used synonymously (Chubarov & Brooker, 2013; Hu, Blakely, & Zhou, 2013) and are used interchangeably in this paper.

discusses the implications for Brisbane and other second-tier cities and offers suggestions for future research.

2. Intercity competition and global city status

To compete and prosper cities must respond appropriately to changing conditions in the global economy (Friedmann, 1986) and the competitive positioning of rival cities (Searle & O'Connor, 2013; Taylor et al., 2009). Benchmarking exercises to assess a city's relative standing in the urban hierarchy are often the starting point for city officials in developing strategies to improve their image in order to attract new businesses, major events, tourism and residents (O'Connor, 2002). Alongside the escalation of global intercity competition and the adoption of attraction-oriented urban development strategies (Anttiroiko, 2014), academic research has focused on understanding how cities acquire power and status as global cities. Friedmann's (1986) influential world city hypothesis posits that world cities serve as control centres for international capital accumulation, concentrate the provision of business services and the production and dissemination of information, news and entertainment. Due to their economic and social significance, global cities also attract large numbers of domestic and international migrants (Benton-Short et al., 2005; Friedmann, 1986). Representing nodes in the world economy, global cities are linked to one another through resource flows (human, capital, knowledge) to form a hierarchical system (Beaverstock, Smith, Taylor, Walker, & Lorimer, 2000; Friedmann, 1986; Sassen, 1991, 2001; Taylor, 2004). Making a connection between national and global city hierarchies, Anttiroiko (2014) argues that it is difficult for a country to have more than one or two cities in the top tier of global cities. Further, he contends that capital cities typically exhibit more global city characteristics. There are, however, exceptions to this observation. The US and Germany have multiple cities in the top ranks and in the case of Australia, two global cities – Sydney and Melbourne – feature in the top tiers, neither being the nation's capital. Predicting the number of global cities that will emerge within a national hierarchy is therefore uncertain.

Reflecting the range of important functions that global cities perform, several ranking schemes, both scholarly and commercial, have been developed to classify cities according to their strength and competitiveness.² For example, the Mori Memorial Foundation (2012) utilises both objective and subjective assessments of six main city functions – economy, research and development, cultural interaction, liveability, environment and accessibility. In contrast, the Globalization and World Cities Research Network (GaWC, 2012), focuses on one aspect of global city status – a city's integration into the world city network – by analysing the importance of a city in the office networks of 175 advanced producer service firms across 526 cities. A city's ranking in both national and urban hierarchies is viewed as a rough indicator of its strength in intercity competition and power in the global economy (Anttiroiko, 2014).

Despite the difficulties in usurping a dominant national city, there are numerous examples of movement up (or down) the rankings, as “cities' positions regarding the global division of labour change over time” (Anttiroiko, 2014, p. 17). Sydney, Singapore, Hong Kong and Seoul are cities frequently cited as having transformed their global city ranking (Edwards, 2003; Kim & Kim, 2010; Sim, Ong, Agarwal, Parsa, & Keivani, 2003; Skeldon, 1997). The bases for such transformations have been linked to a mix of factors: the focus of policy makers on integrating these cities into the global economy, a commitment to improve their attractiveness for multinational investment, and targeted promotion, including the offer of incentives (e.g. cheap land, tax relief, new infrastructure, premises, free training for workers) (Anttiroiko, 2014; Edwards, 2003).

² Results for each city across the ranking systems vary due to differences in the sources of data, type of measures and weighting of different indicators of performance used.

In the case of New York, Greenberg (2008) demonstrates how negative perceptions of the city were transformed through advertising campaigns underpinning the city's rise in global city status that secured its place as the USA's leading global city. The intensification of city marketing techniques, together with pro-business economic reforms, enabled the city to build a reputation as a safe and exciting global city for investors and tourists. Similarly, many formerly affluent industrial cities (e.g. Glasgow and Liverpool) and those with a risqué image (e.g. Amsterdam) have spent considerable resources on rebranding to raise awareness of city improvements (Daramola-Martin, 2009; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2007; Turok & Bailey, 2004). The rebranding of these cities also reveals the importance of stakeholders' long-term commitment to reposition the city and promote its specialised competitive advantage to target audiences.

City rebranding is a prevalent feature of cities' marketing led development, especially for “wannabe global cities” seeking a mechanism repositioning their urban economy and enter into new markets (Short & Kim, 1999; Turok, 2009). In particular, repositioning is a major reason for rebranding a city. A handful of studies have examined the concept of place brand repositioning in the context of nations (Dinnie, 2008; Quelch & Jocz, 2005; Rojas-Mendez, Papadopoulos, & Murphy, 2013), cities (Daramola-Martin, 2009; Janiszewska & Insch, 2012), tourist destinations (Pike & Ryan, 2004), urban districts (Bennett & Savani, 2003) and neighbourhoods (Trumann, Cornelius, & Killingbeck-Widdup, 2007). However, what is lacking from these accounts is an evaluation of how the concept, defined as “a strategic choice of a position for a brand (intended position)” and “the resulting outcome (actual position)” (Urde & Koch, 2014, p. 479), can be applied to second-ranked cities seeking to enhance their reputations as global cities.

3. Possibilities and limits of city brand repositioning

Like product and corporate rebranding, city rebranding is typified by the launch of a new logo, symbol and accompanying slogan or catchphrase (Turok, 2009). Cities also use large-scale sporting and cultural events (e.g. Olympics) to drive their rebranding (Zhang & Zhao, 2009), but the outcomes are often short-term and do not meet their ambitions (Gold & Gold, 2008; Turok, 2009). While the direct economic benefits of city rebranding are difficult to quantify, targeted campaigns can raise the awareness of a city and/or reposition the city in stakeholders' minds. Conversely, rebranding is unlikely to have a significant impact if not associated with some positive outcomes for the city's stakeholders such as improving livability, economic vibrancy, and employment opportunities (Turok, 2009). A conceptual framework to evaluate the positioning and subsequent repositioning of city brands is needed that integrates existing approaches in the branding and place marketing literatures. Based on a literature synthesis, Table 1 identifies the four elements of the brand positioning decision, drawing on the work of Keller (2003), Kapferer (2004) and Tybout and Sternthal (2005). Each positioning element, integral to formulating a brand's intended position, is discussed sequentially, together with associated possibilities and limits for city brand repositioning.

Locating a competitive position in the marketplace has been described as an analytical process (Urde & Koch, 2014) that is a response

Table 1
City brand positioning elements.

Keller (2003)	Kapferer (2004)	Tybout and Sternthal (2005)
Target market	For whom?	Target consumers
Competitive frame of reference (points-of-parity)	Against whom?/When?	Frame of reference
Points-of-difference	Essential difference and raison d'être	Point of difference
Desirability criteria (relevance, distinctiveness, believability)	What?/Why?	Reasons to believe

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