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GOOD STORIES OVERWRITE CREATIVITY: THE THREE ERAS OF CITY COMPETITION

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Abstract. Today cities in national and global competition focus on creativity. Although the creative city concept was invented by Gunnar Törnqvist in 1983, today the dominant concept is creative class articulated by Richard Florida in 2004. Cities are engaged to strengthen their social and cultural environment in the direction indicated in the works by Törnqvist, Peter Hall, Charles Landry, and Florida, and take effort to embed their fame as creative cities to their city branding. This let them communicate a creative image and develop an emotional bond to this image among larger social groups of tourists, employees and beyond. Consequently, their position in competition is improving. The emergence of creativity basically changed the characteristics of city competition since the turn of the millennia, cities – stakeholders in particular – focused on investment and infrastructure development beforehand. As the concept of the creative city already stabilized itself in worldwide city development and branding a new turn might come, and the market of good stories is emerging in city communication which can dim or even overwrite the importance of creativity. While good stories were always part of marketing, and contributed to city planning since the 1980s, their growing importance in city branding can reach a hypothetical point where a new market level develops, and a narrative turn occurs. In such cases, cities themselves carry good stories and the represented virtual reality creates a new market, where creativity will be only one among other stories. In this study we sketch up the three eras of branding in city competition, focusing on the emerging and fading role of creativity.

Keywords: city branding, city competition, creative city, creative class, good stories, spirit of the place.

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1. Introduction

The fact that there may be competition between cities in any market or territorial context appeared in the international literature as a controversial issue until the late 1990s. Begg (1999) and the introduction to the special issue of urban studies on urban competition (Lever & Turok, 1999) presented the subject as being in a state of equilibrium between the two opposing perspectives. According to one view, only companies compete, and place becomes part of the competition as a repository of the choices they choose (Krugman, 1996a, 1996b). On the other hand, competition between cities and other localities can be seen as clear given their independent market position and role (Porter, 1996). After the turn of the millennium, the latter opinion became dominant. However, we still find significant differences in the interpretation of the factors influencing the situation, the market context and the role of the participants. Lever and Turok (1999) treat urban competition as one of two possible approaches, but perceptions of the market position of cities have changed since Molotch (1976).

The economics writings focused on the mechanism, its territorial implications, and its extent. An important component of this was quality of life, which had been at the forefront of both economic and private interest since the 1980s (Rogerson, 1999). The ranking of cities at this time has already gone beyond rankings based on economic performance, infrastructure, and other cumulative, stable location-based characteristics (Hall, 1966), and the use of rankings to improve competition (Giffinger et al., 2010; Carrera Portugal, 2019). Quality of life, which clearly plays an important role in competitiveness today, and its components, such as education and health care, originally appeared as a substitute for direct investment. If it was not possible, or too costly, to facilitate the relocation of companies through physical investment, this could be partly replaced by an environment that provided an adequate quality of life. Although determining the quality of life through its complexity was a very difficult task, it did not prevent the creation of a mass of urban rankings, and although most of them lacked scientific sophistication, they still influenced stakeholders in their decisions and thus played a role in the competitive position of cities. No wonder it has become important for the city administration to emphasize the existing facilities.

The competitive situation of cities and other localities as market players has gradually changed. The role of marketing in competition is also constantly changing, and the composition and importance of each element has undergone a significant transformation in two stages. Urban branding has existed since the middle of the 19th century when it aimed to attract the rural workforce by creating a positive image of the city. The activity of building a positive emotional attitude towards cities is a cost-effective solution in the competition for resources. In the field of tourism, cities have also become independent market players, and branding has developed the most here. As quality of life became the dominant tool in city competition in the 1980s, the concept of the creative city was established, and dominates city competition ever since.

For the macroeconomic approach, the emphasis on quality of life has become an essential tool in tourism. The use of soft tools has further refined, and the "good story" has become particularly important. This is also a long-known element of urban branding in tourism (Jensen, 2007; Keskin et al., 2016), and in urban planning (Secchi, 1984; Mager & Matthey, 2015; Ameel, 2020), but it is starting to represent a completely different level in the competition of cities, and in the definition of the market formed by cities. On the other hand, city branding still essentially focuses on objects, events or services to this day, most often at the heart of a natural or cultural object, building, or event (Bonakdar & Audirac, 2020; Rodrigues & Schmidt, 2021). In the following, the factors determining the competition of cities, the assessment of their significance, and the impact of the given approach on the role of city management will be discussed.

Törnqvist and Florida brought into focus the creative elements in opposition to the previously dominant natural, economic, historical, and physical resources. Florida's (2004) work has especially had a major market and political impact to this day. The Danish Jensen's (2001) concept of a "dream society" is a more progressive soft urban development and branding tool than creativity, and this concept is based on the "good story" which we believe is already creating a market for the spirit of the place for cities (Jensen & Aaltonen, 2013). Although Jensen's seminal works in 1999 and in 2001 did not extend its market/social model to cities,

he devotes a chapter to cities in his 2013 work. Nevertheless, the chapter of the book is very sketchy, and it does not essentially refer to the creation of a market of its own. We carry on his line of thought here and consider the latter to be the most important thing to say. Our research remains retrospective while reviewing the development of the phenomenon of city competition in terms of marketing a tourism, after turning its focus on Jensen's idea it becomes prospective, new trends are identified and a changing market position and policy approach is predicted.

2. The growth machine

In the first interpretation of city competition, they competed with infrastructure and residential investment for public resources, labour, and a more favourable position in the national economy. This was the growth machine (Molotch, 1976). Cities were considered secondary market players in this era, and in part that is why they existed. Molotch (1976) himself emphasized the importance of companies, so urban service providers were only second to enter the competition for place, and the management of cities responded to the competitive situation that had arisen. Most of the factors influencing competitiveness came from national or international level, mainly from the supranational level, therefore the management of a city could do little to improve its competitiveness in economic terms. Of course, a wide variety of tools were available to them, but their weight was underestimated until the 1990s (Begg, 1999). The importance of the performance of urban networks (income, employment), including its social consequences (prosperity), was treated as a national economic issue. Thus, the problem of the competition of cities also appeared at the national level, as well as within the city network of a country. At the international level, the competition of the cities was part of the competition of the national economies.

Competitiveness has been measured in terms of economic performance or environmental elements that result in a better return for investors in a particular area. Urban competition has been questioned, and local characteristics have been seen as a feature of firms (Krugman, 1996a, 1996b). Tiebout (1956) formulated this theorem as early as the 1950s, arguing that both people and industry choose a city by conducting a cost-benefit analysis of the goods and services provided by that place. In the 1980s, cities became dependent on government and private investment due to a lack of local resources and the need to maintain their competitive position. Local policy options were also severely limited, and local leaders had little to do with broader economic forces. According to this analysis, urban dependence grows in parallel with globalization. Labour and capital are mobile, people follow jobs, and industry moves to more distant places where the cost of land and labour is lower (Peterson, 1981).

With the development of global communication and transport conditions in the 1990s, the declining role of cities in the national economy was a cause for concern. Emphasis on the benefits of proximity to the city centre has become increasingly common: special access, closer personal connections, better information, and stronger incentives. From this viewpoint all mechanisms within the city are the result of public-private partnerships (Fainstein, 1990; Harvey, 1989). All this brought about a change in the system of conditions, but not in the approach interpreting the market.

The competition of cities in this context results from the increased movement of capital. The opportunity for companies, even smaller ones, to relocate globally has grown steadily. The relationship of cities to capital began to change, in fact the national and global economic position of cities weakened, but with the economic restructuring from production to service, the spheres of activity and the organization of cities also changed, valuing new properties, thereby also changing the definition of cities, more specifically access to place. Globalization has made cities key economic players, and their flexibility, culturally and in other types of attractiveness, in accessing capital has come to the fore (Castells & Hall, 1994). As the competitive situation is influenced by several historical factors (built environment, historical events and ideas), the market situation created by cities in global competition is changing relatively rapidly and to a large extent. These factors in the 1990s still largely covered the same approach as in previous decades, such as physical (production, facilities such as parks, playgrounds, green spaces, parking lots, public Wi-Fi, public transport) and strategic (government efficiency and institutional flexibility), elements which were included among them (Kresl, 1995).

As a result, it is becoming an increasingly important task for city management to make urban conditions more attractive for capital investment. However, this is a costly task, so in the 1980s and 1990s, more and more cities' leadership begun to describe the conditions as more favourable than they were (Hall, 1966, 1995). This essentially coincided with the rise of the concept of a liveable city and the proliferation of rankings and their increasing use for marketing purposes. While the aim of cities was to enhance their image or atmosphere to improve their competitive position, the attraction of capital and labour remained the main goal, only the nature of the labour sought changed.

In such circumstances city administration continues to work with state actors. The change in branding also follows the structural change, however, in addition to industrial centres, large cities and key tourist destinations, the management of many small towns is also beginning to use similar techniques (Braun et al., 2014). With the spread of neoliberal urban leadership, the entrepreneurial mindset became dominant, which helped the city's corporate perception and the widespread practice of urban branding. All this has already meant a fundamental change for the city administration. In the past, cities sought to create and promote a single identity (*e.g.*, an "industrial city") that addressed specific target audiences (employees, visitors, investors). The rise of entrepreneurial urban governance has been an incentive to reform urban branding since the 1970s. The assumption that the city's image is the key to a thriving urban future placed even more emphasis on promotion in the 1990s, when large-scale transformation projects (Oatley, 1998) and events became part of the city brand toolkit (Green et al., 2016).

3. The cult of creativity

Despite the city becoming a full-fledged market player, it remains a complex phenomenon that is difficult to interpret, where both internal players and the market are difficult to define. The competitive situation can generally be identified in terms of economic performance, but if we focus on competition, the comparative nature must be strengthened, from which it logically follows that a city must either outperform its rivals in prices or offer better value

for money. In this sense, competitiveness is essentially about securing (or protecting) market share (Begg, 1999). All of this is based on the premise that there is a market where cities are real players and therefore able to develop market strategies. And in marketing, it assumes that cities know the customer, the competitors, their own market position, and they can interpret and shape themselves as a product, that is, they can create and position a brand. All this is based on the premise that the city is a unified organization.

With the growing market networks, and finally the emergence of the global urban network (Sassen, 2001), cities are already struggling for a highly skilled workforce, including a creative class (Florida, 2004), after the turn of the millennium, transforming the usual patterns of market building. On a corporate scale, this means that labour with humanities degrees can be recruited into the economic work environment, and competing cities need more and more cultural investment and an inclusive social environment to improve their competitive position. Quality of life is no longer just a general physical, service, and labour market environment, but is augmented by social elements and emphasizes the role of the milieu. However, critiques pointed out that the creative class is territorially disintegrated (Markusen, 2006), and other characteristics of the city determine whether the given settlement is in a concentrating or deconcentrating phase (Lang & Danielsen, 2005), so the city has not become a demographically attractive place to live in an essential sense. Due to the territorial diversity, the definition of the city cannot be given, so it is not possible to determine exactly what is attractive for the creative class.

In the post-millennium approach, cities have a decisive, stable bargaining position in the global competitive environment. Theories of urban dependency that were so prevalent in the past overestimated the power of international and national actors and underestimated the power and influence of local leaders and activists. In their transnational comparative research on urban development, Savitch and Kantor (2002) have shown that city leaders also bargain in business, and the leadership of cities with strong and high support can influence capital investment and national economic development decisions. In this approach, the importance of cities is not only diminishing but increasing with globalization (Denters & Rose, 2005). The recognition in the 1990s that improving the global position of cities is beneficial to national economies and may even be a particularly useful tool has not changed since. In the race for a better global position, the neoliberal city government is experiencing a renaissance (Swyngedouw, 1997; Brenner, 1999). After the turn of the millennium, however, instead of the top-down nature of the decision-making mechanism, support for balance and even urban autonomy has been strengthened.

Competition for jobs in post-industrial host cities such as Paris, France, and London, United Kingdom, is intensifying, so these cities need to meet the different needs of refugees and economic migrants if they do not want newcomers to be marginalized. In cities such as Copenhagen, Denmark, and Oslo, Norway, where diversity is a recent phenomenon, the challenges of responding to cultural and religious differences have been at the centre of the agenda of urban planners and policy makers (Hambleton & Gross, 2007). In America, the proliferation of sanctuary cities since the turn of the millennium clearly shows that local policy decisions have also proven beneficial in the competition for economic resources (Natanson, 2021), making cities become key players in global and national labour market competition.

The relationship between quality of life and the city has been studied for decades and is a useful marketing tool. Landry's (2008) book on the importance of the creative urban environment in the competition of cities was based on the development of the agglomeration economy and the concept creative city of Hall (1966, 1995) and the creative milieu of Törnqvist (1983). While Landry (2008) and Hall (1966, 1995) focused on creative tools and resources, and Florida (2004) emphasized a creative workforce and social environment, Törnqvist was the first to state in 1983 that the creative milieu is the key to the future of cities, and that the city organized in this way is inevitably chaotic.

In the late 1980s, urban branding groups began to embrace a formalized marketing philosophy. Increasingly, customer orientation has had the greatest impact on the city through its promotion, designed around the needs of the target audience, such as those working in the service industry and tourists. Image-centric brand management techniques, such as the strong promotion of slogans and logos, have since dominated the city's "branding" strategies. In the last twenty years, however, the role of city management in interpreting the competitive situation has increased. This is partly due to the classification of cities as actors, but market instruments have also begun to focus mainly on politics, with Rodrigues and Schmidt (2021) arguing that urban branding is specifically a tool for urban politicians. We have moved from traditional associations to a continuous dialogue between business leaders, political actors and consumers, so that the competition between cities has already gained an internal dynamic. Its toolbox, meanwhile, has changed little. Even as it focuses on the creative class, quality of life, local identity, and local developments remain dominant (Donner & Fort, 2018).

By the turn of the millennium, aspects of the experience economy had also conquered the image-building of cities, which meant fine-tuning in some places and complete rebranding in others. Cities can be transformed into places where the "good life" is not only about employment, but also more and more about spending free time, at least in their symbolic meaning and image. Globalization is reflected in the increasing activity of cities, which continues to aim to raise awareness, attract capital, residents and tourists. The most important tool remains city branding (Jensen, 2007; Selby, 2004). The fact that the economic role of the arts has gained prominent importance for urban branding in recent decades (Gertler, 2004; Markusen, 2006) does not mean that it has been completely absent in the past. It was already a widespread tool in the 1980s (Whitt, 1987). The question today is how to create an attractive urban environment for the creative class. Involvement of creative knowledge is also important in Canada (Grant, 2014), and most cities in Europe already have a huge supply of branding for their historical heritage, yet they need to use similar tools as in America, and the creative environment is also emphasized (Albach et al., 2018).

4. The spirit of place

While the physical environment, large investments, and creative urban development continue, a new level of market, the market created by "good stories" (Jensen, 1999, 2001), which can be called the market of the spirit of place, is gaining ground in the competition of cities (see Table 1). The physical (infrastructure, workplace-residence) and cultural-social (theatre, sporting event, multicultural and inclusive society, artists) environment of cities alone is proving

insufficient to maximize the competitiveness of cities, hosting the dominant sectors, in national and global labour market. As urban planners theorized already in the 1980s, a good story, in fact, a concise system of stories, or even a kind of myth about the city is necessary to be created. If a city – or part of a city – tells a good story about itself, it overrides the rational decision based on wages, services, and even cultural-social preferences.

The narrative and its social discourse have become one of the cornerstones of city branding. Discourses are articulated in specific vocabularies and transformed into social realities through the actions of social players within an institutional context. Thus, discourse is an entity of repeatable linguistic articulations, socio-spatial material practices, and configurations of power rationality (Jensen & Richardson, 2003, p. 56). An urban intervention framed by a narrative is part of a larger discourse that is based on underlying reasons and values and is related to a particular strategy, product, intervention, plan, or work of art. The narrative acts of representation play a central role in urban planning and are therefore essentially similar to storytelling (Jensen, 2007; Kavaratzis, 2004). Just as a place is part of a story, the reverse is true: the story is an integral part of the imaginary creation of a place.

A good example of the strength of the story in urban planning is the renovation of downtown Seoul, South Korea, at the turn of the millennium, during which the Cheonggyecheon stream, Seoul, and its environment was restored. Despite the architectural, economic and tourist success of the project and the positive public perception, it was criticized for its lack of narrative in the new area created by the renovation. Criticisms of renovation suggest that even the most authentic renovation of some elements of an ecosystem should not trigger a symbolic and evolutionary interaction between elements of the entire system (Koudela, 2021). The spirit of the place was neither successfully embedded to planning, nor to branding.

Places are never emptied, at most the discourse about them is transformed. Urban planners replace professional narratives with common stories, a multitude of collective memories and personal experiences. The cumbersome stories about the place are overwritten or replaced by more practical interpretations. Urban planners and designers are disgusted by the narrative vacuum. Even a completely cleared area needs an associated meaning (Beauregard, 2005). According to Jensen (2007), such reports may appear in text form on tables, lists, or yearbooks, in the form of narratives and stories carried by chronology or structural elements, which may even be represented by constructed elements, or through institutionalized stories and associated meanings from medicine, up to political ideologies. Much can be embodied.

Anthropology has also long been concerned with the symbolic meaning of place, and the spirit of place has long been a researched social phenomenon, with urban branding only raising the component that has played an increasing role in market processes since the turn of the millennium. And in the competition of cities, all this gradually becomes a social mechanism from a marketing tool, as was the case with the idea of a creative city, which still determines urban development and the competitive strategy of cities, but at the level of values it is an established environmental expectation.

In the last twenty years, urban branding models have been based on the concept of local identity (Kavaratzis, 2004) and focused on image building, more specifically the representations of stakeholders in the field they want to promote and control. Only recently has the

Table 1. The three eras of city competition and its interpretation (source: created by author)

Era	First	Second	Third
Period	▪ 1970s to 1990s	▪ 1980s to day	▪ Since the 2000s
Market position	▪ Capital, companies, and the workforce are looking for a favourable physical environment and cost-benefit situation	▪ Cities are becoming independent players in the global marketplace	▪ Locality becomes an independent market segment
Role of local leadership	▪ Secondary; ▪ Local interest in market competition adapts to economic actors	▪ Partial; ▪ Local management adjusts its market strategies to its own interests (getting into, staying in competition); ▪ The market role of city management is increasing.	▪ Primary; ▪ City management (decision makers) develop strategies appropriate to the specific market
Brand	▪ Based on favourable conditions, specialization, historical and physical conditions	▪ Creative physical, mental and social environment; ▪ Multicultural, inclusive city.	▪ Creating the spirit of the place; ▪ Good stories.
Key person	▪ Harvey Molotch	▪ Richard Florida	▪ Rolf Jensen

"spirit of place" as a central concept – already well known in social psychology – emerged in the brand development process of a tourist destination. Today, therefore, the spirit of the place is also applied to urban branding (Lecompte et al., 2017; Jarratt et al., 2019), and the role of city leadership is greater than ever. Whether they are local decision makers, investors, or visitors to the area, it is important to identify with the values and images promoted by regional brands. Developing the spirit of the place can help to understand the expectations of the place, thus shedding light on the reactions and attitudes of those involved in the decisions of local leaders, giving the place some personality (Anholt, 2010). As an explicit and institutionalized tool, a narrative or good story becomes an independent factor influencing the market, and even in its simplest form, its existence or creation is not only an advantage, but its absence may even exclude a given area from the target market segment.

In the race for a global position, Toronto, Canada, has created the brand of a multicultural city. It also has a good story. Sanctuary cities in the United States have created a special market, for example, Bogotá, Colombia, swings between the brand of the conscious citizen (following Antanas Mockus Šivickas) and the city of the common man (integration of public transport, *etc.* by Enrique Peñalosa). The most conscious in this regard was Park Won-soon in Seoul. Here, green investment (Cheonggyecheon, green belt tourism development, greenways, *etc.*), cultural revitalization (Paris Chinatown, Itaewon, Seoul, historic city centre), transport and information technology development (Internet network and urban development information tools), and multicultural cityscape (dialogue with minorities) all point towards a single brand, one of the main goals of which is to improve the global position of the city (and through this the performance of the national economy), which is also helped by infrastructure development (Incheon International Airport), and economic

programs (support for basic research, diaspora markets). However, even such a large-scale and complex urban development policy may contain flaws if it does not consider the power of the story, as the case of Cheonggyecheon has shown. Even story-based urban branding is only successful if it does not contradict macroeconomic processes, infrastructure, and cultural-social investment, if there is no tension or contradiction between each strategic level. If there is a successful "good story" but no growing labour market demand, the city's situation will not improve.

5. Conclusions

The investment in infrastructure was not enough to improve the cities' market situation, marketing tools were needed. The 19th century advertising tricks to attract labour not only sought to persuade rural people to come to work in the city for higher incomes and well-provided urban services, but they also needed a positive cityscape, a bustling, modern social and human image, and all of this also required a conscious and planned positive emotional tuning. The creative environment represented by Törnqvist (1983), Hall (1966, 1995), Landry (2008), and Florida (2004) must also be communicated and branded. Both are a city brand character that meets the given conditions, which creates an emotional attitude towards the given place. In addition to the above real physical, social and cultural characteristics, there is also a need to build a mythical image. This idea derives from the narrative turn of city planning in the 1980s (Mager & Matthey, 2015; Secchi, 1984) and has been partially present in tourism, city planning and in marketing in general for decades but is still taking shape in the cities' competition for labour market and urban branding.

The role of each component in the competition of cities is not sharply separated in either a functional or chronological sense. However, the emphasis on creativity and the creative social environment has constituted a new market, and the spirit of stories and place shows the beginning of a similar process. We can say that this new element has been added to a pre-existing market area. An independent market mechanism and market level is emerging, where the nature of the product, its market position and its impact on demand are also changing. In the meantime, the cities themselves have become actors, so the situation of urban governance has fundamentally changed, becoming an actor capable of influencing the market. The transformation of competition between cities can be organized into separate stages, although the separation of stages over time entails overlaps and a new stage is emerging.

From the symbols used, we get to the imaginary reality created by the symbols, which is starting to become a determinant of demand. Marketing created fictitious reality has a repercussion on the physical-social existence and becomes permanent. The market, dominated by experiences, is becoming more and more common, so it is also making its mark on the fate of places. The experience can be real or imagined, associated, value in nature or lived as a personal one. The spirit of place no longer exists in the imagination of individuals, it is related to the emotional disposition of the individual, but it is starting to become a market, and this process is positioning cities more and more strongly in the global competition.

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