

SELLING THE CITY



G.J. ASHWORTH & H. VOOGD

***SELLING THE CITY.
MARKETING APPROACHES IN
PUBLIC SECTOR URBAN
PLANNING***

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and
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Preface

It is rarely the appropriate time to write a particular book and this one is no exception. A considered assessment of the application of marketing within public sector urban planning should wait for sufficient practical experience to be accumulated, its effects on planning objectives carefully monitored, so that general lessons about its effectiveness can be drawn. Although the widely reported US city promotions have about a generation's experience, their 'discovery' and import by Western European planners is much more recent and the specialised agencies with specific marketing commissions were mostly established in the course of the 1980s. A critique of the results of their efforts and, probably more significant if less publicised, of the slow seeping of marketing techniques into local authority planning departments, must wait at least ten years.

On the other hand, practitioners in public authorities are now debating the possible role of market planning, speculating about its outcomes and tentatively experimenting with various aspects of it in plans currently being drafted. They require from a university planning department summaries of past experience from wherever that can be gleaned, and a systematic account of the procedures, components and implications of marketing in the particular context of place management for public sector goals. Equally as educators we have the responsibility for equipping those who will very shortly be working within a planning system that has added marketing to its range of techniques and method of defining and solving urban planning problems. They require an understanding of market planning now, how it works, and such skills as necessary to operate it effectively. If this book is to be of maximum assistance to either of these groups, it should ideally have been written ten years ago.

From what has been said above, it is clear that this book has been written for students of planning and for colleagues in planning departments of public authorities and other agencies operating in the public sector. We are aware that any attempt to bridge ideas originating from different academic disciplines takes the inevitable risk of falling between them. But the potential gains to be made by incorporating new ideas make this risk worth taking.

This book is not written for marketing specialists, who will find little new in theory or concepts even though these appear in what are likely to be

unfamiliar political and spatial contexts. Similarly colleagues in other academic disciplines studying the city, particularly those concerned with urban public administration, the perception and promotion of urban images and many aspects of the management of behaviour in cities, will be familiar with some of the material and cases we discuss but not necessarily with the perspectives through which we discuss them.

The examples used as the basis of the experience upon which this book rests are derived from two sources: the descriptions and analysis of others as presented in the accessible literature, and our own practical experience of managing the construction of commissioned planning studies mostly for local authorities. Both sources are necessarily limited, not least in terms of their spatial distribution, with cases from North America being dominant in the literature and our own experience being principally in North Western Europe.

It is argued later that few of those actually engaged in market planning can find the time to write about it. This has proved true equally for the authors and Iain Stevenson of Pinters has demonstrated unusual patience. Our dedication must be to those currently struggling with the attempt to find solutions to urban planning problems, and to those soon to join them in that struggle. This is our market and the only way to assess the value of our product is the extent to which it serves it.

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1 Cities and markets

Public authorities in recent years have demonstrated a changing attitude towards the role of public planning. If we consider urban policies in, for instance, France, the United Kingdom or the Netherlands, then an increasing role for private sector led initiatives and simultaneously a reduction in government control and financial support for such projects is noticeable. In seeking solutions to long-standing urban problems, such as inner city revitalisation, there is a growing interest in various forms of co-operation between public and private interests, responsibilities and finance. The relevance of such market orientation may seem rather obvious in countries like the USA, which traditionally have a decentralised, more liberal planning system 'dominated by working class realists with a low regard for missionaries' (cf. Dyckman, 1961). But even in countries with quite different planning histories, it certainly provides new perspectives for city planning in general and the management of such facilities as housing and public transport, infrastructural provision for which is still financed and regulated by governments.

At its simplest level this is just the recognition that many urban activities, such as housing, employment and recreation, operate within a 'market' whether explicit or not, and the operation of such markets have important effects upon each other. However, the adoption of a more market-oriented urban planning implies a substitution of an approach from the ordering of space and its organisation by a closer attention to the wishes and needs of actual or potential users. The implications of this shift from a supply side to a demand side orientation is the substance of this book. First, this chapter will endeavour to define more closely the changing context of cities and city planning.

Recent urban change

Contemporary interest in the juxtaposition of cities and markets stems essentially from changes in both the character of the city, at least in

Western societies, together with changes in the attitudes of governments, both national and local, to these changes.

It can reasonably be argued that cities have always existed within markets of one sort or another, both in the sense that they compete with others for resources, activities, residents and the attention of outsiders, and equally in the sense that each service offered within the city competes with others for users or consumers. However, the justification for this book at this time rests upon the contention that a particular set of recent and related urban developments have provoked or encouraged a reaction among those responsible for urban planning and management at various levels in the public sector that has reappraised the relationship between cities and markets.

These changes have been variously listed and explained as part of more general theories encapsulated in titles such as advanced capitalism (Harvey, 1989), post-industrialism (Lever, 1987) or post-modernism (Cooke, 1987; Harvey, 1988; Short, 1989). Despite differences in emphasis in these explanations, there is a broad unanimity that a series of fundamental shifts in western economics have become particularly apparant in the last few decades which have altered the nature of urban economies in particular and consequently the way cities are used. These can be cursorily summarised as:

1. The shift in what is produced, namely the de-industrialisation of cities and the rise in importance of not only services in general but the higher order personal quaternary services in particular which satisfy the individual's needs for entertainment, education, culture and the like.
2. The organisational changes in how goods and services are produced which have blurred the distinction between public provision for social goals and private production for individual profit and even between the function of cities as centres of production and of collective consumption (Pinch, 1985).
3. Finally the most important change in where these are produced is the increasing freedom of activities to locate without constraints imposed by the friction of physical distance. It is not that commercial activities have become completely footloose and thus indifferent to the qualities of particular locations; on the contrary the decline in the importance of material transport, the increasing mobility of labour, and the internationalisation of markets has allowed a new set of local place attributes and new definitions of the accessibility of places to become prominent locational determinants.

These changes in the economic functioning of cities can be related to concomitant changes in the relationships of the individual to work, to household structures, to consumption patterns, residential choices and much besides (see Walmesley (1988) for an account of many aspects of the

relationship between the individual and modern urban living). For whatever reason urban societies have become more variegated, individualistic, internationally aware, and oriented to life styles based upon a fashion-conscious and rapidly shifting consumerism.

It is not necessary for our purposes to inventorise, explain, justify or theorise about these shifts, nor to determine whether they are part of a long-term transition between historical epochs, or just the continuing evolution of western capitalist democracies along predictable lines. All that is important here is the realisation that they have thrust cities into a new relationship with external and internal markets presenting simultaneously both threats and opportunities. There are inevitably winners and losers both in terms of favoured and disfavoured cities, and equally between particular social and economic groups and individuals within cities. This is in itself hardly new; throughout urban history circumstances have endowed cities and their citizens unequally. The novelty and much of the explanation of the problem is just that the rules of the competitive struggle have been changed quite abruptly; cities, and activities within cities, established upon one set of criteria have found that these no longer confer advantage and quite different valuations are now placed upon urban attributes.

In particular two urban characteristics have become of crucial significance. The first can be grouped under the term amenity which includes an appreciation of quality in the natural or built environment of cities. It is necessarily difficult to define or measure a set of qualities, which may encompass aspects of urban site, the physical characteristics of air, sound and smell, place symbolisms and associations, and architectural and morphological patterns of buildings and spaces. Even more broadly defined it often includes access to a wide collection of urban residential, social, recreational and cultural services whether provided individually or collectively, by public or private enterprises. But, however vaguely delimited, it is clear that such attributes which were once seen as being at best a marginal consideration for the location of economic activities, and at worst an accepted consequence of such activities, are now active determinants in attracting or repelling the location of such activities.

Second, the way cities are now valued as places in which to live, work, recreate or invest makes the way they are viewed of critical significance. The perception of cities, and the mental image held of them, become active components of economic success or failure.

Thus, for whatever reasons, cities have been placed in new competitive situations within which their strengths and weaknesses are quite differently determined than was formally the case. That this has become apparent sooner and with more dramatic consequences in some cities or in some national urban systems than others is evident, but does not detract from our contention that this relationship of cities and markets is in essence new, applicable to cities of a wide range of sizes, economic structures, cultural contexts, and locations, and international in its incidence.

The city in a competitive world

Before examining the reactions of public planning to these shifts, four cases of the variety of competitive situations in which cities have found themselves, can be reviewed. These indicate both the growing appreciation of the existence of cities in various sorts of markets and the role of the new locational attributes and urban qualities discussed above, in the conduct of such competition.

Popularity leagues

The publication of popularity league tables of major cities constructed from popular reactions to various attributes, such as perceived residential desirability, environmental quality, or personal safety has long been practised in the United States (e.g. Eisenberg and Englander, 1987; Leven and Stover, 1989). The results of these ratings (such as provided, for example by the Rand-McNally Almanac or the Sierra Magazine) are weighted and publicised with the sort of attention otherwise devoted to national sporting events. In this case public authorities are noting existing national city images and responding with promotion, including often public relations exercises aimed at the compilers of such listings.

Image and branch office location

At a more specialised level the increasing internationalisation of both production and consumption has awakened cities to the gains to be made by acting as locations for facilities, whether public or private, operating on international markets, which in turn has generated considerable research into the factors that confer such attractions. Typical of such work is that of Dunning and Norman (1987) which simply listed the weightings attributed by decision-makers to particular urban characteristics in influencing the choice of location of branch plants of multinational corporations. Factors such as suitability of the local urban image to the company, local cultural and even linguistic characteristics were weighted the highest, closely followed by sets of local amenities and facilities for health, education, housing and the like. Such more traditionally considered attributes as local financial support, land cost and availability and even local labour were weighted much less highly (see also Sierra Magazine, 1986). Here the markets are more specific to particular users and planning reactions include not only promotion but improvement of specific amenity attributes, many of which can be influenced by local planning action.

International league tables

A much wider-ranging and ambitious attempt to describe competition between cities on a continental scale has been attempted by the Datar agency of the French government (DATAR, 1989; Gault, 1989). The objective was to score cities according to a range of indices including: ability to attract multinational firms and governmental agencies operating on an international market, centrality in transport and communications networks, importance of research and development, financial institutions, international fairs and congresses, and a wide range of cultural outputs. In this way it could thus be revealed which cities were in fact competing within which arenas for the assumed enormous economic benefits accruing as a consequence of their possession of these various qualities. A clearly implied consequence was the identification of potential winners and losers and the taking of national planning action to strengthen the competitive position of French towns in this respect. Three sorts of results emerged (Table 1.1). First, the delimitation of a number of separate markets such as 'the culture market', 'the international finance market', 'the international passenger transport market' and the like, which although often overlapping had nevertheless their own distinctive characteristics and participating competing cities. Second, various separate 'leagues' of cities could be identified within which competition was fierce but which tended not to compete with each other. There was, for example, a 'capital of Europe' struggle (London, Paris), a 'first division' of such towns as Milan, Rome, Amsterdam, Brussels, Frankfurt, Munich, Madrid and Barcelona competing among themselves, a 'second division', with competitors such as Vienna or Zurich, and so on down lower 'divisions' of regional centres. Third, and perhaps most profitable from the point of view of planning, 'residuals' were highlighted, that is cities with positions in particular markets that were higher or lower than might be expected from their population totals. The 'negative residuals', for example, included such categories as the 'incomplete national capitals' (Berlin, Vienna, Lisbon, Athens), 'overshadowed' towns (Rouen, Saragoza), or 'over-industrial towns' (Liverpool, Essen, Liège). The accuracy of the quantitative scores is not so important as the production of such tables at all, the realisation of the existence of this sort of competition, and the importance attached to it by governments.

Here the city is conceived of as competing within a specified continental market, although in a sense as a national representative opposing other national representative cities, with the implied support of national governments through key infrastructural improvements in the national interest.

A national plan for international competition

At the national level the attention paid to the international competitive situation of representative cities is most clearly illustrated by the Dutch

Table 1.1 A classification of European cities (after Gault, 1989)

'Capital of Europe'	London (83), Paris(81)
'Top League'	Milan(70), Madrid(66), Munich(65), Frankfurt(65), Rome(64), Brussels(64), Barcelona(64), Amsterdam(63)
'Second League'	Manchester(58), Berlin(57), Hamburg(57), Stuttgart(56), Copenhagen(56), Athens(56), Rotterdam(55), Zurich(54), Turin(54), Lyons(53), Geneva(52)
'Third League'	Birmingham(51), Cologne(51), Lisbon(51), Glasgow(50), Vienna(49), Edinburgh(49), Marseilles(48), Naples(47), Seville(46), Strasbourg(46), Basle(45), Venice(45), Utrecht(45), Dusseldorf(44), Florence(44), Bologna(44), The Hague(44), Antwerp(44), Toulouse(44), Valence(43)

Fourth National Physical Plan (RPD, 1988). This influential planning policy document both established a general tone of planning principles and also the main lines of a national planning strategy, for the guidance of the subordinate local authorities in the production of their regional and local plans. In sharp contrast to its three predecessors, this 'Fourth Report' concentrated upon the stimulation of economic growth rather than directing its spatial distribution and mitigating its undesirable consequences. Specifically it concerned itself with analysing the competitive situation of the complex of western Dutch cities within Europe and the means by which planning policies could enhance the advantages of these cities especially in the fiercer competitive situation expected in the post-1992 single European market.

Here the realisation of market position extended to more than an analysis of the existing competitive league, as in the French study, and identification of the factors contributing to current strengths and weaknesses of individual Dutch cities in attracting international activities, as in the industrial location studies of individual Dutch cities, it proceeded to outline interventionist strategies for influencing this situation through the public planning system.

Changing planning perspectives

The changes in the nature of urban economies outlined above, and their consequences for the valuation placed upon urban attributes, need not

necessarily have resulted in any particular planning reaction. They have coincided, however, with changes in thinking about public planning that have encouraged planning authorities to react to urban change by intervention in markets. But this introduction of marketing can only be discussed in contrast to more traditional methodologies of urban and regional planning, thereby placing it in its conceptual and methodological context. This section therefore presents briefly an historical perspective of urban planning as a whole, so that the distinctive methods and objectives of concern in this book can be revealed.

The change of thinking about public planning cannot be seen separately from the shift of appreciation for the role of government in the last decade. After the Second World War there were high expectations in most European countries with respect to the guidance by the government of social processes (e.g. see Burtenshaw *et al.*, 1981). These expectations were fed by the fact that public authorities were really able to exercise considerable influence by their own investments in a number of areas such as housing, road planning and welfare facilities. The period of post-war reconstruction of Europe effectively launched public planning as the instrument for the creation of a 'New Jerusalem'. The Second World War created in Europe the necessity for urban reconstruction on a scale that could only be handled by public agencies, together with a popular demand for such intervention, a political will to attempt it and a faith that it could succeed.

The processes of urban development and change, together with their spillover effects, were thus controlled by a constantly growing system of planning procedures, laws and regulations initiated in most countries in the late 1940s and 1950s, but elaborated and refined in the light of experience during the 1960s and 1970s. The system was operated by an equally rapidly increasing professionalised bureaucracy. This expanding complexity resulted, probably inevitably, in inefficiencies, manifested through the delays involved by increasingly complex procedures, failures to co-ordinate between authorities and departments, and a perception that public planning had become inflexible in its operations. Attempts to introduce more responsiveness into the system through participation and other procedures were undertaken almost everywhere, but in practice frequently only increased the complexity of the process (e.g. see Langenieux-Villard, 1985). As a consequence, in the 1970s public planning in several European welfare states was subject to increasing criticism both from within and outside the system (see Ashworth and Voogd, 1988).

This increasing dissatisfaction was in part the result of the disillusion of a generation's experience, rendered probably inevitable by the high expectations. Urban planning problems, whether in social housing, transport, public service provision, or the environment, were not perceived to have been solved. The fact that much had been achieved, that standards of quality had constantly risen in the face of increasing demands made