

## Place Branding Design used to Nurture City-Citizen Interactions

### I. Introduction

The human connection to a place may be attributed to design, which acts as a representation to human experiences. In the early 90s, a special marketing trend appeared, known as “Place Branding” which allows cities, regions and nations to differentiate themselves from others (Melović). This type of branding utilizes the historical context of a location along with its present characteristics to bring a new perception to a place. Although Place Branding can be achieved successfully through these ways, I intend to show how a focus on including and benefiting the residents of a city must be the primary focus of a Place Branding strategy and campaign to enable true sustainable growth of a city. As a model of my intent, I will create a Place Branding strategy and campaign for the city of Lincoln, Nebraska that focuses on nurturing city-citizen interactions.

### II. Historical Context

To first understand the steps towards branding a place it is important to look at the historical context of that location. When looking at the history of Lincoln, I found that people played an important part in the city’s evolution. Early settlers of Lincoln were drawn in the 1850s by the salt flats located nearby (*Britannica*). However after the city’s founding, German settlers from Russia became the city’s largest ethnic group in the early 20th century (*Britannica*). Lincoln began to rapidly expand with the influx of immigrants and the annexation of surrounding towns helped in the growth of the city. Over the decades, Lincoln has steadily grown in population and in the 1970s the U.S. Department of State designated Lincoln as a “Refugee Friendly” city. Today, Lincoln has an approximate population of 280,000 residents. Of these residents the ethnic composition is approximately 80% White; 7% Hispanic; 4% African American; 4% Asian and 3% consisting of two or more ethnicities (*Datausa*).

The significance of the city’s diversity is essential to recognize during the branding of a city, since the culture of ethnic groups may have different interpretations of the same visual iconography. An example of this can be taken from from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In 1992, the then-president of the ICRC called publicly for the creation of an additional emblem devoid of any national, political or religious connotation (*ICRC*). The ICRC already had two emblems at the time; one is the red cross emblem that has a religious attachment to Christianity, while the red crescent emblem represents the Islamic religion. In 2005, the ICRC adapted another

visual emblem to their brand consisting of the red crystal. The red crystal is the third emblem which is devoid of any national, political, or religious associations (see Fig. 1).

Another importance for understanding the ethnic background of the residents in a city is to understand the style of architecture that the city consists of. The historic buildings in the United States usually resemble the architecture of where its immigrants originated from. In Lincoln, historic buildings come in a variety of architecture styles: Art Deco, Byzantine, French Second Empire, Georgian Revival, Gothic Revival, Neoclassical Revival, Moorish, Late Renaissance Revival, and Richardsonian Romanesque (Journal Star). These historic buildings are some of the first examples of how Lincoln forged an identity for itself through its citizens.

### **III. Design History**

Even though “Place Branding” is a recent concept when talking about cities, it has become essential to the modern era. “The twenty-first century is often understood as the century of cities because increased globalisation and urbanisation have positioned cities centre-stage in urban life. This trend has both speeded up the pace of life and growth of cities and prompted the rat-race, where cities, regardless of size, geography or history, must constantly differentiate themselves to attract tourists, investments and talent” (Bisani). This has set the stage for many cities across the globe to brand themselves to its citizens and visitors. To understand the current field of Place Branding we will look at three cities; Glasgow, New York City, and Amsterdam.

Glasgow is a city in Scotland which was branded as “Glasgow: Scotland with Style” in 2009 by the Glasgow City Marketing Bureau (see Fig. 2). This new slogan saw a tremendous increase in foreign visitors and earnings. In fact when this branding was released, the Glasgow City Marketing Bureau (a Council construction) was delighted in revealing statistics about increased tourist numbers and boosted revenue” (Waard). But although this branding campaign was attentive to the visitors of Glasgow, it didn’t keep in mind its own citizens. It was a ‘top down’ branding campaign, with no mention of, or consideration to, community participation or direct measurable benefits to residents. The place marketing of Glasgow is absolutely focused on economic regeneration: cash is king (Waard). Cities are ultimately made by and for their citizens. Leaving out the people who make the city from the brand mix would result in the loss of authenticity and true identity of the place (Bisani). Since this time, Glasgow

has rebranded itself to the slogan, “People Make Glasgow” (see Fig. 3). This new Place Branding campaign is focused less on gaining tourism and targets the audience that is the most important, its citizens.

Looking at another city in Europe that utilizes Place Branding is the city of Amsterdam. Amsterdam is located in the Netherlands along the lake of Markermeer and has one of the most diverse populations of any city in the world. Since 2004, the city council has promoted Amsterdam’s identity as a branded commodity through the *I amsterdam* urban branding campaign (Lennon). The idea behind this campaign is to show that each person that lives here is important to the city of Amsterdam. “The visual identity it constructs in its logo, designed by KesselsKramer for Amsterdam Partners, is focused on the simple motto ‘I amsterdam’, rendered in the typeface Avenir, the work of the Swiss typographer Adrian Frutiger. The ‘I am’ is foregrounded in red letters and the remainder in white. This emphasizes the notion of the individual’s relationship with the collective of the city, making use of the basic English *I am* to drive the point home” (Lennon). To increase citizen-city interactions and tourist-city interactions, the logo was architecturally reproduced and placed next to famous landmarks (see Fig. 4). This created a phenomenon where the logo would show up in social media posts online and this created even more buzz about the branding of the city. Today, the “I amsterdam” branding lives on because of its positioning on its internal population versus its external.

#### **IV. Branding Enhancing the City**

In 1996, the city of Atlanta hosted the Summer Olympic Games which was the centennial celebration for the modern Olympic Games. In addition to hosting the Games, the Olympics designed a brand for Atlanta. This brought about an exciting opportunity for the city to have an identity and to increase economic development and improve upon urban planning. Moreover, the Games gave impetus to Atlanta’s economic leaders’ vision of downtown transformation, regarded as essential to compete in the modern marketplace (Krabbendam). A major contribution to Atlanta’s downtown infrastructure was the construction of Centennial Park, a park dedicated to the centennial celebration of the Games and that has been a catalyst for downtown development. Since the park has been open places like the World of Coca-Cola, the Georgia Aquarium, and the Imagine It! Children’s Museum of Atlanta have been constructed in close proximity to the park. “It is the park’s post-Olympic legacy and continuing contribution to the reshaping of downtown that are most important, however. There have been three aspects to this: its position as a new downtown attraction; its anchor status for further development; and the impetus it has given to

the growth of downtown housing” (Krabbendam). “Well-designed cities inspire better citizen behaviour, motivated by the betterment of infrastructure and policies, and enable smoother economic growth. It can also act as a guide to regenerate pride in the local heritage and make residents realise the potential value of local resources” (Bisani). In this instance, it can be seen that Place Branding can have a positive impact on the urban development within a city.

## **V. Experience of a Place**

Perhaps the most essential part of creating city-citizen interactions through a Place Branding strategy and campaign is the experience that each individual has with the city. Citizens perceptions of the city are formed by their experiences: in the city, including the physical and virtual space of the city, and with the city, through their interactions with its other inhabitants (Bisani). Experiences can take place at public parks, concerts, sporting events, cafes, shops, public attractions, and more. These experiences can lead to citizens forming a “sense of place.” Geographers such as John Agnew regard *place* as a ‘meaningful location’ and *sense of place* as belonging to the realm of subjective, emotional connections or attachments to a particular locale (Lennon).

In addition, people make sense of places by their physical characteristics like the natural environment and spatial design in terms of the architecture and urban design of public spaces (Bisani). This ability to form a sense of place about a location is what contributes to the character of the place. The distinct character of a city can be formed by its shopping and nightlife, leisure and entertainment, mega-events and festivals that take place. This dimension is inclusive of both, traditions that are a part of the city’s history and heritage and characters that the place has come to exhibit, like the cosmopolitan vibe (Bisani). It is ultimately this concept of sense of place, city-citizen interactions and experiences that foster the unique identity of a city and its branding.

## **VI. Conclusion**

After thoroughly thinking about the historical context, design history, brand enhancing a city and experience of a place; I found it critical to sample residents of Lincoln to begin my process of city-branding. “It is important to opt out a research in order to find out what is the most valued characteristic in a city. In other words, it is necessary to find out which are the key values of a city or area” (Melović). In my survey that I sent out, I wanted to understand the demographics of my audience and understand their perceptions of Lincoln. In this survey I found

that the three best assets of Lincoln are the low cost of living, it's a great place to raise a family, and it's bike paths. People also found Lincoln to be friendly, growing, and student-friendly. However, Lincoln does face challenges in public transportation, attracting entertainment business, and that there is not enough expressways and freeways (see table 1, 2, 3). This understanding of people's perception of Lincoln will help me when creating a visual brand for Lincoln and in the interactions of Lincoln with its citizens and visitors.

In order to understand the full process behind creating a brand for a city, I will gather together a committee that I can rely on for guidance, insight and feedback. My committee will consist of Professor Stacy Asher, Assistant Professor of Art in graphic design and Professor Aaron Sutherlen, Assistant Professor of Art in graphic design. My committee will grow as I advance further into my research and design process. My intent for further investigation includes looking at historical articles and maps relevant to Lincoln as well as written and visual research regarding Place Branding. In the scope of my design process, I wish to design the brand system for the city of Lincoln. Additionally, I will create artifacts that pertain to the history and growth of Lincoln and designed experiences that contribute to positive city-citizen interactions.

By focusing on the human experiences for the Place Branding strategy and campaign for Lincoln, citizens may begin to act as brand ambassadors to the city, which can create positive associations for the residents and visitors of Lincoln. Just as people are crucial to places' existence, they are also essential to their brand (Bisani). Through design people can establish a connection and gain a new perception to a place, which acts as a representation to human experiences.