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City centre in the Era of Consumer Culture: Commercial appeal versus Local identity

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Abstract

This paper analyses the importance of commercial signs in contemporary cities, and explores theoretical concepts that might be helpful in understanding the operation of commercial signage controls in historic places. The focus is on issues which cluster around theories of consumer culture, as well as the practices of city centre management, city marketing, and urban tourism. The discussion is predominantly concerned with commercial city centres because these are places where different functions and meanings co-exist. They are often places where different commercial and non-commercial interests have to be managed or reconciled. City centres are also public areas where human experience is given meaning and valorised through signs, symbols and patterns of behaviour, which result from the combination of physical and symbolic factors of the built environment. In many cases, the commercial city centre coincides with the historic core of a city, and the challenge of the local authority is to combine all functions with the preservation of historic buildings and places. At the end, this paper discusses how forms of aesthetic control over commercial signage can be applied to preserve local identity and stimulate commercial and touristic activities simultaneously.

Key-words: urban identity; city centre; consumer culture.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the importance of commercial signs in the streetscape of contemporary city centres, and to explore theoretical concepts that help explain the design of such media and the operation of commercial signage controls in historic city centres. First, it presents a brief outline of the key factors involved in the process of transformation of the appearance of city centres. Next, the paper explores the practice of city centre management and the interests and drivers within this, which influence approaches to the control, or lack of it, of commercial signage adopted in many historic city centres. Within this conceptual framework, principles of place-marketing and urban tourism are also fleshed out. At the end of the paper, we highlight a number of considerations related to the operation of commercial signage controls in commercial and historic city centres, in different urban contexts, that we argue should be taken into account to preserve historic heritage, and stimulate commercial and touristic activities simultaneously. This paper is based on Portella´s PhD thesis research concluded in Oxford Brookes University, at the Joint Centre for Urban Design, with the supervision of Dr. Reeve.

Commercial city centres are places where different activities and behaviours take place associated with leisure, recreation, tourism, sports and arts, generally predicated on the need for financial return from retail and other investors. City centres, in this regard, often have a regional or even national significance economically through tourism in particular. City centres are also public areas where human experience is given meaning and valorised through signs, symbols and patterns of behaviour, which result from the combination of physical and symbolic factors of the built environment (Kelly and Kelly, 2003). These settings provide a range of personal, community and commercial activities that contribute to creating their identity. In addition, they have social, economic and cultural roles to perform for the local community. In many cases, the commercial district of a city centre coincides with the historic core of the city, and the challenge of the local authority is to combine all these functions without compromising preservation of historic buildings and public spaces (Miles, Hall and Border, 2004).

As part of the history of many countries, historic city centres have been through a process of physical transformation, which has involved the satisfaction of new and emerging social and commercial needs. This transformation usually results in the updating of historic buildings to accommodate commercial activities, and the insertion of contemporary architecture into extant streetscapes. This is a common process resulting from urban renovation. The problems begin when historic buildings and places are altered to the extent that they are damaged by this transformation. According to Stevenson (2003), in

the past, many historic city centres were characterized by colourful, tactile, fragrant and other haptically rich experiences, and unconsciously created a range of pleasurable, or at least stimulating aesthetic experiences. However, over time and with the increasing dominance of commercial signage, many city centres have lost this aesthetic richness and variety, and the character of the whole has been consequently damaged. Figure 1 shows that in Brasilia, capital of Brazil, recognized as world heritage by UNESCO, commercial signs are out of scale to the architecture of the buildings and dominate the streetscape.

Figure 1: Commercial plot in the city of Brasilia - the lack of proportionality or fit of the commercial signage damages the visual quality of the street (Source: author).

As argued by Miles, Hall and Border (2004), aesthetic controls and guidelines cannot be applied in isolation; they must be part of a strategic approach which considers the city centre as a whole, involving a realistic vision for an area, and taking into account the support and commitment of the local authority, the private sector and residents.

The following section analyses the cultural changes which have arguably resulted in people accepting commercial signs as part of their everyday life, and the influence of these media on their behaviour. The discussion below helps to understand the relationship between commercialised city centres and the broader culture of consumerism within which they operate, and those specific conditions identified in the theory of consumer culture which link the experience of people to the meaning and value of place, including historic place.

Consumer Culture: the symbolism of objects

The transformation of the appearance of city centres does not just express historic modifications; social relations and ideologies are also reproduced through it (Gudis, 2004, Sharrett, 1989, Jameson, 1984). Historic and commercial city centres are characterized by interactions between consumption functions and commercial trends that have social consequences extending far beyond the behaviour of individuals (see Koeck and Warnaby, 2014). Shopping has become a key activity in the present day economy, and has been recognized not just as a purely needs driven and functional action of buying goods, but as form of entertainment and as a leisure activity. Places for shopping, fashion, eating, tourism and recreation have become important areas for the display of users' social and cultural differences, as well as for the consumption of cultural and commercial experiences such as film and tourism (Shane, 2005,

Thorns, 2002, Zukin, 1995, Bourdieu, 1984). Fredric Jameson (1984) almost thirty years ago already indicated that consumption has become one of the main driving forces of contemporary life.

The context described above constitutes the phenomenon that came to be known as 'consumer culture', a phenomenon which through lack of adequate planning control has had a significant impact on the appearance of many cities around the world. According to Christopher Sharrett (1989) and Jameson (1984), under or within 'consumer culture', people tend to be recognized for 'what they can buy' as much or more than by 'what they can do', or than by their class. This is related to the social status arbitrarily attributed to consumables such as cars, clothes, shoes and so on, but also to high status visitor locations – the place 'to be seen'. People consume brands and the symbols associated with these by what David Thorns (2002) calls global culture. Goods begin to have more than utilitarian value; they become part of identity, personality, self-image, social position, the attitude and aspirations of people. In fact, it is not the material object that is desirable by people, but the image associated with these objects. In this new era, consumer culture has already dictated the semiotic significance and cultural meanings for a whole set of architectural forms and commercial signage design.

In this cultural context, being aware of the power of visual representation and symbolism, advertisers and shop owners devote their efforts to creating and displaying commercial signs to attend to new visual needs related to this representation. The global phenomenon of 'consumer culture' requires the manipulation of the layout of these media with respect to size, proportion, colour, lettering style and size, and their location or placing in the city. Consequently, the influence of this cultural phenomenon has transformed the image of whole places where goods are made available and advertised; the cultural context of consumption has become influential in the design and location of shop facades, malls and new developments. In a wide variety of cities with very different historical and cultural origins, standard commercial signs are displayed, demonstrating the global effect of 'consumer culture'. The most obvious consequence for the appearance of historic city centres has been the use of standard commercial signs linked to franchises, anchor stores, and shopping malls – Coca-Cola, Mac Donald's, etc . At the same time, commercial signage has been used to increase the commercial appeal of many historic city centres, with the effect of encouraging consumers to experience such areas predominantly as contemporary centres of exchange, consumption and sources of commercial activity (Sasaki, 2002, Creswell, 1998, Marshall and Wood, 1995).

This discussion does not deny that commercial signs are important elements of many contemporary streetscapes. The presence of such media in historic city centres contributes to the satisfaction of

consumers' needs, which are not necessarily related to the purchase of goods; these can be linked to the visual commercial appeal produced by these kinds of media. We argue that whilst it is appropriate and necessary for historic cities to allow commercial signage as means of attracting consumers, at the same time, historic cities must also guarantee the preservation of historic buildings and places, and avoid 'disordered' streetscapes.

In this context, the next section examines the question of the appropriate control of commercial signage; beginning with a brief discussion of the planning context within which such control must necessarily operate. This includes a consideration of the role of city centre management, marketing and urban tourism.

Commercial Signage and City Centre Management

City centre management is related to the maintenance and enhancement of city vitality and viability, and the co-ordination of public, private and voluntary services and interests. According to Ian Wells (1991, p.9), the concept of city centre management can be described as: 'a comprehensive response to competitive pressures, which involves development, management and promotion of both public and private areas within city centres, for the benefit of all concerned'. The term 'competitive pressures' provides the key to why city centre management is necessary. This management involves dealing with the potential of a centre and promoting its wellbeing, and bringing together interests of different user groups to ensure coordination and development of services. Urban design and planning principles are applied in city centre management to create places with a distinctive visual character, safe and accessible streets and public spaces. Marketing and urban tourism strategies are also used to promote places as being attractive for residents and visitors (Urban Design for Retail Environments, 2002).

City centre management is a complex practice, made up of a range of different functions. As long ago as the late 1980s, Baldock (1989) pointed out that city and town centre management (TCM) has at least three main functions: (i) the creation and promotion of an image and climate of success for a city centre, (ii) the development and encouragement of social and economic activities in city centres, and (iii) the management of these places in order to keep them running effectively. As a consequence of the application of these general roles, Ian Wells´ study (1991) demonstrated the potential benefits that a city centre management can bring to a place: encouragement of more people into the centre, maintenance and enhancement of the trading potential of the place, heightened demand for shops in an improved environment, encouragement of owners to maintain properties, enhanced prospects of redevelopment

and refurbishment of existing properties, and protection and enhancement of values in existing shopping streets. There is no evidence that the role for TCM defined nearly thirty years ago has significantly changed, although the context within which it operates has undergone significant structural and economic changes over that period in many parts of the world.

In addition to ensuring the sustainable management of the operation of city centres, city centre management can be used to ensure the visual quality of public areas in commercial and historic city centres. In this regard, visual quality can be related to the level of order among physical elements that form the streetscape (such as buildings and commercial signs), and the principles of legibility and imageability (Yarzadeh and Shamsollahi, 2013). According to Wells (1991), city centre management can also be concerned with also guiding future development in existing urban sites. In this sense, management is in part about planning and economic development as it relates to the visual quality of public places.

Within city centre management as a defined activity, an increasing number of strategies are being applied in order to enhance what city centres offer in terms of their commercial offer. At the same time that retailing is considered by local authorities to be one of the main functions and land use of many city centres, some initiatives also emphasize that these places cannot be categorized as areas just for shopping. Wells (1991) indicated that other activities are necessary for adding vitality and viability to city centres, such as offices, restaurants, cafes, pubs, libraries, museums, cinemas and so on. They contribute to reinforce the character of a place as historic, tourist and/or cosmopolitan. Similarly, Carmen Hass-Klau, Graham Crampton, Clare Dowland and Inge Nold (1999) defended the view that city centre management needs to help city centres to function better, not just for transient consumers and visitors, but for those people who live and work in these places. The recognition of the non-retail focussed dimension of city centres is becoming increasingly important, particularly in a period where shopping is conducted through virtual sites, or sites remote from the traditional urban centre.

According to Wells (1991), a main measure of the relevance of city centre management is in terms of sustained and if possible increased commercial profitability; successfully improved city centres can be expected to attract more people (residents, investors, visitors and so on), and therefore generate higher profits. However, we argue that other qualitative measures should also be adopted, reflecting a more socially oriented analysis, such as through studies of user perception and evaluation of the appearance of city centres. In terms of the key actors and agencies evolved in city centre management, there are two groups that most influence design decisions: local authorities and retailers. In many cases, property

owners and the local residential community are excluded from the city centre management debate. In this regard, a more integrated approach that stimulates participation of city council officers, retailers, property owners and local community might be helpful in developing urban design strategies to increase the visual quality of city centres.

City centre management is not directly involved in the control of commercial signage in historic cities, which is the responsibility of local planning authorities. However, city centre management can influence how the control of such signage is approached. This fact has direct consequences for the visual quality of these places, the image of city centres, the development and encouragement of social and economic activities, the protection and enhancement of aesthetic values in existing shopping streets, and so on. As well as influencing such interests, the evaluation methods often used in city centre management can also be adopted, particularly for measuring the effectiveness of commercial signage controls in historic city centres. The criteria used to evaluate the outcomes of such controls might be framed in terms of the improved appearance, orderliness or otherwise of signage, the contribution of such signage to wayfinding; and might be framed around the characteristics and needs of users – as visitors, residents or those who work in the locale. In this sense, to compare the performance of commercial signage approaches adopted in historic city centres in different urban contexts, the perception and evaluation of residents should be researched. It is important also to understand the interests and responsibilities of the groups responsible for the development of aesthetic control with respect to commercial signage, whether other professionals or local community are consulted during this process, and how this participation takes place. Following this discussion, issues related to marketing and city image should be analysed.

Marketing the City and City Image

Cities have become increasingly shaped by the necessity to project a positive image, and there is no greater advertisement for cities than their own built environment and natural landscape. As discussed by Jon Lang (2005), many local authorities have recognized the importance of open-space design in contributing to this positive images for many cities. Hence, marketing became a key strategy within the management of city centres during the 1970s and 1980s. According to Smyth (1994), city marketing draws on several different fields, such as economics, sociology, psychology, politics and biology. As an academic topic, city marketing has been the focus of two distinct sets of approaches: one examines it from the perspective of a deep economic analysis (such as Kearns and Philo, 1993, Harvey, 1989, Logan and Molotch, 1987), relating it to a particular moment within the development of urban capitalism

and neo-liberalism; the other, more practice focussed, concentrates on the range and success of marketing strategies (such as Gold and Warn, 1994, Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1993, Ashworth and Voogd, 1990).

Advertisements, the main component of most city marketing strategies, have been used by many cities to stimulate local economic development. After setting incentives and selecting desirable images that might be associated with places, a variety of advertisement packages, such as city guides, glossy brochures, fact sheets, xeroxes of industrial commercial information, and advertisements in newspapers, are put together and become the vehicle for promoting a particular and often metonymised image of the place by the local authority. For example, many marketing strategies apply the terms 'business' in slogan campaigns of cities to advertise that these places are good for investment, while in other cases, when cities are characterized by historic heritage, marketing strategies are often designed to emphasize the attractiveness of these places to tourists and locals by means of generalised statements about the quality of the place and the experience it offers, for example: 'sunny places', 'blue sky', 'historic heritage', 'local culture' and so on (Landry, 2006, Knox, 2005, Hall and Hubbart, 1998).

According to Smyth (1994), people and their activities give meaning and use to the built environment. In the process of marketing historic city centres or even entire cities, the images promoted through media such as newspapers, post cards, pamphlets and websites, are not just descriptions of the physical elements of places, but denote meanings symbolically as well. This idea of the capacity of the representation of place to affect its meaning for users is well understood in the field of Environment Behavioural research that has its conceptual basis in perception and cognition of the built environment. According to Environmental Behaviour theory selling and defining a city centre requires the selling of what a place means, how it feels and what it looks like to users (Stevenson, 2003, Gold and Ward, 1994). In this sense, the process of marketing the city can start from the question: what sort of cities do users wish to see? Or, indeed, what sort of city do city marketers and city authorities wish users to see? Having answered this, by analysing user perception and evaluation of the appearance of city centres, marketing strategies can be designed and applied to intervene in the production and transmission of urban images, and to reinterpret these images as the bases of an initiative for 'selling' city centres to residents and outside users (Smyth, 1994). Symbolic factors associated with places need to be identified and packaged. For this, perception and evaluation of different user groups, such as local authorities, local communities, shop owners, visitors and investors need to be investigated. Approaches that take into account only those interests related to the development of tourist activities can lead to one sided representations of place, not recognized by their own residents (Lasansky and MacLaren, 2004).

In places such as Piccadilly Circus and Times Square, commercial signs are deployed that create an image of the multicultural, the global and international centres, intended to attract visitors. In Piccadilly Circus, the signage has graphic impact, challenging the perception of place and symbolism, and providing a play between modernity (globalization) and heritage (Figure 2). In addition, as defended by James Trulove (2000), in an open-air shopping mall in California known as 'the Block at Orange', the commercial signage has been designed to be 'reminiscent of the world´s great city blocks, like Times Square, Pier 39, and Melrose Avenue, but with a California state of mind'. In this type of urban space, commercial signs are employed to increase social and economic vitality by imposing a certain commodified order and meaning on the physical elements, reinforcing the commercial appeal of these areas. At the same time, in many historic city centres, marketing approaches influence the design and control of commercial signs with a particular focus on the preservation of historic buildings and places (Russo, 2002). As opposed to the case of Times Square, for example, the image promoted by marketing strategies in historic city centres, such as Oxford and York in England, tend to emphasize the historic appearance of the area in an ordered streetscape, and not just its commercial functions. In the main commercial street of York, The Shambles, signage reinforces the finer urban grain, being smaller and simpler, like projections that contain the pedestrian realm and create human scale (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Piccadilly Circus in London - commercial signs are designed to project a multicultural identity, reinforcing the sense of this location as a worldwide and international destination (Source: author).

Figure 3: The famous commercial street 'The Shambles' in the city of York in England - commercial signs emphasize the historic appearance of the area (Source: author).

Covent Garden Market in London is another example that symbolic factors can create and/or reinforce character of places. According to the report 'Urban Design for Retail Environments' (2002), this place has the qualities of a traditional market centre, but the 'folk memory' is the appeal of what the area has to offer. The activities of this market provide elements that add to the shopping experience and help to define a distinct character. Shoppers will prefer to visit Covent Garden Market because it has a character, and qualities that are not found in other commercial centres in London (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Covent Garden Market in London. Symbolic meanings emphasized by the setting provide elements that add to the shopping experience and help to define a distinct character (Source: author)

With regard to historic city centres in different countries, the drive to market the city influences the design of commercial signage controls. In order to understand how the views of city council officers

inform and influence the development of policy for the regulation of commercial signage, the following issues should be investigated: (i) whether the creation and/or promotion of a city image is part of the aims of commercial signage controls, (ii) whether local authorities are involved in marketing strategies related to the promotion of the city centre, and (iii) what image of the city centre is promoted through marketing strategies and commercial signage design. Such research would inform approaches aimed at improving the preservation of the historic identity of place, without sacrificing commercial interest. It is important that a local authority can determine whether its approach to the regulation of commercial signage and broader strategies for marketing place are likely to reinforce a common image of a city centre, or whether these initiatives are likely to damage that coherence and authenticity. In this sense, urban tourism and city regeneration issues should be analysed in more detail.

Urban Tourism and City Regeneration

The concept of urban tourism is described by Dean Mac Cannell (quoted in Taylor, 1991, p.66) as 'a way of attempting to overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience'. According to Stevenson (2003) and Thorns (2002), urban tourism involves the redevelopment and regeneration of the city, through image-making and the application of marketing strategies focused on the production of leisure spaces. Moreover, the term urban tourism has been understood as the revitalization of declining cities or parts of cities into tourist destinations. One intention of urban tourism is to create landscapes capable of international comparison; they aim to promote images of cities distinctive enough to compete with images of other places located in a global context. Stevenson (2003, p.99) argues that what distinguishes urban tourism from traditional tourism is the way that images of places are packaged and marketed. Christopher Law´s book (1992) indicates that the use of strategies to transform city centres into places of consumption and leisure is a phenomenon that goes back several decades.

Urban tourism is linked to 'tourism shopping', a term applied by Stephen Page and Colin Michael Hall (2003, pp.133–139). In general, there is a relationship between tourism and retail activities as the majority of tourist destinations combine shopping and visiting attractions. Many successful cities in Europe have applied urban tourism strategies and promoted 'unique' leisure shopping to establish their popularity as international destinations. In this context, the overall visual distinctiveness of public spaces is an important resource for the promotion of tourism in historic city centres: usually users look for a shopping experience which they believe is special or even unique, qualities which are composed through the design of shop windows, shopfronts and through the presence of historic or distinctive

building facades. Page and Hall (2003) also suggest that there are particular physical and non-physical qualities, elements, or devices, which can be deployed within place marketing by city centre managers to promote urban tourism. These qualities would include aesthetic interest, conveyed through the setting and its architecture; the display of goods on the streets, street musicians and artists; cleanliness and safety. Moreover, these authors also suggest a number of factors that could be considered by local authorities to attract visitors to historic city centres. These include marketing the destination based on an identifiable theme, using historic and cultural attractions of a place; and investing in attractive shopping galleries, facades, shopfronts, layout and design of the built environment and in the preservation of the historic architecture, where these do not conflict.

The concept of urban tourism needs to be analysed in terms of its influence on how decision makers think about the regulation and control of signage historic city centres. In many cases, commercial signage controls are incorporated in urban tourism strategies as a deliberate tool to create or reinforce the visual character of a historic city. When used appropriately (as in the case of the Shambles in York), this type of control can help to promote historic city centres as tourist destinations drawing on their unique identity. However, in some cases, signage can also be applied to promote a manufactured character. Examples of this artificial manufacture of historic identity can be found in the city of Gramado in Brazil, promoted as the 'Brazilian Switzerland' (Figure 5), and in the city of Frankenmuth in The United States, promoted as the twin city of Frankfurt in German (Figure 6).

Figure 5: City of Gramado in Brazil – commercial signage and architecture are designed to promote the city as the 'Brazilian Switzerland' (Source: author).

Figure 6: Frankenmuth in The United States – commercial signage and architecture are designed to promote the city as the twin city of Frankfurt in German (Source: Naoumova).

Different urban tourism and commercial signage approaches can result in distinct levels of visual quality in historic city centres, as these approaches influence the aesthetic composition of shopfronts, window displays, advertisements and even more permanent building facades. In this regard, Deborah Stevenson (2003) and John Gold and Stephen Ward´s (1994) argue that cities are in constant competition with other cities in terms of visual quality, amenity and lifestyle. Ordered streetscapes, attractive public space, historic character, urban culture and social and economic vitality have become valuable resources that have been commodified for sale in the global marketplace. This is because such factors can influence the image that users have of cities, and this image can add a competitive edge among commercial and historic city centres of different countries (Zukin, 1995, 1998). According to Hall

and Hubbard (1998), increased competition between cities around the world is the main contributing factor to the insertion of place promotion strategies in city centre management. As discussed by Manuel Castells (1992), cities cannot be considered as individual places, but as a process by which places are connected in a global network. The discussion about cities as interconnected systems is not new as a review of the literature reveals (Pred, 1997, Johnston, 1982, Hall and Hay, 1980, Brunn and Wheeler, 1980, Bourne, 1975, Berry and Horton, 1970, Berry, 1964).

The way that commercial signs are designed has a powerful effect in the competitiveness of historic city centres in terms of their appearance. These media can contribute to one city centre being seen as more pleasant than another. For this reason, in many historic cities, approaches to guide and control shopfronts and advertisements are adopted, having as the main aim to make the city more pleasant, to be recognized as a better place than others, and consequently, to attract more people (Stevenson, 2003). The fact that when signage is design well, and located in a way that is appropriate to its setting it can have a positive outcome in terms of the visitor experience, suggests that it ought to be possible to define some general principles for the regulation of these media (see Crawford, Lee and Beatty 2015). We argue that local authorities in historic cities should ensure that commercial signage is regulated in such a way that it contributes to the preservation of historic heritage, both for the sake of that identity in itself, but also because of the commercial benefits which follow.

Conclusion

The discussion presented in this paper has been intended to contribute to a conceptual framework which would be needed for any coherent analysis of the operation of commercial signage controls in historic city centres in different urban contexts. The non-physical drivers and cultural conditions that influence the control of commercial signage – such as consumerism, city centre management, city marketing and urban tourism - indicate that the following issues should be taken into account in the design and control of commercial signs in historic cities according to user perceptions:

1.   Accepting that the only constant is change, even in historic settings, in cases where the commercial centre coincides with the historic core of a city, the challenge for a local authority is to establish and implement aesthetic controls which can reconcile the interests of retail, services and business with the need to preserve both the substance and the image of the historic heritage.

2.   Legibility and imageability increase the visual amenity of city centres, and restoring meanings to cities damaged by the insensitive use of commercial signage involves re-claiming the symbolic

meanings attributed by users to these places as an important element of the preservation of historic heritage. In this sense it is not only architectural monuments that should be taken into account in the revitalization of historic city centres, but also their setting, and townscape.

3.	The use of standardised commercial signs and logos leads to a risk that all city centres will look the same, with little individual visual character. On the other hand, inconsistent or poorly through approaches to aesthetic regulation, may result in the presence of conflicting styles, designs and finishes in the same place. In addition, the lack of a coordinated approach to guide the design of commercial signs, buildings, public spaces and their interconnectivity can make city centres less integrated and potentially less attractive.

4.	The presence of commercial signage in historic city centres can contribute to satisfying consumer needs which are not necessarily related to the purchase of particular goods; this can be linked to the visual commercial appeal produced by these signs. In this sense, approaches to commercial signage in historic city centres needs to accept that there is a need for such signage in order to help make retail and other such uses more viable. At the same time, there is a need to ensure that such signage does not damage the level of the visual amenity constituted by the historic environment.

5.	Apart from the so-called shopping experience, other uses and activities are also responsible for adding vitality and viability to city centres, such as offices, restaurants, cafes, pubs, libraries, museums, cinemas and so on. These uses reinforce the character of a place as historic, touristic and/or cosmopolitan. The development of a commercial signage approach should consider all these land uses and the signage adopted by them.

6.	Local authorities should monitor the effectiveness of commercial signage controls applied in their city in creating functional appropriateness, commercial legibility, and wayfinding, measured against specific criteria to do with aesthetic pleasure. The results of any such monitoring would help to maintain the visual quality of the city and drive the design of new design controls.

7.	All stakeholders who have an interest in both the commercial efficiency of city centres, and in the historic ambience should be involved or consulted over what forms of signage is appropriate, and where it should be located.

In this paper, the importance of the practice of 'city marketing' and the concept of 'urban tourism' and their influence on the design and display of commercial signs has been considered. This discussion assumes that the image promoted by marketing and urban tourism strategies in historic city centres needs to emphasize the historic appearance and its broader role, not just its commercial function. Through a review of legislation and guidelines related to the regulation and control of, as well as an

interrogation of the views of city council officers involved in the design of such controls, the following factors should be analysed by planning authorities: first, whether the creation and/or promotion of city image is part of the aims of commercial signage controls; second, whether local authorities are involved in marketing strategies related to the promotion of city centre image, and finally, which image of the city centre is promoted through marketing the city and urban tourism strategies and commercial signage controls.

This discussion has identified seven basic aspects, as presented above, in relation to the use of commercial signage, and the drivers for this in historic cities, that should be further researched in order to better understand the effects and the effectiveness of the regulation of commercial signage in historic areas. In any investigation into the use of such controls in specific cases, the first question is obviously whether any such regulations are in place, and if not what difference this has made to the visual amenity of the setting. If there are, then the investigation needs to reveal their aim, who is responsible for them, and the efficiency in their implementation. In addition, it would be important to know what form of and with whom, any consultation was conducted to inform such controls . The research might then establish the effectiveness of the regulatory regime, and the influence of these controls on the visual quality of the city centre. More generally questions might be asked about the 'fit' or consistency between the image conveyed by the signage, and the intended image conveyed through the other promotion strategies of the city council or other responsible agencies. Once such research has been carried out in a number of contrasting sites and countries, researchers in this field would be in a strong position to better theorise the nature of the relationship between users' perceptions of visual quality as consumers and their perception as visitors to or inhabitants of historic environments.

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