The difference of ‘being diverse’: city branding and multiculturalism in the ‘Leicester Model’

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Abstract

This city profile on Leicester focuses on the representation of ethnical diversity in city branding. Through a historical approach, the paper discusses how the local authorities have taken advantage of the arrival of different migration flows into the city, in order to redefine its post-industrial identity in terms of multiculturalism, tolerance and inclusivity. In so doing, the paper emphasises the combination of deliberate marketing communicative activities, the provision of services for attracting and retaining foreign businesses and the creation of an open urban *milieu* where various ethnic groups are free to express and celebrate their own cultures through festivals and events. The paper identifies the alignment between place communication and place ‘offerings’ development as the crucial element underpinning Leicester’s model for multicultural cooperation and critically assesses the recent challenges that are being posed to the sustainment of a multicultural city image.

Keywords: city branding; place branding; multiculturalism; ethnical diversity; Leicester

Introduction

Leicester is an English medium-sized city located in the region of the East Midlands. With a total population of 329,839 in 2011 (UK Office for National Statistics, 2011), Leicester is the thirteenth most populous city in the United Kingdom and offers, together with London, one of

the most ethnically and culturally diverse urban areas of the country. Before the unexpected victory of Leicester City Football Team in the 2015/16 Premiere League, which rapidly boosted the city's international profile, for decades Leicester seemed to share the stage with (and the destiny of) several other British cities. Once brick-and-mortar landscapes for myriads of manufacturing plants and multitudes of low-skilled workers, from the mid-Seventies onwards British cities have been concerned in reshaping their socio-economic structure. For this purpose, most of them have sought to pursue alternative models of urban regeneration based on 'soft' assets and resources.

Notably, reaching the status of a *knowledge* city (Carrillo, 2006), *culture* city (Griffiths, 2006) or a *creative* city (Evans, 2009) worked as an orienting principle for recent urban policy making in a context of perceived inter-urban competition (see Gordon, 1999; Gordon & Buck, 2005). In this view, culture is ascribed a "redeeming role" (Rabbiosi & Giovanardi, 2017, p. 250) by city managers, in the effort to boost economic performances and urban development. It is in this neoliberal scenario of city 'boosterism' that British cities have steadily become testing grounds for place marketing (Paddison, 1993), tourism promotion techniques (e.g. Bradley, Hall and Harrison, 2002) and subsequently place branding (e.g. Hankinson, 2001; Lloyd & Peel, 2008; Koller, 2008). Larger cities like Manchester (Young, Diep & Drabble, 2006; Warnaby & Meadway, 2013) or Liverpool (Houghton & Stevens, 2011), and even smaller cities like Oldham (Koller, 2008) or Bradford (Trueman, Cook & Cornelius, 2008), have reported the task of overcoming the negative perceptions of their industrial legacy. In this context, branding has been a favourite tool that enables the creation of compelling narratives, which are supposed to facilitate economic innovation and change. Furthermore, the experience of British cities have often revealed that social-related issues, such as the quest for "social cohesion" and "social inclusion" (see for example Turok, 2009), often become extremely challenging aspects in the process of redesigning post-industrial urban identities. This is the specific domain of contribution of this city profile of Leicester, which endeavours to illuminate a widely debated social dimension of city branding practice: the representation of *difference* and, in particular, *ethnic diversity*.

On the one hand, local policy makers and city branding practitioners agree that the co-presence of different ethnical groups can be a distinctive and desirable characteristic of a reputable 'knowledge city' (see for example Selby, 2004, p. 28). This is in respect of the 'desired' urban demographic profile but also the features of place 'products' and services. For instance, Toronto showcased its multicultural character by celebrating the diversity of ethnic food (Boudreau, & Young, 2009), while Sidney claims to be one of the world's multicultural

cities (City of Sidney, 2014). Analogue assertions of multicultural identity underpin the branding strategies of cities that claim to be ‘global’ (Paganoni, 2012) or ‘cosmopolitan’ (Young et al., 2006; Colombino, 2009), reinforcing the tendency to emphasise cultural variety so as to appeal to trans-national creative workers (see Florida, 2002), international tourists (see Selby, 2004) and other sophisticated elites (see Shaw, 2007). In this view, not only is ethnical diversity itself an enviable aspect of modern and vibrant urban areas, but it is also a key component of creativity. In their review of the literature on ‘creative cities’ and city branding, Trueman et al. (2007) identify ethnicity as a distinguishing dimension of urban creativity, which could work as a pivotal asset for presenting the city’s milieu to external audiences.

On the other hand, critical commentators have repetitively noted that the frequent celebration of cultural and ethnical diversity in city branding has often eroded the meaningfulness of diversity. This tendency may negatively affect the effectiveness and credibility of city marketing messages (e.g. Turok, 2009) and, furthermore, holds contradictory socio-political and ethical implications, because it can often portray a “narrow cosmopolitanism” (Young et al., 2006). Accordingly, the repeated incorporation of diversity in city branding narratives and discourse might sustain a ‘representational regime’ whereby social exclusion, rather than inclusion, is promoted, and where only certain forms of difference are tolerated or accepted (see Gibson, 2005). In other words, advocates of the multicultural city have often treated multiculturalism in a simplistic way. Multiculturalism might then become a mere attribute of a ‘loft-living’ style that is showcased in city tourism brochures or in a leaflet advertising newly refurbished cosmopolitan districts, aiming to attract a highly-selected and mainly bourgeois type of resident (Gibson, 2005). In this view, the practice of city branding contributes to a dominant discourse, where certain cultures are commodified for the needs of tourists and where “semiotic violence” (Jensen, 2007) is committed against ethnical minorities, being spectacularised as ‘exotically’ diverse.

An alternative rendition of the entanglement between city branding and multiculturalism is offered in this paper. Through an illustration of the historical development that led to the “Leicester Model” – a set of policies based on a political commitment to multiculturalism – the paper discusses how local authorities in Leicester have taken advantage of the arrival of different migration flows into the city, in order to redefine its post-industrial identity as characterised by openness and inclusivity. The paper also discusses the tensions and implications of two recent unexpected events: the discovery of King Richard III’s mortal remains (and the resulting tourism-oriented policies) and the victory of the local football club

in the Premier League. The paper ends with a critical assessment of the challenges posed by de-globalisation to the sustainment of a multicultural city image. This task is fulfilled by reporting relevant findings from a three-year archival research conducted by the first author in the city of Leicester.

From manufacturing prosperity to industrial decline

During the inter-war period, Leicester was internationally known as the city that ‘clothes the world’ thanks to the diversity of its manufacturing industries, such as boot and shoe, and its wide variety of hosiery and knitted goods production (Nash & Reeder, 1993). Leicester’s economic prosperity relied on a buoyant industrial sector that employed two-thirds of the 283,000 people residing in Leicester during the year of 1950. Unemployment was non-existent and vacancies were waiting to be filled (Authority of Leicester Corporation, 1946, p. 20). It was in this moment that the city began to experience a significant influx of migrants coming from the Caribbean and the sub-Indian continent to meet the 1950s’ labour shortages.¹ While the British National Act 1948 enabled all Commonwealth citizens to migrate to Britain, it further encouraged people to move and start a new life in Britain. From this very first moment, migrations flowing into Leicester started forging its multicultural character.

Leicester’s buoyant manufacturing base meant that the city at the time was “one of the wealthiest in Europe” (Beazley, 2006, p. 170), and to attract visitors, shoppers and buyers from many overseas places the first Leicester Trade Fair was organised in May 1949. This was emblematic of Leicester’s industrial power and helping to convey the image of a successful and economically dynamic city. Visitors to Leicester could remark on a culture of well being and economic success within the city, with its prosperous shops and well-dressed people – a proud city that could manufacture any type of products from umbrellas to jet engines, from boats to cosmetics, from cigars to lenses. Leicester’s industrial potential was reflected in the quality of its products that were praised for bearing the “true stamp of the Leicester craftsman” (Authority of Leicester Corporation, 1946, p. 20).

¹ Leicester was a favourable destination for series of migration flows to occur which first started in the middle of the nineteenth century with the arrival of Russian Jewish refugees. They were followed by the migration of other European Jews in the 1930s who were escaping Nazi Germany persecution.

However, this temporary success came to an end as its greatest manufacturing centre collapsed due to the phenomenon of deindustrialisation and the economic recession of the 1970s. The city felt the full force of economic restructuring, and optimism diminished when it failed to sustain a dynamic image. The decline of long-standing firms in traditional industries was the direct result of foreign competition. The expansion of the tertiary sector led to a change in the nature of occupational structure as employment in banking, commerce, insurance, public administration and health sector were flourishing - managerial professions increased by 57.4 per cent from 1981 to 1991 whereas occupations in metallic good manufactures decreased by 36.6 per cent over the same period. The local authorities had to tackle difficulties that emerged in a post-industrial era, and a high unemployment rate that reached 11.5 per cent in 1981 in contrast to 4.7 per cent in 1975 (UK Census, 1982; UK Census, 1991; Leicester City Council, key facts about Leicester, 1991).

This novel post-industrial scenario led to a genuine challenge for Leicester's local authorities, as they had to deal with the negative public perception of the city as an industrial relic – the best days of which were now firmly in the past (Leicester Mercury, 1986). While the city's industrial power was in decline, another migration flux occurred in Leicester. The arrival of Asians from East Africa in Leicester happened for political reasons, as the Ugandan president Idi Amin was persecuting this ethnic group for having control of over important economic sectors such as trade. Asian families were then expelled in a context where African nationalism and inter-communal tensions were strongly felt. This exodus resulted in more than 20,000 people arriving in Leicester during the period 1968-1978 (Panesar, 2005). Although Ugandan Asians were first perceived as a menace by some far-right anti-immigration activists, this new migration wave had profound implications for the prosperity of the economic and cultural urban life, paving the way for the multi-cultural character of Leicester (Jones, 2014). According to the 1991 census, its ethnic minority population accounted for 28.5 per cent of the population whereas the UK average was 5.5 per cent (Bonney, 2003, p.18). The presence of ethnical minorities became even more predominant over the decades. Leicester gained a reputation for being the home for refugees and asylum seekers: in the early 2000s Leicester welcomed Somalis refugees; since Poland became member of the EU in 2004, there has been exponential growth of Polish people in the city; more recently new groups of migrants from Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and Kosovo arrived in the city as refugees. Leicester is now considered one of the first UK cities, outside London, to

have a majority of the population with ethnic minority origin (see Leicester City Council, 2008, p. 11).

The “lost city” in search for an identity

The main idea of the local authorities in the 1980s was to alter the public’s perception of a city suffering from industrial decay and chimney-belching smoke (Leicester Mercury, 1986). Although local actors demonstrated local faith in restoring its post-industrial reputation, raising Leicester’s profile appeared to be a difficult task. Aspects of an old industrial city were difficult to overcome in a world of changing globalisation, and in which the tourist market was not open to all places. Although Leicester possesses a long historical tradition with its street patterns dated back from the medieval period and a Victorian character exhibited from terrace housing, its historical asset had been somewhat neglected. Hence, the city did not rely on a recognised historical aura in order help in the rebuilding a post-industrial image. Leicester was not generally considered to be a historical town but rather a grey and run-down industrial city that was struggling to compete with Nottingham’s Robin Hood legend (Leicester Promotions, 1999).

The difficult task of providing Leicester with a credible tourist destination profile is illustrated in the account of Mr Darryl Stephenson, principal assistant chief executive in Leicester City Council. In 1986, he argued that “Leicester has become known as a tourist base only because of five years of hard selling and the lower prices in hotels” (ibidem). Leicester did not promote flagship tourist destinations and struggled to attract overseas tourists. Non-UK residents visiting Leicestershire represented 15 per cent of tourism in 1994 and it decreased to 9 per cent by 1999 (Leicester City Council, 1990, p. 49). It is not surprising that Leicester had always been criticised as a potential tourist destination, and in the 1990s David Crease and Andrew Keeling from the East Midlands Tourist Board argued that “the city and even the county are in need of a shot in the arm” (Leicester City Council, 1990, p. 49). Cherry Fleet, marketing manager at the Belmont Hotel, also argued that Leicester was considered to be the “lost city” with reference to Terry Wogan’s infamous phrase (ibid., p. 50). In a nutshell, Leicester was generally perceived to be an unattractive destination, and nobody in the city could even conceive multiculturalism as a symbolic asset for attracting visitors.

The Council had a long way to go in promoting Leicester as a leisure destination. As a result, the Leicester Tourism Development Action Programme was created in 1990 to

implement a marketing strategy for Leicester. The English Tourist Board created a partnership with Leicester City Council, Leicestershire County Council, and the East Midlands Tourist Board, the regional Enterprise Unit, Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce and members of the private sector (ibid., p. 10). These partners recognised the need to promote Leicester's potential as a tourist destination and to implement marketing strategies and tactics to attract visitors, in line with European cities' tendency to rely on place promotion (see Ashworth and Voogd, 1994).

In 1990, the need to rethink the image of Leicester was finally acknowledged. Local authorities were aware that Leicester possessed various urban assets, but the challenge was to find a unique selling point to position the city globally. Therefore, the Leicester Tourism Development Action Programme targeted Leicester's international community that was "considered [a] model for racial co-operation" (Leicester City Council, 1990, p. 1). Indeed, Leicester was proud of its multiracial dimensions and so certain slogan ideas were proposed, such as "Leicester a world of difference" (ibid., p. 6). This could encourage visitors to discover and appreciate the cultural diversity of Leicester. Another slogan was "Leicester birthplace of tourism". In fact, Leicester was the home of Thomas Cook and his first organised trips were a railway excursion from Leicester to Loughborough in 1841.

None of the slogans suggested above were chosen, but Leicester injected further energy into the process of opening up to the world. This is illustrated by the creation of Leicester Promotions in 1993, which was a private sector agency supported by Leicester City Council with the aim of marketing Leicester globally. One of the first outcomes of Leicester Promotions' activity was the creation of the slogan "Leicester full of Surprises" in 1993, in order to strengthen the profile of the city (Leicester Mercury, 1994a). This promotional effort was based on fascinating facts about Leicester to entice domestic and international markets. Leicester promotion's objective was to attract tour operators and to increase wider public awareness of Leicester's intrinsic assets. For example, the highest Roman building in Britain (Jewry Wall) is located in Leicester. Moreover, Leicester is the home of the biggest Diwali celebration held outside India (see Figure 1). In spite of the potential contribution of these place-product components, this campaign failed to highlight strategic points of interest. It seemed that Leicester Promotions was trying to "promote" or "sell" the place, in line with the approaches of place promotion and place selling (Ashworth and Voogd, 1994). The confused identity that the popular Rough Guide to England attributed to Leicester in 1994 supports this:

“[as] a drearily modern place saved from mediocrity by its role as a focal point from Britain’s Asian community” (Leicester Mercury, 1994b).

Yet, as this quotes alludes to, the multicultural element was inexorably filtering into media representations and other spontaneous manifestations of the emerging Leicester city brand. A more explicit recognition of the rich symbolic potential inherent in *diversity* is discussed in the next section.

Figure 1: Asian festival of Diwali decorations in 1994 (Diwali lights). Source: David Wilson Library, Special Collections, LMA/prints/ Leicester Fiesta (35/3).

Recognising the potential of diversity: at the roots of the “Leicester Model”

Most of the refugees who arrived in Leicester in the 1970s from East Africa were merchants, artisans, textile workmen and traders. These played a major role in re-boosting Leicester’s post-industrial economy, in particular the clothing trade between Leicester and the Asian sub-continent in the 1990s. This migration flow contributed to bringing new commercial and entrepreneurial skills to Leicester, thus offsetting the gloom of deindustrialisation. This perception is illustrated by the words of Alan Green, Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce (LCC) and Industry chief executive, who in 1992 argued:

“I think in the knitwear and clothing industry it would be fairly safe to say that if it were not for the Asian Community a big part of this traditional trade would have disappeared” (Leicester Mercury, 1992a)

The official appreciation of the Asian community’s business expertise by LCC is evident in the following account, which emphasises the business value of social capital and the presence of the Asian community:

“everybody appreciates that within the Asian community there is expertise that is lacking in mainstream companies. For instance, the community probably has the finest range of commercial contacts in East and West Africa and we ought to tap into that. It also goes without saying that their knowledge of the Asian sub-continent is superior to anybody else’s. So there are many areas where the Asian businessman has knowledge that ought to be useful to his English born counterpart” (Leicester Mercury, 1992b).

It is possible to argue that the British philosophy that acknowledges the expression of diversity in the public sphere through the promotion of multiculturalism inevitably influenced local decisions in Leicester. However, the experience gained by Leicester City Council in managing diversity (see Leicester City Council, 2003) generally acknowledged under the label of “Leicester Model” (Singh, 2003), has been identified by the national government as one of the best practices against which to benchmark policies for encouraging social and intercommunity cohesion (Singh, 2003).

Two intertwined types of initiatives, so making Leicester a diverse locale for living and business, was substantiated by an official narrative that attributed strategic relevance to the inclusion of the Asian community. The first set of initiatives regards business climate and consists in the provision of public services for attracting and retaining businesses; a second set of initiatives regards the creation of a *milieu* that is multi-culturally friendly, in which various ethnic groups can feel free to express and celebrate their own cultures via urban festivals and events. The intertwining of these initiatives is evident in the community plan of Leicester, published in the late 1990s. The document highlights the city council’s ambition to shape a diverse city by

“providing services which are sensitive to people’s religious, cultural, linguistic and access needs; developing policies and services to enable the acceptance and resettlement of asylum seekers in the city; ensuring the provision and use of quality cultural and leisure services events and activities, which reflect the rich diversity of the city’s communities and people” (Leicester City Council, n.d., p. 16)

This claim hints at a wide range of policy programmes, in which “secondary communication” (explicit communicational activities) and “primary communication” (activities whose communicational effect is implicit) are aligned (Kavaratzis, 2004) to encourage urban diversity as a strategic and foundational pillar for urban policies.

Developing multicultural ‘city offerings’: a diverse place for business and living

Services providing advice and information to Asian businesses had been established since the late 1970s. For instance, in 1976 local authorities made the first steps towards a policy that favoured the interests of minorities through the development of bi-lingual streets (see Leicester City Council, 1990, p. 54). Furthermore, more specific projects came to life in the early nineties. For example, a new business advice centre opened in partnership with the Leicestershire Asian Business Association and the Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Leicester Mercury, 1988).²

Celebrations of the value provided to the local economy by the Asian community became more frequent and established in the following decade. In 2005, an official document underscores the role of the ethnically diverse background of Leicester:

“Some of the UK’s most successful businesses are located here. Two world-class universities are based within the city and a third is just outside. The people of Leicester demonstrate a capacity for innovation, creativity and entrepreneurialism beyond the average for other parts of the UK. The city’s young and *ethnically diverse* population

² According to the Leicester Mercury, 2,000 Asian businesses were accounted in 1992 in Leicestershire and they employed approximately 50,000 people. 60 per cent of Leicestershire’s Asian companies were in retailing and wholesaling, 30 per cent in manufacturing and 10 per cent in the service industry. Some other data has been identified regarding the number of Asian businesses in the county: According to *The Leicester Asian Business Survey* published in 1994, 1,446 Asian businesses have been identified in Leicestershire and many small ones such as shops and take-away could not be listed. Most of the Asian businesses were small and 55 per cent of them were in retail, wholesale, import/export and catering.

cultivated these traits and has contributed to the strong rate of business formation”. (Leicestershire Economic Partnership, 2005, p. 3).

Similarly, the attention of local authorities towards the needs of ethnic minorities was epitomised by Paul Winstone, Race Relations Officer, in 1990: “I would say we lead the country for this minority-mindedness in Britain, possibility Europe” (ibid., p. 3). This functional and factual aspect of multiculturalism engineered by Leicester city managers appears to be coupled with a more convivial aspect that Jones (2014) defines “ceremonial multiculturalism”.

Celebrating a multi-cultural *milieu*

As an accompanying expression of local authorities’ view of diversity’s strategic role, Leicester encouraged a rich programme of cultural ethnic festivals and religious celebrations, such as the Caribbean carnival, the Diwali celebration, the Narvratri celebration (see Figure 2) and many others. On the occasion of the Hindu consecratory rites in Abbey Park in 1987, which was one of the first to be held outside India, Leicester was said to have become “part of India for hours [...] as more than 15,000 Hindus from all over Britain took part in religious ceremony and rites” (Leicester Mercury, 1987).³

As Herdle White, organiser of the Caribbean Carnival in the 1990s, pointed out: “there is a genuine multi-racial backing for the carnival and of the thousands who take part; perhaps not more than 60 per cent are West Indians” (Leicester City Council, 1990, p. 48). Bringing people together from a diverse range of local communities was also the case for other festivities such as the Leicester’s Belgrave religious festival. A welcoming attitude was expressed through an open invitation by the President of the festival, Jagat Purusha, who claimed: “I would like to invite member of *all communities* throughout the East Midlands to join in” (Leicester Mercury, 1991).

³ The ‘Mahayana’, which is also called the Hindu consecratory rites, took place for the first time in Abbey Park in 1987 where the Swami, a Hindu priest, preached a message of tolerance and peace.

Figure 2: The Hindu festival of Navratri in 1994.

Source: David Wilson Library. Special Collections, LMA/prints/
Leicester Fiesta (35/3)

As a further component of the Leicester cultural model, Leicester City Council started looking in the early 2000s at the issue of diversity from the perspective of heritage. The starting premise derived from the recognition that “Leicester is the home of people from many cultures and their heritages have enriched the city” (Leicester City Council, 2002a, p. 7). In other words, Leicester’s vision was based on encouraging people to accept different cultural identities, with a view to taking care of *different* communities and traditions. Awareness of the multi-cultural roots of heritage management and provision constitutes an interesting point. The recognition that “appreciating everyone’s heritage has a direct, beneficial impact on the lives of all Leicester citizens (Leicester City Council, 2002a, p. 7) is mirrored in a holistic appreciation for the value of cultural diversity (illustrated in the Race and Equality Scheme 2002-3). Accordingly, “Leicester City Council exists to promote the integrity and sustainability of Leicester through cultural diversity, social justice, community cohesion, economic prosperity and environmental quality. Its vision for integrating Britain’s most diverse city depends on developing sustainable communities, where diversity is cherished as a unique asset and people of all communities feel at home” (Leicester City Council, 2002b, p. 3).

Positioning Leicester through diversity: “One Leicester”

Between the end of 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, multiculturalism gradually becomes a more explicit and assimilated element of the city image, with local stakeholders deliberately deciding to communicate it towards external audiences. This is certainly the case for the project “A taste of Asia”, a tourist-product package that Leicester Promotions set up for attracting visitors interested in consuming ethnic gastronomic resources (see Briggs, 2000). An introductory course in a demonstration kitchen at the Asian Cookery School and a dinner in a Punjabi restaurant were featured components of this multicultural experience, which were heavily promoted through PR campaigns and promotional leaflets. It is possible to argue that multiculturalism and diversity are deployed here in a destination marketing perspective, largely tactical and focusing on city-tourism product development.

It is with the creation of the brand “One Leicester”, developed in 2008 by a consortium of local public and private stakeholders, called Leicester Partnership, that diversity and multiculturalism are identified among the strategic reputational assets defining the vision of the city (Leicester Partnership, 2008). Accompanied with a slogan “One passion, one Leicester” (see Figure 3), a city brand is elaborated for Leicester following a participatory process of consultation, which involved city council staff focus groups, people’s panels involving a cross-section of dwellers of Leicester and meetings with a range of the city's influential experts on different environment-related issues (ibid, p. ii). The vision document resulting from what we could consider for that time as a pioneering participatory approach to place branding (see Braun, Kavaratzis & Zenker, 2013) with the recognition that “Leicester has an unfortunate reputation for talking itself down” (Leicester Partnership, 2008, p. 28). The intention is instead to identify strategies and values in order to “create a strong regional and national identity for Leicester and communicate our successes to as wide an audience as possible” (ibidem).

Figure 3: promotional leaflet from the campaign “One Leicester”

The combination of the two values “driving out inequalities” and “having a customer focus” (Leicester Partnership, 2008, p. 15) captures the particular blend of marketing language and elements of culture-led regeneration policies that characterise the New Labour between 1999 and 2004 (see Gordon and Buck, 2005). For the first time, city brand was openly proposed as a tool for championing the multilayered identity of the city, so as to reach out to audiences that do not know Leicester and in turn to contribute to the individual and collective confidence of inhabitants (see Leicester Partnership, 2008, p. 4). The link between city reputation and migration flows is addressed by the vision document, discussing both challenges and opportunities:

“Whilst Leicester has benefited hugely from past migration, which has added a rich cultural diversity to city life, it also faces further challenges from uncertain patterns of migration from eastern Europe and other parts of the world. However, the success of community regeneration projects [...] demonstrates that we can achieve real, lasting change and improve people’s lives. (p.9)

Overall, the brand “One Leicester” entails a shared programme where the Leicester’s model for multicultural cooperation will have to be celebrated through an exercise of “secondary

communication” (see Kavaratzis, 2004), namely communication activities overtly aiming at influencing the perception of the city. This effort worked as an integrative domain of policy making that pertains to a “cognitive dimension” (see Bellini, 2004). Rather than substituting other types of programmes and interventions supporting multiculturalism, “One Leicester” worked as a tool that complemented and reinforced the inclusive policy making at the core of the Leicester Model. In this view, providing tangible facilities and services that facilitate the fulfilment of people’s religious, cultural and linguistic needs constitutes a meaningful way to substantiate claims of multiculturalism. The experience of Leicester points to the use of branding that is not as a mere communicative exercise (“city of words”) for external audiences, but for a more holistic approach where communication is performed in combination (and harmony with) physical place-making (“city of stones”) (Therkelsen, Halkier & Jensen, 2010, p. 140) and provision of public services. The holistic approach followed by local authorities fostered multiculturalism in a way that that was not only ceremonial (i.e. emphasis on its convivial and celebratory aspects), but also functional and factual (i.e. facilitated by the provision of specific public services). As a result, this deep-rooted tendency to emphasise urban social heterogeneity has trickled down into manifestations of “tertiary communication” (Kavaratzis, 2004), evident in the multiple production of stories and celebration of multiculturalism ‘from the bottom’. An example of this can be found in how the TEDx event held on October, 26th 2016 has been marketed by the steering committee:

“everybody living in Leicester, passing through and those who once lived here and have moved to other corners of the globe contribute to our city’s vibrancy, diversity and rich heritage” (<http://tedxleicester.com/event/everyjourneymatters-tedxleicester-26th-october-2016/>)

The following section discusses how this deeply-embedded image of diversity projected by the city has come under increasing tension due to two contemporary challenges that are appearing at the horizon.

Contemporary challenges in sustaining a multicultural image

Two recent positive “process coincidences”, as Rainisto (2003, p. 82) would put it, brought to the fore exceptional reputational assets for the city: the discovery of King Richard III’s mortal remains beneath a city centre car park in 2012, and the victory of the local football team in the 2015/16 Premiere League. Although both events provided a great deal of international visibility for the city by generating positive media coverage (e.g. CNN, 2015; Financial Times, 2016), it is worth discussing more in details the potential challenges posed by each event to the process of sustaining a multicultural image. The two potential threats discussed below are dissonant heritage (see Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996), which arises from conflicting interpretations of the past within the same place, and *urban spectacle* (see Gotham, 2002), which may overemphasise the carnivalesque aspect of ceremonial multiculturalism.

The first process coincidence came as the outcome of the University of Leicester archaeological team, which identified a car park where King Richard III could have been buried (BBC, 2012). The DNA based identification of the Shakespearian character’s mortal remains and the following exhumation and reburial ceremony sparked curiosity across the globe (BBC, 2013; CNN, 2015). Simultaneously, the city council promoted the rapid construction of a Visitor Centre and a resolute marketing strategy aimed at associating Leicester with the “KR III brand” (Leicester City Council, 2014, p. 4). Among its goals, this branding strategy included the one “to instil confidence in the target audiences that Leicester is the fitting final resting place for England’s last warrior king” (no page number) and to attract residents, school age children, domestic overnight visitors and international travellers. This is an example of how personality associations can be used by city managers to create place branding strategies (see Ashworth, 2010), with cultural heritage being a particularly suitable source of historical characters that can put a city on the map.

If heritage-based storytelling is not per se inappropriate, it cannot be denied that the story embodied by Richard III contributes to showcase elements of a rather traditional Britain imagery, which celebrates a contested ruler during the Wars of the Roses. If overemphasised, historical identity resources of this kind could possibly go in a direction that encourages the phenomenon that Tunbdrige and Ashworth (1996) define as “dissonant heritage”. This consists in the multiplicity of interpretations of the past within the same place which when unchecked can increase the likelihood of clashes and conflicts between different urban ethnic

groups. For the Asian communities living in Leicester, for example, a strong brand focus on a typically 'Western' figure might be unpopular or, at least, meaningless.

The selectivity characterising the management of historical resources and their capacity to foster hegemonic paths of place development (see Graham, 2002) could, if not carefully controlled, contradict the open and multi-ethnic underpinnings of the Leicester brand. On the one hand, in fact, ceremonial multiculturalism can accommodate traditional narratives that pertain to British local history. On the other hand, however, the feasibility of this strategy ultimately depends on the balance between traditional narratives and the other 'stories' celebrated in the city and the overall perceived variety of the resulting urban imaging. Thus, the question as to how prominent British history should be in the future development of the Leicester brand remains at the moment an open one. If ad-hoc research is needed to appreciate the extent to which Richard III is a potential source of civic pride and how local communities identify with it, it is possible to report the tendency of local businesses to commercially exploit the KR III brand, by offering residents and visitors some gadgets, souvenirs and even some Richard III ice cream (Low, 2015).

A second unexpected source of international fame came from the Leicester City Football Club's triumph in the 2015/2016 Premier League. Right after this surprising victory, city managers agreed that this "supercharged the city's international profile" and that "Champions League fixtures will present big marketing opportunities" (More, 2016). The increased city name recognition following the high visibility in the international media has not been the only positive implication appreciated by local stakeholders. For example, the two universities of Leicester sought to celebrate the event and leverage it in order to improve their prospects among strategic catchment areas for international students, such as China and Thailand (see Pickles, 2016). More generally, the football triumph rapidly became a source of civic pride for different communities (see Think: Leicester, 2016). As argued by Edensor and Millington (2008), football can work as a "revealing field in which to explore contemporary formations of identity" (p. 172) in cities, and a gateway to explore "the relationship between branding, place and identity" (ibidem). In the case of Leicester, the emerging joyfull football-related identity has been used by public and private actors in order to redress and reject the traditional narrative of Leicester as a "lost city" that was struggling to compete in the modern world. In particular, as opposed to the KR III brand, football became an occasion to enhance ceremonial multiculturalism. In fact, the value of enthusiastic comradeship at the core of the "Leicester effect" story produced an inclusive narrative evident in several media representations (Financial Times, 2016). The diversity of the team itself, with football players

from Japan, Algeria and several European countries (The Guardian, 2016), owned by a Thai businessman, may have facilitated the identification of local communities. Ultimately, this upsurge of popularity provided a further opportunity to promote the image of Leicester as a place of multicultural tolerance, in line with the city's positioning as a global referent for ethnical integration that is rich in its diversity and vibrant in its opportunities.

If Leicester City's success constitutes a source of reputational asset that is potentially less dissonant than the celebration of a British King's mortal remains, it however poses some challenges to the long-term sustainment of a multicultural image. Critical commentators have often denounced the *mise-en-scène* of Leicester multiculturalism as superficial and commercially-oriented (Machin & Mayr, 2007; McLoughlin, 2014). In particular, the allegations raised against ceremonial multiculturalism regards the potential drawbacks of a commodified "liberal view of carnival multiculturalism" (Machin & Mayr, 2007), which may prevent the public discussion of "more difficult and profound issues underlying cultural differences" (McLoughlin, 2014, p. 34). In other words, these concerns highlight the risk of reducing ethnic diversity to "urban spectacle" (see Gotham, 2005), which is an established argument voiced by critical scholars in city branding. The extent to which a city can defend from these allegations may depend on how much that city integrates ceremonial multiculturalism with other policies that help make a place *de facto* welcoming and diverse. Given the expertise accumulated in the provision of services for multi-ethnic and multi-faith people, as well as the embedded multicultural participation in the economic and cultural life of the city, Leicester seems to be well-equipped to face this challenge.

Conclusion

This present paper has attempted to discuss the role that diversity and multiculturalism have played in the process of city-brand management in Leicester. The historical reconstruction presented above has aimed at unveiling the way in which local authorities have taken advantage of the arrival of different migration flows into the city in order to redefine its post-industrial identity in terms of diversity and openness. This historical approach has illuminated the intimate nexus between in-bound migration and the multicultural appeal that city managers have deliberately created over the last decade. Furthermore, the alignment between place communication and place 'offerings' is one of the most important aspects that distinguishes Leicester's deployment of diversity and multiculturality. In fact, rather than

renditions of “narrow cosmopolitanism” (see Young et al., 2006) as perpetrated by fashionable yet sterile marketing campaigns, Leicester has grounded a symbolic utterance of diversity and multiculturalism in a holistic and long-term way, thus providing services for different ethnic groups and by extension encouraging cultural settlement and contribution.

Catapulted onto an international stage by the discovery of Richard III’s mortal remains and the local football club’s victory in the Premier League, Leicester is experiencing old and new challenges. The previous section has illustrated how delicate is the task to introduce symbols and narratives based on local British history without contradicting the multi-ethnic vocation of the city brand. Another challenge regards the risk of commodifying multiculturalism, which urge managers to maintain a balance between its convivial and spectacular aspects on the one hand and its governance and infrastructure on the other. However, another emerging challenge seems to be appearing at the horizon, which these concluding remarks cannot overlook.

This city profile on Leicester can be particularly meaningful in the current context where globalisation is believed to be no longer driving world growth (see Wolf, 2016). Indeed, some influential Western countries are said to be progressively retreating from global markets (see for example Bello, 2013) and trying to regulate migration flows. Brexit is the most explicit manifestation of this tendency that can have direct constraining implications on the sustainability of the Leicester Model and its philosophy based on inclusivity. On the one hand, the place branding literature has shown that cities can negotiate scalar relationships with national states, by for example doing “scale-jumping” and directly connecting with and reaching out to international actors (Giovanardi, 2015). This perspective encourages cities to implement image-related policies independently from national institutional actors. On the other hand, however, it is true that the consequences of Brexit in terms of (im)mobilities might remarkably limit the possibility for Leicester to become (or remain) a hospitable city for migrants and/or expats, posing functional constraints to some aspects of the “city of stones”. In other words, the more functional and factual components of multiculturalism would be undermined here. While de-globalisation is affecting some national governments and political leaders at any administrative levels, cities included (see Clemente, 2009), it is uncertain how the ‘urban’ could remain a driving actor of globalisation in a rapidly changing scenario as it has been over the past decades. In this context, place branding is thus one of those urban policy domains that will need to be sensibly rescaled.

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