Flagship Regeneration: panacea or urban problem?

Brian Doucet
PhD Student Utrecht University

EURA Conference Glasgow, September 12-14 2007
What are flagships?

- Large scale land and property developments which play an influential role in urban regeneration
- Catalyst for further regeneration and development
- Marketing tool or advertising board for re-imaging cities
Examples

- Convention Centres (SECC, Glasgow)
- Luxury shopping malls (Faneuil Hall, Boston)
- Museums (Guggenheim, Bilbao)
- High-profile office developments (Canary Wharf)
- Waterfront developments (Inner Harbour, Baltimore)
- Also some tourist attractions, high profile housing developments (Montevideo, Kop van Zuid, Rotterdam)
Inner Harbour, Baltimore
Kop van Zuid, Rotterdam
Aims of this paper:

• To better understand:
  
  • Why flagships are still a popular form of urban regeneration?
  
  • What have been the major criticisms of flagships?
  
  • How these relate to the perspective of local residents.
Why do cities still pursue flagships?
1. Ideological shift

• Shift in public policy away from redistributive measures

• Belief that they will solve urban problems

• Belief that they are secure investments
2. Tangible benefits of flagships

- Physical transformation of areas/symbol of change
- Catalyst for further development
- Catalyst for a new industry (i.e. tourism)
- Increase property prices, gentrification
- Residents: hope to boost civic pride, provide new spaces to visit
3. Re-branding and re-imaging

- Flagships are linked to re-imaging campaigns

- Large advertising billboards

- Primarily aimed at outsiders, rather than residents

- Copy successes in other cities (Baltimore, Glasgow)
4. Cities have few other options

- Little else that city councils can do to attract public and private investment

- “Keeping up with the Jones”

- Because other cities are launching flagships and re-branding themselves, others must follow suit
Critiques of flagships
1. Conflicting visions of the city

- Vision of the city promoted by boosters is different from one seen by residents

- Who are flagships designed for: residents or outsiders?

- Selective idea of ‘liveability’

- Will many residents feel excluded?
2. Flagships as a diversion for the masses

- Spectacle serves to divert attention from the real social problems of the city
- Roman Bread and Circuses formula
- To what extent are residents aware of this?
3. The Cookie-cutter effect

- “Clone Cities”

- Not every city that wants to have a major international flagship can have one

- “How many successful stadia, Disney-worlds, harbour places and spectacular shopping malls can there be?” (Harvey)

- AutoWorld, Flint Michigan
4. Greater socioeconomic polarisation

- Focus on wealth creation, rather than distribution
- Failures of trickle-down (jobs)
- Divert scarce municipal funds
- Create high-end consumption-based spaces
- Resident responses: cynicism, exclusion?
5. Greater Spatial Polarisation

• ‘Two Speed Revitalisation’

• Site Specific, focus on areas of highest return (city centres, waterfronts)

• Examples: Baltimore, Glasgow

• Flagships as a catalyst for gentrification
Conclusions

• Flagships are necessary to create a new image of a city, and act as a catalyst for further investment.

• Flagships as a regeneration tool cannot adequately address issues of poverty and inequality.
• But what are the views and perspectives of residents towards flagships?

• Do they embrace them or do they feel alienated by them?

• How would these results vary among different socioeconomic groups? In different neighbourhoods?
Questions? Comments?

Email: doucet@geo.uu.nl