

Marketing ethnoscapas as spaces of consumption: 'Banglatown — London's Curry Capital'

Accepted following review: 18th November, 2010



Stephen J. Shaw

is Senior Lecturer at the Cities Institute, London Metropolitan University, where he is Director of TRaC, a centre for research on how urban spaces and public transport can be made more welcoming, safe and accessible for more people. Following a previous career in planning and regeneration, he has published a wide range of books and papers on place marketing and management, mobilities, and urban tourism, especially in disadvantaged urban areas. The paper draws on the author's empirical research comparing town and city management practices in Europe and North America, and the interpretation and delivery of high-level policies at 'street level'.

Abstract This paper considers the showcasing of Chinatowns and other 'ethnic cultural quarters' in cities that are gateways to immigration in North America, the Pacific Rim and Europe. It reviews the historic development of particular streets as commercial and social hubs for ethnic minority communities, as well as 'exotic' attractions for visitors from the majority culture and international tourists. Over the past two decades or so, the policies and programmes of some gateway cities have actively encouraged clusters of ethnic minority businesses to convert older commercial premises into tourist-oriented restaurants, bars, shops and other uses that stimulate an emerging visitor economy. Indeed, some have regarded this as something of a panacea to revitalise selected streetscapes and, more altruistically, to promote social inclusion and 'celebrate' the contribution of ethnic minorities to the life of a globally competitive cosmopolis. Evidence from the UK, however, suggests the rhetoric of national policy to combine the economic regeneration and social objectives of such initiatives may be far from straightforward to implement. The re-imagining of Brick Lane in London's East End as 'Banglatown' is used to illustrate the formulation of broad policy intentions since the mid-1990s, and to highlight the unintended consequences of an influx of affluent and somewhat hedonistic visitors from the majority culture into a low-income and ethnically diverse neighbourhood. Acknowledging the harsher economic climate of the early 2010s, the author argues that urban authorities must intervene with sensitivity to the views and likely impact upon such 'host' communities, as well as the longer-term commercial viability of an emerging visitor economy.

Keywords: *immigration and settlement, inter-racial tensions, leisure and tourism-led regeneration, public engagement, urban design, unintended consequences*

INTRODUCTION

In many large cities that are gateways to immigration, localities associated with ethnic minorities are signposted and promoted as Chinatowns, Greektowns, Little Indias, Little Italies, Turkish Quarters, Latin Quarters, and so on. Inner-city areas whose very names were once associated

with the poverty of immigrant communities, and in some cases violent inter-racial conflict, have been re-imagined for 21st century consumption. Place marketing has thus been developed and applied to the micro-scale of commercial streets in ethnic minority neighbourhoods — especially those that are accessible to

Stephen J. Shaw
London Metropolitan
University
Stapleton House,
277/281 Holloway Road,
London N7 8H, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 7133 3362;
e-mail:
s.shaw@londonmet.ac.uk

Central Business Districts and entertainment areas — to reposition them as desirable destinations for leisure and tourism. Members of the majority culture and international tourists are encouraged to savour ethnic cuisine with menus adapted to their tastes. Other elements may include street markets, shops that sell clothing, jewellery, spices and herbal medicine, along with cafés, bars and nightclubs. Typically, these are presented against a colourful backdrop of neon lights and exotic signage, banners, ornamental gates and other street decorations.

Some inner city and inner suburban areas have accommodated newcomers for many years and have remarkable, but often painful, histories of settlement and adaptation. In many cases, their commercial strips and enclaves have served successive waves of people from distant countries, and continue to serve co-ethnic and other local residents with food and other products. Some are visited by members of a community that has long dispersed, but which maintains its contacts through family gatherings, festivals and other events. Other visitors search for ethnic cuisine or more hedonistic attractions in an exotic setting. The streetscape is represented and promoted to audiences beyond the immediate locality, which may include higher-spending cultural, business and short-break tourists. A visitor economy, serving some or all of these diverse markets, can generate wealth and job opportunities. Further, it is argued that the 'showcasing' of such areas will draw attention to the creative and artistic as well as economic contributions of immigrants to the city as whole, reinforcing messages of tolerance and inter-culturalism, defined by Wood and Landry¹ as the 'capacity to recognise and engage with cultures other than one's own', and by Sandercock² as an ability to live 'alongside others who are different, learning from them'.

In some gateway cities of the developed

world, supportive policies and programmes have enabled such localities to become conspicuous attractions, and many feature in mainstream tourist guides. As demonstrated in the examples discussed below, interventions by particular urban authorities over the past twenty years or so have helped promote ethnic minority firms, cultural venues and events that capitalise on their appeal to visitors. For many cities, this represents a comparatively recent turn, and there still are still considerable differences of approach, not only between different countries, but also within metropolitan areas, where local municipalities have different priorities. Nevertheless, in various ways, local authorities across the world are nurturing emerging visitor economies and helping to promote them, not only acknowledging, but 'celebrating' their historic and contemporary significance as commercial and cultural assets to the city as a whole.

The paper examines the changing perceptions of minority neighbourhoods by the majority culture in North American cities since the 19th century. This leads to a critical examination of contemporary developments in the Pacific Rim and Europe. The paper argues that, by the late 1990s, competitive place marketing from North America had become deeply embedded in the practices of local authorities in the UK. From 1997, however, they were required to reconcile this entrepreneurial approach to securing local economic benefits with aspirations to develop social cohesion, inclusion and wider participation. In more recent times, there has been an increasing acceptance that the 'success' of an image-led renaissance may well have undesirable consequences for the very communities that were supposed to benefit most from regeneration. The author's longitudinal study of Brick Lane in historic Spitalfields, adjacent to the City of London, and its controversial representation as 'Banglatown — London's Curry Capital'

from the mid-1990 — is used to illustrate the gap which can develop between the intentions of public policy and implementation, especially the unforeseen effects on residents and other local stakeholders at street level. The author reflects on the changing response of urban governance in this case, and on the broader implications and challenges for sustainable development of ethnic cultural quarters in anticipation of difficult years to come for many local authorities in the UK and elsewhere.

RE-IMAGING OF ETHNOSCAPES IN NORTH AMERICA AND OTHER CONTINENTS

Immigrants adapt as well adapt *to* their new urban environments in gateway cities. Arjun Appadurai,³ social anthropologist and influential commentator on globalisation, describes the physical form of such adaptations in the contemporary city as ‘ethnoscapes’: the landscapes of those who ‘constitute the shifting world in which we live’. Where regulations allow, immigrants may recreate the architecture of former homelands, most notably in places of worship and buildings that accommodate community life. In general, the gaze of members of the majority culture has been ambivalent. On the one hand, negative racial and racist stereotypes have been mapped onto places portrayed with suspicion as the locus of alien communities, squalor and unwholesome activities. On the other hand, they have been gazed upon with fascination as exotic cityscapes that offer possibilities for ‘urban ethnic tourism’. Minority entrepreneurs have responded to this more positive construct, especially through restaurants.

Historical evidence suggests that the phenomenon of urban ethnic tourism in North America has its origins as early as the mid-19th century in New York and Chicago, where it became fashionable, especially among ‘bohemian’ middle class

WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants), to ‘go rubbernecking’ or ‘slumming’ in Chinatown and other non-WASP areas.^{4,5} To many others of the majority culture, however, low-rent minority neighbourhoods were places to avoid. As Lin⁶ observes, Chinatowns, Mexican barrios, Jewish and African-American ‘ghettos’ — along with settlements of other minorities such as Southern Europeans — were commonly regarded as features of an unstable ‘zone-in-transition’.⁷ Their place names often expressed the marginalisation of impoverished minorities, eg in Los Angeles: Sonora ‘Dogtown’ and Calle de los Negros.⁸ In the 1950s and 1960s, as cities such as Philadelphia sought to modernise their downtown areas, low-rent districts were bulldozed to make way for large-scale redevelopment or isolated by urban freeways.⁹

As the Civil Rights and urban social movements gathered more broad-based support, such wholesale clearance was resisted, albeit with varying success. By the 1976 Bicentennial, more inclusive attitudes prevailed, at least at Federal level, and ‘ethnic heritage recovery’ included symbolic renovation of landmark buildings and the founding of museums which highlighted the valuable contribution of immigrant communities to the American metropolis, eg the Chinatown History Museum, the Eldridge Street Synagogue and Lower Eastside Tenement Museum in New York. By the 1990s, area-based renovation, preservation and promotion of streetscapes associated with particular minorities had become an established approach to downtown revitalisation of US cities. Indeed, Judd’s¹⁰ discussion of developments in urban tourism raised criticisms of formulaic revitalisation of Disneyfied Latin Quarters such as Detroit’s Greektown: ‘a two-block-square renovated district . . . [that] is an island in a sea of decay’. The description echoes Urry’s¹¹ characterisation of urban ‘tourist bubbles’,

islands of affluence sharply differentiated from the surrounding inner cityscape.

Changing perceptions of ethnoscapas can also be traced in Canada. Anderson¹² documents the racialised construct of Vancouver's Chinatown by the mainly British settlers from the 1870s through to the Depression years as a place of poverty and disease with a reputation for gambling and opium dens. By the mid-1930s, however, restaurateurs in Vancouver's Little Orient were welcoming a rising trade from non-Chinese customers. In the 1960s, Vancouver's Chinatown resisted plans for an eight-lane elevated freeway, and the area is now a must-see attraction for visiting cruise passengers. Toronto's downtown Chinatown also survived post-war reconstruction, and the inner suburban streets of Greektown on Danforth are identified by Greek signage, its public spaces beautified by classical statues and other public art. As in the US, however, critics highlight anomalies between the presentation and present-day reality in some cases. 'Little Italy' was Toronto's main Via Italia in the first half of the 20th century, but by 2001 Italian-speaking residents had declined to fewer than 10 per cent. Streetscaping created an Italianesque ambience which benefited restaurant owners, but as a reporter for the *Toronto Star* wryly observes '[m]ainly, what's left is Little Italy the brand name, the trademark, the logo, the ethnic "swoosh". Very Little Italy.'¹³

In metropolitan centres of North America, Chinatowns and other ethnic cultural quarters now feature prominently in city guides and tourist brochures. Although these, especially in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, are the most widely known to global audiences, the phenomenon has its counterparts in other world regions. A notable example is Sydney in Australia. Like Toronto, it was a city where the majority of immigrants were of British origin until recent decades.

Today, Sydney's minority neighbourhoods or precincts include Little Vietnam, Little Turkey, Little Italy as well as the downtown Chinatown.¹⁴ Elsewhere in the Pacific Rim, a street in Osaka has been given a Korean theme for Japanese shoppers.¹⁵ And in post-colonial Singapore, historic enclaves — especially Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam — have been renovated and marketed to appeal to tourists.¹⁶ Commercial centres that developed to serve the everyday needs of immigrants from former colonies are promoted to visitors in European cities that were formerly hubs of Empire, including London, Paris, Brussels, Antwerp, Amsterdam and Lisbon, as is Kreuzberg in Berlin, where Turkish guest workers were encouraged to settle.

In British cities, a few minority enclaves existed in the 19th century, eg Chinatown in Limehouse, Port of London. It was not until the 1950s and 1960s, however, that the UK Government encouraged large-scale immigration from former colonies to satisfy labour shortages. In Birmingham — former 'Workshop of the World' — inter-racial tensions resurfaced periodically.¹⁷ Nevertheless, as Henry *et al.*¹⁸ demonstrate, post-colonial, post-industrial Birmingham now capitalises on its ethnic diversity, eg British Bhangra music and dance, and cuisine that features the Birmingham Balti, and halal Chinese. In London's East End during the 1970s, neo-fascist groups opposed to immigration regularly came to Brick Lane, Spitalfields, to intimidate its Bangladeshi population, as in Southall — a West London suburb where many people from the Punjab had settled. By 2000, however, the commercial streets of both areas were attracting more welcome visitors from the majority culture. The case below is used to illustrate the potential of place marketing to re-image a troubled inner city area, a transformation which, in this case of Brick Lane coincided with the election of a new government whose polices espoused

new, more socially oriented approaches to regeneration and renewal.

ETHNOSCAPES AND ‘THIRD WAY’ REGENERATION IN THE UK, 1997–2010

In the UK, three New Labour Governments between 1997 and 2010 followed nearly 20 years during which the spirit of urban competitiveness had been instilled into UK local authorities. Since the early 1980s, they had been encouraged to remove barriers to business-led regeneration. It was also expected that they would become more entrepreneurial in their own right. As Ashworth and Voogt¹⁹ observed, the idea that cities — and areas within cities — should compete with one another reflected a liberal, free market approach to place marketing that was difficult to square with the more hierarchical and interventionist systems of regional/urban planning that had prevailed in Europe. Nevertheless, in the UK many urban areas had experienced rapid de-industrialisation and rising unemployment, with little prospect of government intervention to stem further loss. If they wanted to attract/retain investors, developers, high-income residents, visitors and other desirable target groups, they had little choice but to develop strategies of self-promotion more typical of their North American counterparts.²⁰ In this context, strategies to develop niche markets in leisure and tourism were incorporated into local economic development programmes.

Local authorities were also required to compete for central government grants through ‘City Challenge’ and, from 1994, the ‘Single Regeneration Budget’ (SRB), the funding regime that nurtured the emerging visitor economy in Brick Lane and other areas fringing the City of London discussed below. They had to make a convincing case which concurred with the UK Government’s emphasis on ‘self-help’. Further, they had to enlist

support from diverse agencies, such as developers, landowners, banks, hotels, trainers, cultural and community groups. If successful, a small-area programme would be set up, typically for five years. In areas of recent immigration and settlement, the acumen of minority entrepreneurs and their contribution to ‘cosmopolitan’ tourism provided a compelling storyline of ‘globalisation from below’ which many interest groups and political factions could support in cities such as Bradford, Liverpool, Birmingham and London.^{21,22}

From 1997, the New Labour Government was keen to promote its ‘Third Way’ agenda which promised to steer a middle course between excessive statism, on the one hand, and *laissez faire* capitalism, on the other.²³ For their part, local authorities were expected to cultivate closer relationships with local business, public and ‘third sector’ organisations: non-governmental agencies which ‘principally reinvest surpluses in the organisation or the community’.²⁴ Far from being abolished, the SRB continued through to 2007, and the principles of competitive bidding and local collaboration remained key features. There was, however, a new emphasis on meeting social objectives — social cohesion, inclusion and wider participation — as well as those concerned with economic and physical regeneration.

The development of upscale leisure and tourism consumption in low-income, ethnic minority neighbourhoods has particular sensitivities. The aspiration to combine strategies for economic competitiveness supported by place marketing with inclusive regeneration and community engagement raises some important issues. The final section of this paper considers the following questions with reference to Brick Lane in the historic area of Spitalfields in London’s East End:

- Why was Brick Lane rebranded as Banglatown, and what benefits were anticipated?

- How did urban governance facilitate inclusion and participation in proposals to accommodate the emerging visitor economy?

As Yin²⁵ observes, the use of case studies has a distinct advantage where ‘a “why” or “how” question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control’. Case studies allow investigation of a ‘contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used’ (p. 23).

In this study, the phenomenon is the re-imagining of cityscapes associated with ethnic and cultural minorities as spaces of consumption; the context is intra-urban place competition and the supportive role of urban governance. The approach adopted in this and other case studies undertaken by the author includes analysis of the regeneration discourse of SRB bid applications, monitoring and review documents, local authority policy and planning statements, interviews with key informants, including managers of regeneration partnerships, senior local government officers and politicians. This is combined with site visits, observations and photography of changing urban landscapes, and consideration of how these are represented in the news media as well as tourist guides. The key findings in the case of Brick Lane over the past decade are summarised below.

BRICK LANE TO ‘BANGLATOWN’: A CONTESTED PLACE-BRAND

Brick Lane — a busy thoroughfare of Spitalfields in London’s East End — has been an important hub of religious, social and commercial activity for successive waves of immigrants for over three centuries. These included Protestant

Huguenot ‘refugees’ from France from the late 1600s, whose silk merchants built fine townhouses, and at the turn of the 20th century many Jewish immigrants arrived from Russia and Poland. The streetscape of Spitalfields reminds the onlooker of the area’s long history of immigration and settlement (Figures 1a and 1b). Over the past 30–40 years, it has accommodated London’s largest concentration of people originating from Bangladesh, one of the UK’s poorest minorities. Initially, many found work in the area’s long-established textile industry, but the ‘rag trade’ was unable to keep up with global competition, and unemployment rose to new heights. Unfortunately, the street became the scene of periodic intimidation by race-hate groups, and ugly images of confrontations were communicated widely by the news media. Somewhat against the odds, a small cluster of cafés began to welcome a rising trade in customers from the majority culture. Bangladeshi landlords converted run-down commercial buildings into restaurants, initiating a reorientation of the local economy in the 1990s. And, as a new influx of artists and designers came to live and work in Spitalfields, Brick Lane gained a counter-cultural reputation which appealed to many young urban professionals.

Acknowledging these trends, in the mid-1990s London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) began to consider the potential of leisure and tourism to stimulate economic and physical regeneration. Together with two adjacent inner-city local authorities, city institutions, educational and voluntary agencies, it joined a partnership led by the City of London Corporation.^{26–28} Known as the ‘City Fringe Partnership’ (CFP), the consortium successfully applied for funding under SRB3 ‘Building Business’ for proposals that included promotion of Brick Lane. Thus, in 1997, it was designated as one of three ‘Developing Cultural Quarters’:



Figures 1a and 1b: The streetscape of Spitalfields reminds the onlooker of the area's long history of immigration and settlement (photos: author)

'These cultural areas, unique to the capital and on the doorstep of the City, will be developed to provide a resource for tourists as well as employees and business visitors, helping to enhance the City's reputation as the premier European business location.'²⁹

The policy rationale for CFP emphasised the benefits of wealth creation, jobs and streetscape improvements. Mindful of perceptions of Brick Lane as the locus of inter-racial conflict in the recent past, the narrative of place marketing would accentuate the positive, especially the contribution of immigrants to the life of the capital, both historic and contemporary:

'[T]he cultural diversity and strong entrepreneurial culture have produced a strong base in leisure facilities, entertainment and the arts all within a short walk of the City. On offer is an array of restaurants, including the well-known tourist attraction Brick Lane, ethnic shops and thriving markets ...'³⁰

This image-led regeneration of the street was given a further boost by 'Cityside', another SRB carried out in parallel with CFP 1997–2002. Led by LBTH, its aim was to 'strengthen links with the City and encourage diversification of the local economy', and £1m was allocated to 'Raising the Profile'.³¹ Thus, place marketing would support streetscape enhancement, eg Eastern-style gateways, signage and brighter streetlights, the design of which incorporated 'Asian' motifs. At its southern entrance, the main approach from the City, it was important to ensure that affluent visitors would feel safe as well as welcome, especially after dark.

Shortly after its inception, Cityside set up a 'Town Management' group whose remit included the promotion of two festivals, Baishakhi Mela (spring) and the Brick Lane and Curry Festival (autumn), and it was through this forum that

'Banglatown' was developed as the place brand. Initially, the *Evening Standard* newspaper ran a critical campaign against 'renaming' Brick Lane. But, in time, the media came to use it as a neutral place descriptor. Andrew Bramidge, Director of Cityside, reflected on this gradual acceptance:

'The *Evening Standard* ran what I thought was quite a scurrilous campaign against Banglatown. They had all sorts ridiculous stories about taxi drivers getting lost ... It was just ludicrous, they were just using that to mock the whole concept. It's interesting now that papers like the *Evening Standard* and *Time Out* use the term just as a matter of fact now. There doesn't seem to be any connotations to it any more.'³²

In practice, the attraction of Asian cuisine greatly exceeded expectations (Figures 2a and 2b). As the number of restaurants with similar menus multiplied, however, the intensity of on-street canvassing by waiters began to suggest over-supply. Facilitated by LBTH Planning Committee's decision to permit conversion of local shops to restaurants in the central section of Brick Lane,³³ a survey carried out for Cityside reviewed the spectacular growth. In 1989, there were only eight cafés/restaurants in Brick Lane. Between 1997 and 2002, this rose to 41, making Banglatown 'home to the largest cluster of Bangladeshi/"Indian" restaurants anywhere in the UK'.³⁴ All reported that their clientele was 'overwhelmingly White', with a clear majority (70 per cent) in the 25–34 age group, and predominantly male.³⁵ By now, the restaurants employed around 400 staff. Further, conversion of part of a former brewery into bars and night clubs enhanced the leisure offering and expanded the evening economy. Despite the mixed reception for the Banglatown brand, some traders wanted to create an even more striking environment with brightly coloured paving and street furniture.



Figures 2a and 2b: The attraction of Asian cuisine greatly exceeded expectations (photos: author)

The combination of economic and social goals harmonised well with the New Labour Government's Third Way agenda outlined above, a discourse that promised business-led regeneration combined with a new emphasis on social justice and capacity building. The decision to broaden participation in the Banglatown project, however, was in response to tensions that erupted into an unanticipated and heated conflict over a scheme that was presented as beneficial to everyone. In 2000, the economic arguments for expansion of the visitor economy prevailed, and it was acknowledged that the volume of through traffic was the major constraint. In response, an 'Environmental Improvement Area' scheme was prepared jointly by LBTH and Cityside. A vehicle-free environment would attract more visitors, and provide a more pleasant environment for residents. Consultants were appointed to draw up a detailed scheme. It soon became apparent, however, that support was far from universal. The proposal was strongly supported by a group of restaurateurs, who envisaged new opportunities for alfresco dining. Understandably, other firms, such as retailers and textile wholesalers, opposed the exclusion of goods vehicles for collection/delivery of stock. Many residents also voiced their objections to any further expansion of bars, night clubs and restaurants, or late-night extension of their licences.

A stormy public meeting early in 2000 in the town hall required police attendance. In the aftermath, the consultants persuaded their client that permanent closure of the street would be undesirable and unworkable. Moreover, the diverse local communities that lived, worked, owned businesses, shopped, socialised, worshipped and enjoyed their leisure time in Brick Lane must be actively involved in scheme design. The LBTH officers expressed concern over the wider Banglatown project. There were

criticisms that, far from narrowing the gap, spatial inequalities had widened, and there was evidence of conflict over the use of public space. Council Planning Officer Andrea Ritchie reported that in a focus group:

'Older Bengali women stressed the point that they had to be escorted by their husbands and that they could not walk along Brick Lane at all because there are just too many men there, with all the visitors and [restaurant] staff. So, although it is their area, they are socially excluded from it.'³⁶

By 2001, Baishakhi Mela was attracting 60,000, and the festival was being promoted as a multicultural spectacle but, as Eade³⁷ noted, its representation to visitors of other cultures was controversial. Although supported by secular communities, some Muslims frowned upon music and dancing, and there were particular sensitivities around places of worship on Fridays. The influential Imam of East London Mosque condemned the festival as an un-Islamic event that would lead young Bangladeshis astray.

The programme of participation sponsored by LBTH and Cityside between 2000 and 2002 provided a more balanced representation of local opinions than had previously been obtained. Those who took part in the questionnaire surveys, interviews, focus groups and 'drop-in' sessions included residents from the socially/ethnically diverse neighbourhoods around Brick Lane, restaurants and other businesses, community organisations, police and other public services, as well as visitors.³⁸ As anticipated, there was a wide diversity of opinion. Nevertheless, when funding became available from Transport for London, the scheme implemented from 2002 to 2006 was guided by broad agreement over design solutions to minimise conflicts between pedestrians and traffic, bars/restaurants and other firms, visitors and local residents. Thus, wider

consultation informed a revised scheme to accommodate the multiple uses and users of the street (Figure 3). It was also accepted that Banglatown's image would be reflected through public art and non-permanent features such as street decorations, rather than through permanent, territorial expressions of ethnic identity. Richard Simon, the urban design consultant who oversaw this work, reflected on the significance of the public engagement and the issues that participants drew to their attention, especially in the calmer atmosphere of focus groups and drop-in session held in a vacant shop:

'There were definite concerns that . . . it would become a sort of Bengali ghetto. Furthermore, the Bengali community is tending to migrate away from Brick Lane to other places — there's a population shift over towards Green St and further out into Newham. So people weren't necessarily

saying this is the heart of the Bengali community in London . . . We felt that you could create a Banglatown identity without the obvious use of permanent features such as brightly coloured paving and highways. You could do it through more subtle means like gateway markers and public art, which can, if the area changes over a period of time, be changed. And we felt that this was a more long-term sustainable view.'³⁹

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

To summarise, Brick Lane illustrates the role of ethnic minority entrepreneurs as prime movers of regeneration. Without public intervention, however, restaurateurs and other traders would have found it difficult to develop and promote their inner city location to higher-spending visitors. The local authority was keen to pump prime the emerging visitor economy, which they identified as a viable alternative to a manufacturing industry that was no



Figure 3: Wider consultation informed a revised scheme to accommodate the multiple uses and users of the street (photo: author)

longer able to compete in global markets, and LBTH formed alliances with commercial, public and third-sector partners who successfully attracted government grants. In accordance with the performance indicators required for SRB3, the main emphasis was on economic and physical regeneration. Re-imaging was considered an important element of the strategy and, through the City Fringe Partnership, positive connections with the 'hidden' heritage of immigration and the contemporary culture of the Bangladeshi community would be promoted to attract target audiences. Cityside allocated further resources between 1997 and 2002,⁴⁰ combining place marketing with infrastructure and streetscape improvements.

As the final audit of the impact of Cityside confirmed, the SRB3 targets were fully achieved for business start-ups, jobs created and safeguarded, and amount of new workspace created.⁴¹ Both programmes were further justified with reference to less measurable benefits that would accrue, not only to the disadvantaged area concerned, but also to London as a whole. It was anticipated that the latter would include spatial redistribution of tourism, diversification of the capital's tourism offering and enhancement of an 'exciting and vibrant multicultural city'.⁴² From 1997, New Labour's imperatives of social inclusion and wider participation established a new context for Brick Lane, in 2000, the proposal to pedestrianise the Restaurant Zone was presented as a scheme that would improve the public realm for local people and visitors alike. The hostile response of residents from Spitalfields' diverse communities, however, revealed wider anxieties that the Banglatown brand would become, like Chinatown in London's West End, a permanent and somewhat crudely drawn marker of a single ethnic identity.

The transformative effects of

'Banglatown' produced economic benefits of wealth creation, jobs and investment in the built environment. The early 2000s, however, brought greater awareness that these positive effects would have to be weighed against more prosaic but problematic social and environmental consequences, especially for low-income residents and other local stakeholders for whom an urban visitor economy may be something of a mixed blessing. Unintended outcomes included:

- (a) loss of local convenience shops and displacement of minority residents from public spaces as a visitor economy expanded rapidly, with restaurants, bars and night clubs for an affluent and mainly young white clientele
- (b) inappropriate juxtaposition of land uses and activities, notably licensed premises and a 'secular' street festival held near to a mosque, as well as parking/loading problems for other established businesses,
- (c) noise and nuisance associated with the evening economy, and more sinister and illegal trade in drugs and prostitution in back streets and at entrances to social housing estates.

CONCLUSION

The rethinking of the strategy to revitalise Brick Lane reflects a more considered approach which respects its symbolic function as a commercial and social centre for ethnic minority communities, as well as a high profile location for dining and late-night entertainment. The case study suggests that sustainability includes the acceptability of a brand projected through place marketing to external audiences and to the host communities. The re-imaging of Brick Lane has been remarkable. The shabby-chic of its 'Dickensian' East End streetscape now features in most mainstream tourist guides to London. By 2004, the Brick Lane Festival was warmly

endorsed, not only by the Mayor of London, but also by the Prime Minister, who praised its contribution to 'a truly inclusive Britain that takes pride in its diversity'.⁴³ There is a very real danger, however, that formulaic marketing of minority neighbourhoods will reinforce rather than challenge stereotypes, freeze-framing and romanticising an unrealistic ethnic geography that will soon become an unconvincing fiction: a 'racialized construct tuned to multicultural consumption',⁴⁴ and a far cry from Wood and Landry's⁴⁵ principles for an inter-cultural city.

In the UK, local authorities have significant scope to intervene through their powers as Local Planning Authorities, and for highways and the public realm. Legal controls over licensed premises and policing practices are also important for regulating an expanding evening economy. Informed by public engagement with a broad range of local residents, public agencies, businesses and community organisations, local authorities may formulate area-based initiatives to facilitate sustainable development of an emerging visitor economy so that the ethnic cultural quarter is better integrated with the surrounding area. If these 'smaller' voices are ignored, there is a strong possibility that expansion will be influenced and driven by more powerful and well-connected local entrepreneurs to secure a competitive advantage. The outcomes might well be detrimental to residents and others, including those who are the intended beneficiaries of regeneration strategies.

The evidence above suggests that, over the last decade, urban authorities have been far less inclined to hard-brand ethnic cultural quarters with somewhat stereotypical territorial symbolism: the established 'Chinatown model'. The reasons for this may be pragmatic, especially as policy makers seek more cost-effective alternatives to permanent exotic streetscaping and expensive public realm

schemes. Further, at times of actual or threatened terrorism, some minority businesses express concern that, although unconnected, overt ethnic branding deters some visitors, especially where it is perceived as 'Islamic'.⁴⁶ A shift towards more subtle, 'softer' branding may be more acceptable to local communities than the old model, and more credible to visitors. The sustainability of an emerging visitor economy, however, especially in a disadvantaged ethnic minority neighbourhood, will depend upon the effectiveness of interventions that have the broad support of 'host communities' to regulate less socially desirable outcomes, with an appropriate mix of land-use planning, regulation of traffic and parking, and licensing of bars, restaurants and late-night entertainment venues.

The acceptability to urban policy makers of more consultative and interventionist approaches to the development of ethnic cultural quarters is, however, far from certain. For gateway cities in most of the developed world, the aftermath of the credit squeeze and global economic downturn of 2008 created a very different environment from the previous years of growth, which encouraged immigration and a vibrant cosmopolitanism that was viewed positively by many national governments and cities. In the UK, since May 2010, the Conservative–Liberal Democrat Coalition Government has established a very different policy agenda, with an overarching emphasis on 'shrinking the state', 'the big society' and a 'new localism'. Finance for local authority initiatives will be in even shorter supply, property markets will remain sluggish, and unemployment seems likely to rise.

In this context, it is anticipated that inter- and intra-urban competition for scarce inward investment and high-income residents as well as visitors will intensify. The ideology of neoliberal city governments around the world will favour

less intervention in the urban economy, rather than more; cities will encourage further downloading of responsibilities from the local state to private and third-sector organisations. Under these harsher conditions, local authorities will be under pressure to facilitate 'quick fix' solutions, and an urban visitor economy is still regarded by many as benign and something of a cure-all. Nevertheless, the lessons from the cases discussed above should not be forgotten or underplayed. The author would welcome comments from practitioners and researchers on scenarios for the years to come.

Notes and References

- Wood, P. and Landry, C. (2008), 'The intercultural city: Planning for diversity advantage', Earthscan, London, p. 93.
- Sandercock, L. (2006), 'Cosmopolitan urbanism: a love song to our mongrel cities', in Binnie, J., Holloway, J., Millington, S. and Young, C. (eds) 'Cosmopolitan urbanism', Routledge, London, pp. 37–38.
- Appadurai, A. (1997), 'Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalisation', University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, pp. 32–33.
- Cocks, S. (2001), 'Doing the town: the rise of urban tourism in the United States', University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Gilbert, D. and Hancock, C. (2006), 'New York City and the transatlantic imagination, French and English tourism and the spectacle of the modern metropolis, 1893–1939', *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 33, pp. 77–107.
- Lin, J. (1998), 'Globalization and the revalorizing of ethnic places in immigration gateway cities', *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 313–339.
- Burgess, E. (1925), 'The growth of the city: An introduction to a research project', in Park, R.E., Burgess, E. and Mckenzie, R. (eds) 'The city', University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 47–62 [republished 1967].
- Pearlstone, Z. (1990), 'Ethnic Los Angeles', Hillcrest, Los Angeles, p. 72.
- Guan, J. (2002), 'Ethnic consciousness arises on facing spatial threats to Philadelphia's Chinatown', in Erdentug, A. and Colombijn, F. (eds) 'Urban ethnic encounters: The spatial consequences', Routledge, London, pp. 126–141.
- Judd, D. (1999), 'Constructing the tourist bubble', in Judd, D. and Fainstein, S. (eds) 'The tourist city', Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, p. 36.
- Urry, J. (1990), 'The tourist gaze: Leisure and travel in contemporary societies', Sage, London, p. 8.
- Anderson, K. (1995), 'Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial discourse in Canada, 1875–1980', McGill–Queen's University Press, Montreal.
- Taylor, B. (2003), 'Little Italy — Very little Italy, As other neighbourhoods burn out, College St. Refuses to fade away', *Toronto Star*, 2nd June, quoted in Hackworth, J. and Rekers, J. (2005), 'Ethnic packaging and gentrification: The case of four neighbourhoods in Toronto', *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 211–266.
- Collins, J. and Kunz, P. (2007), 'Ethnic entrepreneurs, ethnic precincts and tourism: The case of Sydney Australia', in Richards, G. and Wilson, J. (eds) 'Tourism, creativity and development', Routledge, London, pp. 201–214.
- Hester, J. (2002), 'Repackaging difference: The Korean "theming" of a shopping street in Osaka, Japan', in Erdentug, A. and Colombijn, F. (eds) 'Urban ethnic encounters: The spatial consequences', Routledge, London, pp. 177–191.
- Henderson, J. (2008), 'Managing urban ethnic heritage: Little India in Singapore', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp. 332–346.
- Rex, J. and Moore, R. (1967), 'Race, community and conflict: A study of Sparkbrook', Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Henry, N., McEwan, C. and Pollard, J.S. (2002), 'Globalisation from below: Birmingham — postcolonial workshop of the world?' *Area*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 117–127.
- Ashworth, G. and Voogt, H. (1994), 'Marketing and place promotion', in Gold, J. and Ward, S. (eds) 'Place promotion: The use of publicity and marketing to sell towns and regions', Wiley, Chichester, pp. 39–52.
- Ward, S. (1998), 'Selling places: The marketing and selling of towns and cities 1850–2000', Spon, London.
- Shaw, S., Bagwell, S. and Karmowska, J. (2004), 'Ethnoscapes as spectacle: Reimagining multicultural districts as new destinations for leisure and tourism consumption', *Urban Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 10, pp. 1983–2000.
- Ref. 18 above.
- Giddens, A. (2000), 'The third way and its critics', Polity Press, Cambridge.
- HM Treasury, Department of Trade and Industry and Home Office (2005), 'Exploring the role of the third sector in public service reform', The Stationery Office, London, p. 7, available at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/3/E/vcs_thirdsector210205.pdf
- Yin, R. (2003), 'Case study research: Design and methods', 3rd edn, Sage, Beverly Hills, p. 20.
- Shaw, S. and Macleod N. (2000), 'Creativity and conflict: Cultural tourism in London's city fringe', *Tourism, Culture and Communication*, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 165–175.
- Shaw, S. and Karmowska, J. (2004), 'Multicultural heritage of European cities and its re-presentation through regeneration programmes', *Journal of European Ethnology*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 41–56.
- Shaw, S. (2007), 'Cosmopolitanism and ethnic cultural quarters', in Richards, G. and Wilson, J. (eds) 'Tourism, creativity and development', Routledge, London, pp. 189–200.

29. City Corporation (1996), 'Revitalising the city fringe: Inner city action with a world city focus', City Corporation, London.
30. Ref. 29 above, pp. 5–6 NB: the City Fringe and Cityside SRB regeneration programmes overlapped geographically in Spitalfields, and ran concurrently over the period 1997–2002; the latter was named 'Eastside' in the bid document (1966), but in 1997 it was renamed 'Cityside'.
31. LB Tower Hamlets (1996), 'Eastside Challenge Fund Submission', LB Tower Hamlets. [NB 'Eastside' was subsequently changed 'Cityside'.]
32. Personal interview with author, 7th October, 2002, Spitalfields, London.
33. LB Tower Hamlets (1999), 'Brick Lane Retail and Restaurant Policy Review', 1st March, LB Tower Hamlets.
34. Carey, S. (2002), 'Brick Lane, Banglatown: A study of the catering sector, final report', Research Works Limited, Hendon, London, prepared for Ethnic Minority Enterprise Project and Cityside Regeneration, p. 12.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
36. Personal interview with author, Council Offices, LB Tower Hamlets, 27th September, 2002.
37. Eade, J. (2006), 'Class and ethnicity in a globalising city: Bangladeshis and contested urban space in London's "East End"', in Arvaston, G. and Butler, T. (eds) 'Multicultures and cities', Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, pp. 57–69.
38. Shaw, S. (2008), 'Hosting a sustainable visitor economy: Messages from London's Banglatown', *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 275–285.
39. Personal interview, Clerkenwell, London, 9th June, 2008.
40. According to Cityside (2002), 'SRB3 final report', Cityside Regeneration, London, £1,053,000 was spent on Raising the Profile from a total budget of £11.4m over the five years from 1997, p. 10.
41. Cityside, Ref. 40 above.
42. LB Tower Hamlets (1996), 'Eastside Challenge Fund Submission, Theme 3 Releasing the Visitor Economy', LB Tower Hamlets, London, p. 1. [NB 'Eastside' was subsequently changed to 'Cityside'.]
43. Brick Lane Festival (2004), 'Official guide', Ethnic Minority Enterprise Project, London, p. 2.
44. Jacobs, J. M. (1996), 'Edge of empire: Postcolonialism and the city', Routledge, London, p. 100.
45. Ref. 1 above.
46. Carey S. and Ahmed, N. (2006), 'Bridging the gap: The London Olympics 2012 and South Asian-owned businesses in Brick Lane and Green Street', The Young Foundation and Agroni Research, London.