

CHARLOTTE WERTHER

## Rebranding Britain: Cool Britannia, the Millennium Dome and the 2012 Olympics<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The last fifteen years have seen the emergence of nation branding as an area of study. One of the leading figures in this development has been Simon Anholt, who, in his own words, first used the phrase ‘nation brand’ in 1996,<sup>2</sup> and developed an index<sup>3</sup> that ranks the strength of nations’ images or brands on the basis of six dimensions. Much debated has been the issue of whether it makes sense *and* is at all feasible to engage in the process of turning around the image of a nation as is suggested by the term nation branding.<sup>4</sup> In his recent book Anholt even states that “there is no such thing as ‘nation branding’”, and that “[i]t’s only when people start talking about *branding* rather than just *brand* that the problems start”.<sup>5</sup> So what seems to have become more generally agreed is that whether it wants to or not, “a nation’s ‘brand’ exists, with or without any conscious efforts in nation branding, as each country has a certain image to its international audience, be it strong or weak, current or outdated, clear or vague”<sup>6</sup>, whereas *nation branding* as “a quick fix for a weak or negative national image”<sup>7</sup> is illusory.

Anholt has endeavoured to launch the alternative phrase of ‘competitive identity’, and the terms ‘reputation management’ or ‘nation image management’<sup>8</sup> have also been suggested, and Fan ventures the following definition: “Nation branding is a process by which a nation’s images can be created or altered, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed in order to enhance the country’s reputation among a target international audience”.<sup>9</sup> In other words, nation brands or images

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank the anonymous reviewer and Martine Gertsen, Department of Intercultural Communication and Management, Copenhagen Business School for very helpful comments on the first draft of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Anholt, Simon. *Places: Identity, Image and Reputation*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Anholt GfK Roper Nation Brands Index™.

<sup>4</sup> Fan, Ying. “Branding the nation: What is being branded” *Place Branding and public diplomacy*, vol. 4(2) 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Anholt, op.cit. pp. 1 and 4.

<sup>6</sup> Fan, Ying. “Branding the nation: Towards a better understanding” *Place Branding and public diplomacy*, vol. 6(2) 2010. p. 98.

<sup>7</sup> Anholt. op.cit. p.3.

<sup>8</sup> See van Ham, Peter. “Place Branding: The State of the Art” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 616(1) 2008. p. 129 and Fan op.cit. p. 101.

<sup>9</sup> See Anholt, Simon. *Competitive identity: The new brand management for nations, cities and regions*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 and Fan 2010. op.cit. p. 101.

exist and in today's globalised and highly competitive world managing or enhancing such images is widely attempted.

Images aimed at international audiences are evidently in focus, but part of the discussion within the discipline has been the link between international images and the *national identity* or *self-perception* of the nation. It is often stressed that any attempt to manage a nation's image needs to be grounded in reality and resonate with the identity and self-perception of the nation, one reason being the intriguing question of "how to get the populace behind it and make them 'live the brand'".<sup>10</sup> This issue is often referred to as the 'internal' branding aspects of nation branding, just as the population is seen as internal audience or stakeholder.

The rise of nation branding coincided, in Great Britain, with a debate about that very self-perception or identity linked among other things to devolution of political power to a Scottish parliament and a Welsh assembly, and an increasingly multicultural population, especially in London. Was Britain breaking up and was the Britishness, which according to historian Linda Colley<sup>11</sup> developed following the union of England and Scotland in 1707, losing its grip? Did Britishness need re-imagining or re-branding to re-engage the British population?

At the end of the 1990s, books and reports that foresaw the death of Britain and/or called for a renewal of British identity abounded,<sup>12</sup> and politicians and pundits commented on British identity and "the likely nature of Britishness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century", the subject of Linda Colley's 1999 Millennium lecture in no. 10 Downing Street to the Prime Minister and his guests, in which she asked whether "it is possible successfully to re-design and re-float a concept of Britishness for the 21<sup>st</sup> century."<sup>13</sup>

This article looks at three different attempts at re-designing British identity. It aims to discuss (1) to what extent these occasions have allowed Britishness to be re-imagined and the British population to be re-presented to themselves; (2) if presenting homogeneous national identities is at all possible in a world of fragmenting identities; and (3) whether some contexts lend themselves more readily to this type of re-imagining than others. We shall do so by reviewing some of the discussions which took place subsequent to the endeavours to re-brand

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<sup>10</sup> Anholt, Simon. 'Foreword'. *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 9(4-5) 2002. p. 230.

<sup>11</sup> Colley, Linda. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance Marr, Andrew. *The day Britain died*. London: Profile Books, 1999, and Leonard, Mark. *Britain TM: Renewing our identity*. London: Demos, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Colley, Linda. *Britishness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. London, 8 December 1999. Retrieved March 29, 2011, from

<http://tna.europarchive.org/20041108201805/http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page3049.asp>.

Britain's image *and* identity: the Cool Britannia campaign of the early years of the Blair government, which much nation branding literature describes as a failure; the Millennium Dome at the turn of the century, which raises the question of whether national identity is decentred and no longer coherent; and the more recent bid for hosting the Olympic Games in 2012, which has not avoided criticism, but may in the end prove at better context for engaging the population in re-presenting the nation.

### Cool Britannia

The first attempt at (re)presenting and (re)branding Britain - and London - as *modern, young and diverse* by the incoming Labour government was dubbed *Cool Britannia* by the media.<sup>14</sup> The intention was to represent Britain as new, young and creative, just as the Labour Party had been remodelled as *New Labour*. It was based on a 1997 report by the think tank Demos, which argued that, internally, "Britain's identity is in flux", while "[a]round the world (...) Britain's image remains stuck in the past".<sup>15</sup> As can be seen, the report was concerned both with Britain's international brand and with the ongoing discussion of British national identity or "Britishness", the audience of the branding effort evidently being both external and internal.

The report launched six new stories about Britain, one of which was *United colours of Britain*.<sup>16</sup> It described the remarkably diverse ethnic composition of the British population, the presence of most of the world's religions in Britain, the hybrid nature of the English language, regional and local diversity and the many subcultures, and the extraordinary range of British food, stating that "Chicken Tikka is one of Marks and Spencer's biggest exports".<sup>17</sup>

Cool Britannia met with a number of criticisms. The campaign was described as "short-lived", "controversial"<sup>18</sup> and "problematic".<sup>19</sup> Part of the blame was placed with the media, since their "reaction was almost hysterically hostile", which meant that "the campaign died before it could gain any momentum".<sup>20</sup> Another criticism was and is that the 'Cool' image was not sufficiently broad, focusing on Britain as *Creative Island* and home to the new hip creative industries, and although it "may have represented music, fashion and arts industries", it "was

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<sup>14</sup> Dinnie, Keith. *Nation branding: Concepts, issues, practice*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2008. p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> Leonard. op.cit. p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Evidently modelled on the slogan of Italian fashion manufacturer Benetton. The other five stories were: *Hub UK – Britain as the world's crossroads*, *Creative island*, *Open for business*, *Britain as silent revolutionary* and *The nation of fair play*.

<sup>17</sup> Leonard. op.cit. pp. 56-57.

<sup>18</sup> Dinnie. op.cit. pp. 114 and 30.

<sup>19</sup> Quelch, John & Jocz, Katherine. "Positioning the nation-state." *Place Branding*. vol. 1(3) 2005. p. 232.

<sup>20</sup> Dinnie. op.cit. p. 30. See also Quelch & Jocz. op.cit. p. 232.

hardly representative of manufacturing and technology”.<sup>21</sup> According to Quelch and Jocz “[c]ynical media commentators”<sup>22</sup> questioned and ridiculed the whole notion of branding something as complex as a nation and its national identity, and Dinnie blames “insufficient integration of all the stakeholders in the nation-brand.”<sup>23</sup>

Another way of putting the last criticism is that there was too much emphasis on a trendy, modern and cutting-edge image of Britain for it to resonate with the *internal or domestic audience* of the campaign, the British general public. For most of them, Cool Britannia smacked too much of a narrow and essentially London-based Britain that felt remote and completely unrelated to their lives. It apparently was unable to capture a different diversity in Britain – and Weight claims that “above all, it failed to register in Scotland and Wales” since the creative industries of *Creative Britain* “were based almost entirely in the south-east” and “therefore associated in Scotland and Wales with the rich, self-regarding southern elite whom they blamed for their troubles”.<sup>24</sup> In branding terms the campaign failed to convince the internal audience, the British population, let alone to make them ‘live the brand’. The campaign seemingly offended against the advice from some branding experts<sup>25</sup> that nation branding efforts must attempt to be *inclusive*, rather than imposed top-down. If not “[t]he nation brand being promoted may seem ‘foreign’ to the domestic audience.”<sup>26</sup>

The campaign also failed to recognize that established images cannot be changed overnight, especially in ‘an old country’<sup>27</sup> such as Britain, where “it is often harder to unfreeze an existing, perhaps outdated, image and build a new one than to start with a clean slate”.<sup>28</sup> According to Fan, “Cool Britannia failed exactly because it abandoned all those traditional images associated with the country in favour of hippy and trendy images”.<sup>29</sup> Not only was the domestic audience unconvinced of the modernity of Britain, but international audiences were not persuaded either, according to a 1999 British Council survey of international perceptions of Britain, which stated that “[o]n balance people were more inclined to

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<sup>21</sup> Jaffe, Eugene D. & Nebenzahl, Israel D. *National Image & Competitive Advantage*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press, 2006. p. 146. See also Fan, Ying. “Branding the nation: What is being branded?” *Journal of Vacation Marketing*. vol. 12(1) 2006. p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Quelch & Jocz. op.cit. p. 232.

<sup>23</sup> Dinnie. op.cit. p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Weight, Richard. *Patriots: National identity in Britain 1940-2000*. London: Pan Books, 2002. pp. 691-692.

<sup>25</sup> Dinnie. op.cit. p.115.

<sup>26</sup> Fan. 2006. op.cit. p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> To borrow from the title of Wright, Patrick. *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain*. London: Verso, 1985.

<sup>28</sup> Quelch & Jocz. op.cit. p. 232.

<sup>29</sup> Fan. 2006. op.cit. p.10.

think of the UK as a traditional than as a modern society”.<sup>30</sup> Dinnie’s assessment (in 2008) is that “the short-lived ‘Cool Britannia’ campaign may still make some politicians jittery about committing to a nation-branding strategy”.<sup>31</sup> However, on taking office in 1997 the Blair government had not yet become “jittery”, and consequently did not shy away from taking on another project intended to brand the British nation both abroad and to itself. This new scheme was the Millennium Dome.

### Millennium Dome

The Millennium Experience and Exhibition housed in a Dome at Greenwich had originally been devised by John Major’s Conservative government in 1994 to celebrate the millennium and British achievements. Funding was to come from the National Lottery and the project was supervised by Deputy Prime Minister Michael Heseltine, who set out the purpose in 1996, stressing the external branding aspect:

I want millions of visitors to visit the country, share in the festival and go away deeply impressed, much excited by British achievements (...) It is about selling ourselves and our country.<sup>32</sup>

However, the Millennium Experience was also intended to *unite the nation* in celebration as described by the then Heritage Minister, Virginia Bottomley:

We believe there should be a single shared national experience in the year 2000 (...) The Millennium Exhibition will deliver that shared celebration. It will have mass appeal. It will embrace the whole nation.<sup>33</sup>

In 1998, the n/New Labour Prime Minister added to this by reiterating the Dome’s importance for the *domestic audience*, for bringing the (diverse) nation together, and for providing the opportunity to look ahead and imagine Britain’s futures:

It will bring the nation together in common purpose – to make a difference. It will unite the nation. It will be a meeting point of

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<sup>30</sup> British Council. *Through Other Eyes: How the World Sees the United Kingdom*. London: British Council, 1999. Quoted in McGuigan, Jim. A shell for neo-liberalism: New Labour Britain and the Millennium Dome. In Counce, Steven et al. eds. *Relocating Britishness*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004. p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> Dinnie. op.cit. p. 114-115.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted from McGuigan, Jim. “The social construction of a cultural disaster: New Labour’s millennium experience.” *Cultural Studies*. vol. 17(5) 2003. p. 673.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Weight. op.cit. p. 692.

people from all backgrounds (...) It will be a catalyst to imagine our futures.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, Mr. Blair listed five criteria that the project would need to meet: “the content should *inspire* people”, “it should have *national reach*”, “the *management* of the project should be *first rate*”, “[it] should *not call on the public purse*”, and “there should be *a lasting legacy*” (author’s emphasis).<sup>35</sup>

Over and over, including in the preface to the exhibition guide by the Queen, the Millennium Dome was compared and linked to the previous occasions on which British life and national achievements had been on display, the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the Festival of Britain of 1951:

The Millennium Experience, in the same tradition as its predecessors (...) provides a focus for the nation’s celebrations at an important moment in our history, bringing together people from communities throughout the United Kingdom and from many other countries.<sup>36</sup>

Despite all the ambitious aims, in terms of bad press, the Millennium Dome more than outdid Cool Britannia. It was the top news story during 2000<sup>37</sup> and was derided as uninspiring and a cultural disaster, as well as a scandalous waste of public (lottery) money. When, in September 2001, the Prime Minister explained to David Frost what had gone wrong, blame was placed on inadequate management.<sup>38</sup> The project had not met the third of the PM’s criteria, *first-rate management*, and as a consequence, also failed to live up to the fourth criterion, *not calling on the public purse*, since the New Millennium Experience Company repeatedly had to ask for additional funding from the National Lottery.

In fact, the Millennium experience was essentially financed by public money, but entirely in line with New Labour’s policy of public-private partnerships, sponsors were invited in, providing some funding but also, in some cases, leaving major fingerprints on the content and “the loudest say in most of the Dome’s thematic zones”.<sup>39</sup> For these reasons McGuigan describes the Millennium Dome as “a shell of neo-liberalism”, criticizing it for representing - in top-down fashion - “Britain as a nation of corporations instead of a democratic people engaged in debate over their time and place in history”, and concluding that “New Labour’s Millennium Experience, in effect, represented the government’s subordination to the impera-

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<sup>34</sup> Blair, Tony. *Why the Dome is good for Britain*. People’s Palace speech, Royal Festival Hall, 24 February 1998. Quoted in McGuigan. 2003. op.cit. p. 672.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in McGuigan. 2003. op.cit. pp. 672-673.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Weight. op.cit. p. 693.

<sup>37</sup> McGuigan. 2003. op.cit. p. 674.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 675.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 686.



tives of big business at great expense to the public”.<sup>40</sup> A similar criticism by Philips is that “the Dome constructed the British visitor as a consumer” rather than as a citizen.<sup>41</sup>

While visitor numbers failed to meet the projection (yet another reason for the verdict of failure), those visitors who did come generally wanted to “see for themselves” and to have “a good day out” and they were often more generous and approving in their response<sup>42</sup> than might have been expected from the media coverage. Whether they were *inspired*, as had been yet another of the aspirations and success criteria of the Prime Minister, is more difficult to determine, as is the question of whether the Experience had *national reach*. Weight reiterates his criticism of Cool Britannia from the perspective of the non-English nations of Britain, claiming that “[t]he Dome’s most serious failing was that it conveyed no sense of what it meant to be English, Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish” and that “[i]ndications are that most visitors to the Dome were English or foreign”.<sup>43</sup> In other words, the brand was less than *inclusive*.

The so-called ‘Andscape’ (images of over four-hundred items identified as typically British) was part of the Dome’s ‘Self-Portrait’ zone sponsored by Marks & Spencer, and arguably one of the most bottom-up elements in the entire exhibition. It was based on responses to a leaflet with the question: “What one thing best represents something good about Britain to you and why?” and did in fact contain references to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, *and* England outside London such as Dougie McLean (Scottish songwriter), Snowdonia (Wales), The Giant’s Causeway (Northern Ireland) and The Angel of the North (England).<sup>44</sup> However, the argument that Edensor pursues in his discussion of the Andscape is a slightly different one. He claims that national identity has become increasingly mundane and based on the everyday and therefore that “a sense of national belonging is increasingly decentred from authoritative, official versions of culture and identity” and that “national identity is enacted in homely settings as well as at ceremonial sites and memoryscapes”.<sup>45</sup> Thus, ‘Worcester sauce’, ‘socks and sandals’, ‘the weather’ and ‘my cat’ were included in the Andscape along with ‘the royal family’, ‘parliamentary democracy’, ‘war memorials’ and ‘Shakespeare’.

The alleged decentring of national identity at the turn of the millennium makes Weight conclude that “[u]nlike in 1851 or 1951, in 2000 Britishness could no

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted from McGuigan. 2003.op.cit. pp. 687-688. See also McGuigan. 2004. op.cit.

<sup>41</sup> Philips, Deborah. “Stately pleasure domes – nationhood, monarchy and industry: the celebration exhibition in Britain.” *Leisure Studies*. vol. 23(2) 2004. pp. 95-108, p. 107.

<sup>42</sup> McGuigan. 2003. op.cit. p. 686.

<sup>43</sup> Weight. op.cit. pp. 694-695.

<sup>44</sup> Edensor. *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg, 2002. p. 175 ff.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* pp.186 and 189.

longer be presented as a homogeneous national identity”.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Edensor states that

a grand project on a scale such as this is no longer feasible. Whilst previous exhibitions have managed to persuade most visitors that there was *a coherent British national identity*, widely recognizable if not shared by all, such an ambition is no longer possible because national identities are fragmenting (author’s emphasis).<sup>47</sup>

As was the case with Cool Britannia, the Millennium Experience lost the battle of the media, and if it is viewed as yet another exercise in (re)presenting or branding Britain and Britishness to the population, it failed on a number of similar counts and raised similar doubts as to the rationale of engaging in such projects. Why are we doing this? Is it worth the cost? What kind of Britishness is represented and is the entire nation included? We shall try to address these questions on the basis of a review of the most recent branding project, “London 2012”, and argue that staging a mega-event like the Olympics provides a platform for more successful re-imagining of the nation.

London 2012 may not seem immediately comparable to Cool Britannia and the Millennium Dome, since hosting the Olympic Games is very obviously an opportunity to showcase the nation or a major city to an *international* audience. However, for the whole nation to come together in support of the bid, the idea needs to be ‘sold’ to the general public, and in that sense, bidding for, winning and hosting London 2012 can indeed be seen as an instance of *internal branding* and of (re)imagining Britain and Britishness generally and London more specifically.

### **London 2012**

On 6 July 2005, in Singapore, London won the right to host the 2012 Olympic Summer Games. The competition was Madrid, Moscow, New York City and, not least, Paris. The bid was promoted by a team of then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, London’s then mayor, Ken Livingstone, and double Olympic champion, Sebastian (Lord) Coe, who had been appointed bid leader. Also part of the team were a group of multi-ethnic school children and young people from the east end of London, who had been flown in to support the initiative. As early as 2003, when London entered the race to host the Games, the population of London had been invited to ‘Back the Bid’. 1.2 million Londoners had done so and another 10,000 had volunteered to be helpers at the Games,<sup>48</sup> and on the evening of 6 July the victory was celebrated in Trafalgar Square.

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<sup>46</sup> Weight. op.cit. p. 693.

<sup>47</sup> Edensor. op.cit. p. 171.

<sup>48</sup> Newman, Peter. “‘Back the bid’: the 2012 summer Olympics and the governance of London.” *Journal of Urban Affairs*. vol. 29(3) 2007. p. 255.



In the Candidate File for the International Olympic Committee (IOC), London's *diversity* and *multiculturalism* were presented as potential reasons for selecting London as Olympic city for 2012.

London's diversity and creativity would contribute to the Games (...), guaranteeing a warm welcome for all and an exciting sporting and cultural experience.<sup>49</sup>

Nowhere can offer a better location for the Games than London: the city that people of all faiths, cultures and languages can call "home". We are proud of our diversity – of people, of buildings and neighbourhoods, of museums and shops – and every year celebrate it with visitors from every continent.<sup>50</sup>

The diversity and multiculturalism of London, and the intention to engage especially young people in the Games, were underscored by the presence of the thirty young "ambassadors" from the intended Olympic site in the East End, one of the poorest and most disadvantaged areas in London.

Each of them comes from east London, from the communities who will be touched most directly by our Games. And thanks to London's multi-cultural mix of 200 nations, they also represent the youth of the world.<sup>51</sup>

The legacy left by the Games in the East End was to be one of "economic and social regeneration in what is now a disadvantaged area" and "a desirable and socially diverse new residential area, providing 3,600 new homes in a community transformed by the Games".<sup>52</sup>

The bombs that hit London buses and the tube the following day, 7 July, would seem to have shattered the image of harmonious diversity and multiculturalism presented in Singapore, but reactions to the attack could also be seen to confirm the strength, courage and grit of the diverse London population in a way reminiscent of World War II, as argued by Prime Minister Blair in the foreword to a 2006 report on 'London's challenge for 2012'.

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<sup>49</sup> *London 2012. Candidate File*. London: London, 2007. Retrieved on 1 September 2009 from <http://www.london2012.com/documents/candidate-files/introduction.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* Ken Livingstone's letter to Count Jacques Rogge, President of the International Olympic Committee.

<sup>51</sup> *London 2012. Singapore Bid Presentation: Speeches*. London: London, 2005. Retrieved on 1 September 2009 from <http://www.london2012.com/documents/locog-publications/singapore-presentation-speeches.pdf>. Sebastian Coe's speech.

<sup>52</sup> *London 2012. Candidate File*. Op.cit. Introduction.

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London is a wonderful city, rich in history, full of life and energy. It's incredibly diverse, a magnet for people from across the world, a true, modern, international capital. Its people are tolerant, resilient and resourceful.

All these qualities were demonstrated in the space of 48 hours last July (...) The way London responded underlined its strength and the courage of its citizens.<sup>53</sup>

Levels of popular support were high during the bidding period and, drawing on insights from the sociology of events and sports, Newman explains how "competing for the Olympic Games creates moments of celebration and (...) spaces and opportunities for Londoners to show their support for the Olympic project and for the image of themselves represented in a global arena".<sup>54</sup> In that perspective it is possible – if only temporarily – to mobilize support for a vision for and a representation of the nation and capital city by providing space and moments of celebration "in which residents can see history made before their eyes and where cultural values can be reproduced".<sup>55</sup>

It would seem that, during the bidding period, both central and local government were successful in applying "[a]n inclusive, stakeholder approach [which] represents the best means (...) to integrate a nation's cultural diversity into its nation branding" in order to make it "resonat[e] with the nation's citizens",<sup>56</sup> and possibly make them live the brand. 'Backing the bid' and celebrating at Trafalgar Square offered Londoners that opportunity. In addition, the bid was backed by the nation's then top leader, Tony Blair, which,<sup>57</sup> according to Quelch and Jocz' list of recommendations for nations that want to (re)position themselves, is needed "to motivate the citizenry (...) to walk the talk, to deliver on the promise that the country's chosen positioning strategy makes to the outside world."<sup>58</sup>

Somewhat in contrast to Cool Britannia and the Dome, the focus on London may have made it less difficult to direct the branding of the Olympic bid to diversity and multiculturalism and a more heterogeneous national identity, even if these characteristics might not be representative of the entire nation. Given that the East End borough of Newham has the highest share of minorities of any local authority in Britain, it would seem a fair reflection of a 'new' Britain.

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<sup>53</sup> Government Office for London. *Building on success: London's challenge for 2012*. London: GOL, 2006. Retrieved on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2009 from <http://www.gos.gov.uk/gol/news/newsarchive/392606/>.

<sup>54</sup> Newman. op.cit. p. 256.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p. 262.

<sup>56</sup> Dinnie. op.cit. p. 115.

<sup>57</sup> Campbell, Dennis. "The day Coe won gold." *The Observer*. 10 July, 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Quelch & Jocz. op.cit. p.236.

Apparently, London 2012 has been less contested than Cool Britannia and the Millennium Dome, since nationwide popular support was and continues to be high according to surveys, with 79 per cent being pleased that London is to host the Games in December 2009,<sup>59</sup> even if people outside London are not likely to go to the Olympic Games (75% against 47% in London) and generally do not think that the region where they live will get any noticeable benefit from the Olympics (73% against 59% in London).<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, the Labour government's Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell maintained that

We have (...) given more thought and careful planning (...) in making sure that people around the country have a part to play in the games and benefit from the games. That's why support for the games all around the country is as high as it is.<sup>61</sup>

The minister's conclusion is to some extent belied by the survey results, but what the high level of popular support might suggest is that it is easier to represent the nation to itself in the context of a joint mission, such as staging an international sports event, than branding and presenting celebratory versions of British achievements and Britishness. According to Newman, the Games "have an external audience but also an internal one through the provision of extraordinary events that give meaning to spaces in cities and help define the roles of citizens".<sup>62</sup> Sports in general and hosting mega-events such as the World Cup or the Olympics in particular are considered very powerful platforms for boosting the nation brand abroad,<sup>63</sup> but also for providing an opportunity for support and identification in the entire population. In 2005, (now former) British Olympic Association CEO Simon Clegg commented that "[t]his is massive, and this goes way beyond sport (...) This has the potential to change the psyche of the nation in terms of how we look at ourselves. People say that we love to be the underdog (...) But we're a winner here, and the whole country's going to be a winner".<sup>64</sup>

Continued high support does not mean that the familiar criticisms of projects of this type and magnitude have not emerged in relation to London 2012, the most crucial one relating to the realism of budgets and who would pick up any extra costs.<sup>65</sup> Budgets have indeed soared, owing – it is claimed – to factors such as

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<sup>59</sup> *Gov Monitor*. Support For 2012 London Olympics At All Time High 2009. Retrieved on 12 January 2010 from [http://thegovmonitor.com/world\\_news/britain/support-for-2012-london-olympics-at-all-time-high-18986.html](http://thegovmonitor.com/world_news/britain/support-for-2012-london-olympics-at-all-time-high-18986.html).

<sup>60</sup> *BBC*. "Press Release. Poll: Three out of four believe London Olympics will bring no noticeable benefits to their region." 3 April, 2008.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in *BBC*. Op.cit.

<sup>62</sup> Newman. op.cit. p. 261.

<sup>63</sup> Dinnie. op.cit. pp. 123-124, and Quelch and Jocz. op.cit.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Campbell. op.cit.

<sup>65</sup> *BBC*. "Olympic cost plans 'unrealistic'." 21 April 2008.

increasing costs of security, just as the credit crunch has substantially reduced the expected contributions from the private sector. Londoners have never doubted that they would foot any extra bill even if they believe that costs should be shared equally with non-London taxpayers.<sup>66</sup>

Also Wolff Olins' price of £400,000 for designing the logo for the Games was questioned and ridiculed as was the jagged emblem (representing the figure 2012) itself. However, the organizers were adamant that this is "an iconic brand that sums up what London 2012 is all about – an inclusive, welcoming and diverse Games that involves the whole country" (Tessa Jowell), a "brand [that] draws on what London has become – the world's most forward-looking and international city" (Ken Livingstone) and "a hard working brand which builds on pretty much everything we said in Singapore about reaching out and engaging young people" (Lord Coe).<sup>67</sup>

An early assessment of the success in engaging and involving especially children and young people in the Games was published in July 2008.<sup>68</sup> It concludes that the Games are "relatively low in the minds of young people", but that "there is significant potential to tap into latent emotional engagement with the Games".<sup>69</sup> In fact, the young respondents would like to be proud of their nation, just as they hope for a positive legacy, including "[a]n improvement in national perceptions of young people", "[i]mproving relations and understanding between different nations/cultures" and "[t]he regeneration of specific areas of London".<sup>70</sup>

The question as to whether the promised urban regeneration in East London will be at the expense of local residents and small businesses is a major concern of critics of negative social and environmental impacts of Olympic projects.<sup>71</sup> A 2007 report from the Geneva-based Center on Housing Rights and Evictions estimated that "1,000 people were facing displacement because of London's Olympic construction, in a city that already had more than 11,000 homeless persons and about 60,000 households living in temporary accommodations".<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> BBC. "BBC London Olympics Survey." 7 December 2008.

<sup>67</sup> BBC. "London unveils logo of 2012 Games." 4 June 2007. See [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) for examples of how the logo was ridiculed (eg for resembling a beer mat), but also Lord Coe's defense of it as useful and edgy.

<sup>68</sup> *Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)*. The London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games: Children and Young People's Perceptions and Involvement. London: DCSF, 2008. Retrieved 26 January 2008 from <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u015196/index.shtml>.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p.14-15.

<sup>71</sup> Lenskyj, Helen Jefferson. *Olympic Industry Resistance: Challenging Olympic Power and Propaganda*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008. See also Kingsnorth, Paul. *Real England: The Battle Against the Bland*. London: Portobello Books, 2008. p. 99.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Lenskyj. op.cit. p. 49.

Along similar lines it is argued that East-End regeneration was already under way prior to the Olympic bid and that its “young people need continuous low-cost, youth-focused activity with space, rather than one-off events”.<sup>73</sup> Other concerns are whether any new jobs created would go to local rather than migrant (non-British) workers and anger at Cadbury’s announcement that they were to become Olympic sponsors while planning to close a factory near Bristol.<sup>74</sup>

Whether London 2012 will be successful in branding and (re)presenting a new diverse British brand abroad remains to be seen, but there is no end to expectations for *internal* social, housing and skills legacies,<sup>75</sup> and following the financial crisis, long-term economic benefits for the UK economy.<sup>76</sup>

### Conclusion

Cool Britannia and the Millennium Experience were expected to leave their imprint on Britain’s brand and on British minds and hearts. In Tony Blair’s words about the Millennium celebrations: “there should be a lasting legacy”. Instead, Cool Britannia petered out and the Dome became an expensive white elephant and an embarrassment to the government at the time,<sup>77</sup> even if it has since then been developed into a successful entertainment complex, O2, whose arena will in fact be used as one of the Olympic venues in 2012. In both cases, the media were not won over, and, in branding terms, the projects failed to resonate with the internal audience, who did not see the representation of the national image and identity as based in *their* reality and self-perception. In other words, Britishness was not successfully re-imagined nor was the British population re-presented to themselves. The lack of success may also underscore the points made at the beginning of this article that branding, and especially the top-down variety, should not be undertaken lightly, and that summing up what Britain’s image and British identity is all about has become next to impossible in a world of increasingly fragmenting identities.

What is also evident is that the wider context (and timing) is essential and not easily predicted and that long-term projects on this scale are notoriously difficult to control. Since London’s successful bid, a global recession has set in and a number of the original key figures have been replaced. Ken Livingstone did not get to swing the Olympic flag as mayor of London during the closing ceremony in

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<sup>73</sup> Power, Anne. The 2012 Olympic Games: Sport, families and children – the Olympic promise. In *Britain in 2008*. Swindon: Economic and Social Research Council, 2007. Retrieved 26 January 2010 from <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/CI/CP/britaintoday/index.aspx>

<sup>74</sup> Beard, Matthew. “Migrant builders threat to Olympic ‘skills legacy’.” *Evening Standard*. 13 November 2008 and *BBC*. “Anger over Cadbury Olympics cash.” 14 November 2008.

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion of the games as ‘legacy’ see also MacRury, Iain & Poynter, Gavin. Olympic Cities and Social Change. In Poynter, Gavin & MacRury, Iain. eds. *Olympic Cities: 2012 and the Remaking of London*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.

<sup>76</sup> *Gov Monitor*. op.cit.

<sup>77</sup> Newman. op.cit. p.256.

Beijing; he was replaced by the new Conservative mayor Boris Johnson, but may in fact be back for the Olympic opening ceremony if he wins the mayoral elections in May 2012. Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who, along with a number of Cabinet colleagues, was not easily persuaded that bidding was such a good idea, will not be around as PM to take credit in 2012.<sup>78</sup> Instead, his government was blamed for soaring costs, and staunch promoter of the Games, then Olympics minister Tessa Jowell, was heavily criticised in November 2008 when she admitted that “[h]ad we known what we know now (about the recession), would we have bid for the Olympics? Almost certainly not.”<sup>79</sup>

Nevertheless, London 2012 seems more likely to prove a popular success than Cool Britannia and the Millennium Dome. In spite of criticisms, the process of bidding for, organising and eventually staging the Olympic Games has been a more engaging experience with its focus on bottom-up and participatory elements and its more inclusive approach. As a result, a major sports event like this potentially provides the “celebratory moments [that] offer an opportunity for “national reassessment” of Britain’s sense of itself and of its relation to the world”<sup>80</sup> necessary to engage locals and the nation at large and make them support and temporarily live the brand. Whether the Games will also leave a permanent imprint on British minds and hearts and change British identity fundamentally in the process is a different matter.

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<sup>78</sup> Campbell. op.cit.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Hart, Simon. “Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell tries to paper over London 2012 Games gaffe.” *The Telegraph*. 13 November 2008.

<sup>80</sup> Newman. Op.cit. p. 262, drawing on Philips op.cit. p. 107.