

## **Marketing the 'City of Smells'**

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## Biographies

The late **Victoria Henshaw's** final post was as a Lecturer in Urban Design and Planning at the University of Sheffield. A former town centre manager, she turned to academia with a desire to investigate the role of the senses in the experiences, perceptions and design of urban space. With this research agenda, the role of smell and olfaction within cities became a passion. As well as conducting smellwalks in cities around the world, she was author of the blog 'Smell and the City' and the book *Urban Smellscapes: Understanding and Designing City Smell Environments*, published by Routledge in 2014. Her work has featured in electronic, print and broadcast media around the world, including mainland Europe and the UK, America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. Her academic legacy will undoubtedly be the impact of her work on the way planners and architects think about the olfactory design elements of urban space.

**Dominic Medway** is Professor of Marketing at Manchester Business School. His principal research interests cover place marketing and retail marketing. His work is published in a range of academic journals such as *European Journal of Marketing*, *Environment and Planning A*, *Tourism Management*, *Journal of Business Research* and *Journal of Marketing Management*.

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## Marketing the 'City of Smells'

### Abstract

This paper explores how smell might contribute to urban identity, building on the strong links between smell, limbic processing and emotion. It critically examines existing scent marketing, psychology and urban olfaction literatures, exploring the potential for the marketing of urban places through smell, and capitalising in particular on ambient smells that already exist within a locale. The paper makes an initial threefold contribution to theory and practice: (i) demonstrating the current use of smell in city marketing, and the inherent challenges arising; (ii) identifying ways in which smell might be used in future urban place marketing activities, and in particular to more explicitly communicate the experiential attributes of being in a particular city; and (iii) proposing that olfaction may, in certain circumstances, be an effective way of incorporating a more participatory *modus operandi* within urban place marketing effort. The paper concludes with a further overarching theoretical contribution, involving a consideration of place marketing which incorporates non-representational perspectives.

**Keywords:** Place marketing, Olfaction, Smellscape, City/urban environments, Urban experience

## Introduction

Over the last 30 years, place marketing has become an increasingly common strategy for urban centres seeking to gain advantage in an ever more competitive spatial environment. This has had significant implications for how the attributes of cities are communicated to users and potential users - according to Hubbard and Hall, such places can be '*constituted through a plethora of images and representations*' (1998, p. 7). Indeed, there is a clear emphasis in urban place marketing on the creation of visually appealing messages and forms of communication (Gold, 1994; Ward, 1998). Kotler et al. (1999, p. 171) note that this use of '*visual symbols*' has been prominent in place marketing, and the extensive use of logos in urban place promotion (see Barke and Harrop, 1994; Burgess, 1982; Warnaby and Medway, 2010) suggests that the importance of what can be *seen* remains central to those responsible for marketing in this context. This visual emphasis is consistent with principles of corporate communications (see Melewar, 2003), which have more recently been used to underpin our understanding of place branding activity (see for example, Kavatzis, 2009; Kavatzis and Hatch, 2013).

In this paper, it is argued that whilst the visual emphasis in the marketing of cities (not least through advertising and other marketing communications activities) is understandable, the other senses, and specifically smell, provide different but equally important information and stimuli relating to urban experience, which could provide a real point of difference in related place marketing effort. However, senses other than sight have been largely ignored in academic discussions of place marketing. Indeed, only Medway (2015) has examined the notion of marketing places through smell, albeit in very broad-brush terms and as part of a wider discussion regarding the role of all the senses in place branding activity. This is surprising on two counts. First, understanding of human relationships with place has moved far beyond the visual in other social science disciplines such as geography (e.g. Porteous 1990; Hetherington 2002; Tuan, 1974), particularly through the realm of non-representational theories (Lorimer, 2005; Thrift, 2003), anthropology (e.g. Carpenter, 1973; Ingold, 2000, 2011) and tourism (Dann and Jacobsen, 2002, 2003; Saldanha, 2002). Second, even within the marketing subject area, at the micro-spatial scale of service environments (or servicescapes) there is a wealth of literature emphasising the role non-visual senses may play in the consumer's experiences and perceptions of service environments, particularly in terms of *hearing* music (e.g. Hui et al., 1997; Milliman, 1982, 1986; Oakes, 2000; Oakes and North, 2008; Yalch and Spangenberg, 1990, 2000) and *smelling* artificially introduced scent(s) (see Bradford and Desrochers, 2010), especially in retailing (e.g. Bone and Ellen, 1999; Davies et al. 2003; Doucé and Janssens, 2013; Parsons, 2009; Ward et al., 2007). To a far lesser extent, work on the marketing of retail service environments has also considered the role of tactile and gustatory senses (see Spence et al.,

2014). Other studies have examined the combined interactive effects of the senses of hearing and smell in marketing service settings (see Mattila and Wirtz, 2001; Spangenberg et al., 2005).

Clearly, non-visual senses such as smell can provide a more overtly immersive experience for the consumer of service environments (such as retail stores and hotel lobbies). However, it could be argued that cities exhibit some of the characteristics of service environments on a broader spatial scale; certainly various authors have conceptualised cities as service 'products' (Warnaby, 2009; Warnaby and Davies, 1997) or service systems (Dirks et al., 2010; Maglio and Sphorer, 2008). Cities also have a long historical association with smells (often bad ones – see, for example, Classen et al., 1994; Reinartz, 2013) and, to a limited extent, smell has been used implicitly by practitioners for urban marketing purposes in the past with references to the clean and bracing air of seaside and alpine towns in marketing communications content (for an overview, see Medway, 2015). It seems somewhat remiss, therefore, that existing literature has not broadened the scope of olfactory marketing from managed service contexts to the wider urban environment.

This paper begins by reviewing the role of smell in the marketing of managed and spatially-bounded service environments, or servicescapes (Bitner, 1992; 2000). We then extend the servicescape concept to the broader spatial canvas of cities, drawing upon various literature streams to consider olfaction in an urban context. Then, by way of synthesis, we examine the marketing of urban places through smell. As such, the paper makes an initial threefold contribution to theory and practice. First, we demonstrate the current use of smell in city marketing, and the inherent challenges arising. Second, we identify ways in which smell might be used in future urban place marketing activities, and in particular to more explicitly communicate the experiential attributes of being in a particular city. In relation to this, we propose that olfactory experience within an urban context may have an important role to play in the marketing of cities to those potential place users with some form of (non-olfactory) sensory impairment. Third, we propose that olfaction may, in certain circumstances, be an effective way of incorporating a more participatory *modus operandi* within urban place marketing effort. The paper concludes by signalling a further overarching theoretical contribution, in terms of the rethinking of place marketing from non-representational perspectives. We also propose an agenda for future research.

### **Smell in the marketing of managed and spatially-bounded service environments.**

The role of smell as a marketing tool within service environments was acknowledged as far back as 1973, albeit as part of a wider consideration of the concept of atmospherics (Kotler, 1973), which

necessarily includes the other senses, and links back to Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) work in which they proposed the stimulus-organism-response concept to generate a fuller understanding of how environmental stimuli influence approach and avoidance behaviour. Much of the subsequent research into atmospherics in service settings only discusses scent in passing (see for example, Grewal and Baker, 1994; Wakefield and Baker, 1998). As Ward et al. (2007, p. 297) imply, such work is indicative of a theme whereby *'smell is acknowledged but not developed'*. Despite this, there has been a small amount of theoretical work which gives scent prominence as an ambient factor in marketing (see Bone and Ellen, 1999; Gulas and Bloch, 1995). Moreover, from an empirical perspective, there has been a steady stream of research focusing explicitly on the role of smell in retail/service settings, adopting either experimental (e.g. Chebat and Michon, 2003; Doucé and Janssens, 2013; Hirsch, 1995; Parsons, 2009) or survey-based (e.g. Ward et al., 2007) methodologies. This reflects the fact that marketing practitioners have become increasingly aware of the potential for scent (Bradford and Desrochers, 2009) within the context of service environments or servicescapes – indeed in such spatial contexts one might also talk of 'smellscapes' (Porteous, 1990). Thomaselli (2006) identified scent marketing as one of the top ten trends for the future (see also Lindstrom, 2010), and Spence et al. acknowledge that *'[u]nderstanding how and when specific scents enhance the customer experience will be key for commercial success in the years to come'* (2014, p. 478). If, as we suggest above, cities can be thought of as service environments, then is there a similar role for smell that could be capitalised upon by place marketers operating at this broader urban spatial scale?

Bradford and Desrochers (2009) have indicated that this growing interest in smell by marketers is due to the strong link between olfaction and emotional reaction. Lindstrom (2005) reports that over 75% of emotions are generated by smell. Ward et al. (2007), citing Krauel and Pause (2001), suggest that customers within retail outlets may have the ability to react and respond to a smell on a subconscious level, reflecting the fact that smell is received and processed in the limbic part of the brain, which has strong connections with automatic affect and cognition. This resonates with the olfaction and psychology literatures, which emphasise the strength of the connection between smell, memory and nostalgia (Dove, 2008; Engen, 1991; Henshaw, 2014).

From a marketing point of view, this highlights the potential use of smell in manipulating consumer behaviour, especially when introduced into a service environment where it is perceived and processed without necessary realisation by the consumer that they are acting in response to an environmental stimulus (see Hirsch, 1995). In this manner, Lindstrom (2005, 2010) reports how smell marketing has been used to develop the brand identity of Singapore Airlines. This involved

introducing a manufactured scent called Stefan Floridian Waters into the aircraft cabins via flight attendants' perfume and the impregnated fragrance in hot towels distributed before take-off. More recently, aroma has been used by 'scent consultants' such as ScentAir, Air Aroma and Brandaroma to engender greater brand identity in the service environments of retailers (e.g. Zara and Benetton), hotel chains (e.g. Hilton, InterContinental and Radisson), gyms (e.g. Fitness First), airlines (e.g. Qantas) and banks (e.g. Société Générale).

Bradford and Desrochers (2009) classify the types of aromas used in scent marketing, identifying three broad categories of *marketer scent*, *product scent* and *ambient scent*. They define marketer scents as those used as an explicit promotional tool, citing as examples the new car smell at a car dealership or the baking smell in a house for sale. Product scent is where the scent itself is the product, and would include goods such as perfumes, air fresheners and deodorisers. Ambient scent is identified as a general odour which does not emanate from a product, but is present as part of a retail environment via some form of technological intervention. However, this concept neglects the fact that an ambient scent need *not* result from technological intervention (i.e. it may occur naturally within the service environment as a result of some activity or process; e.g. the smell of coffee in a coffee shop). Bradford and Desrochers (2009) identify a further categorisation of ambient scent relating to the extent of the consumer's conscious awareness of it. Thus, scents are either revealed openly to the consumer, where there is intention to influence response, but this intention is not realised by the consumer (i.e. objective ambient scent). Alternatively, the use of scent is imperceptible to recipients (i.e. covert objective ambient scent), but may still affect their behaviour. Ambient scent within retail and service settings, as studied in some of the literature discussed above, is an area which Mattila and Wirtz (2001) have suggested should assume greater importance for researchers. Both forms of ambient scent also raise ethical questions relating to potential human manipulation, which are considered later in this paper.

### **Urban olfaction**

If places can be considered as service products or service systems (see above), then this indicates we could extend the servicescape concept to cover urban areas. Venkatraman and Nelson (2008, p. 1010) define the servicescape as '*a physical, material setting designed and built to shape consumption behaviour*'. In this regard, servicescapes can include ambient conditions, such as smell, sound and tactility, which may influence a consumer's experiences and perceptions in different ways (see for example, Baker et al., 1992; and in a specific urban context, De Nisco and Warnaby, 2014;

and with regard to smell in particular, see Doucé and Janssens, 2013; Seo et al., 2010). Accepting the notion of the city as a servicescape, we adopt a multi-disciplinary perspective to consider how smell can be produced and received/consumed within city environments. Conceptualising schemas for understanding the specificities of cities as smellscapes in this manner is a necessary contextualisation for considering how smell might be leveraged for urban marketing purposes later in this paper.

### Smell production

Regarding smell production, drawing on the scent marketing and urban olfaction literature, we suggest the existence of three key interconnected elements: i) *intentionality*, ii) *scope* and iii) *duration*.

Intentionality refers to the fact that some urban smells are purposely introduced within a locale; in contrast to those smells which emerge more organically or unintentionally (often as by-products of other activities). A recent high profile example of the former in the UK was the £1.4 million spent on a series of scented advertisements by food processing company McCain. This encouraged potential consumers to purchase frozen baked potatoes through the use of a giant artificial baked potato on advertising within bus shelters, on which passers-by could activate a baked potato aroma<sup>1</sup>. On other occasions shops and hotels are purposely scented to brand their service environments, reflecting Bradford and Desrocher's notion of ambient scent, but (consistent with the urban design notion of 'active frontage' whereby interior private spaces interact with more public exterior space – see Davies, 2000) these odours can spill out to 'pollute' the surrounding urban area. By contrast, *unintentional* urban odours would typically include a variety of smells that are by-products of a manufacturing process or service activity.

Intentionality in relation to urban smell is related to the other elements of scope and duration. For example, intentional smells, such as those emanating from the McCain advert, are often localised around the source of olfactory production (in this case, bus shelters), and are of a fixed and/or temporally-bounded duration. Similarly, unintentional smells may be localised to a distinct pocket of urban space, for example where the smell emerges from a restaurant extraction vent or a chlorinated water feature, but equally, may emanate over a wider areal scale, encompassing neighbourhoods or whole districts, typically as a by-product from breweries, distilling, factories and other commercial activities. For example, Steel (2008) recalls the rich chocolate odours of the Lyons Factory in Brook Green, London. Such unintended local

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<sup>1</sup> See: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7Gwt1I0ieQ&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7Gwt1I0ieQ&feature=player_embedded); <http://now-here-this.timeout.com/2012/02/10/mccains-giant-jacket-potatoes/>



smells combine to create an olfactory identity for urban places. Regarding duration, these unintentional smells are likely to be governed by the operating hours of the source of their production. Thus, the smells from factories impact on urban space when production lines are running, often establishing diurnal rhythms of unintentional smell production that may, in turn, be further moderated by meteorological conditions (see discussion below).

### Smell reception/consumption

Turning to the reception and consumption of smell, this is arguably influenced by three additional elements within an urban (and potentially any) context: i) *nature of association* ii) *degree of liking* and iii) *potential contestation*. For the first of these, arising from limbic processing, smells as received are often associated with previous experiences, in which case they are defined through the workings of memory and recollection. Indeed, psychological research has shown that we have a long-term accuracy in our recall of smell which is far better than visual memory (Engen and Ross, 1973; Engen, 1977). Within an urban context, Knopper (2002) has also argued that odour links the history of a city to the present through such memory associations. Furthermore, the fact that olfactory reception and processing occurs in the same part of the brain which governs emotion (Gloor, 1978), means that smell, more than any other sense, can trigger nostalgia (Dove, 2008; King, 2008), not least for a place. Thus, there are a host of online blogs and chatrooms where people discuss urban smells from sources as diverse as biscuit factories, coffee processing plants and soap manufacturing as integral to their sense of rootedness within a particular locale (see for example, Milligan-Croft, 2012, and also <http://forum.skyscraperpage.com>). Significantly, some of these discussions concern *past* smells, thereby re-emphasising the importance of association, in that smell can remain part of the nostalgic mythology of a place. This, in turn, may contribute to marketable urban narratives around olfaction. One of the challenges of place marketing is making places stand out as different in the mind of the place consumer, and we discuss below how leveraging olfaction in this manner may be one such route to achieving this.

The degree of liking of a smell and potential contestation are closely connected aspects of olfactory reception and processing. Hamanzu (1969) suggested that around only 20% of existing odorous compounds are deemed 'pleasant' by humans. It would appear that the smells emanating from urban space often fall into the larger 'unpleasant' category. Hence, writing from a tourism perspective, Dann and Jacobsen (2003) found that urban smellscapes are portrayed far more negatively than rural smellscapes in travel writing. Similarly, Henshaw (2014) suggests that odour in an urban context is generally perceived as being a negative

environmental factor. Efforts have been made to measure urban smells, mainly in the context of pollution. However, this is hampered by the inconsistent and subjective nature of odour assessment by individuals (Yang and Hobson, 2000). There is resonance here with the concept of habituation, whereby even bad smells can appear less noticeable and offensive to those in regular contact with them, whilst being more likely to be noticed by visitors, outsiders and newcomers (Porteous, 1990). When smell becomes intrinsic to an urban centre, effectively meaning enough people associate it with the place, either positively or negatively, then it can become contested. Thus, an argument about how much a smell is liked or disliked represents a debate about urban identity by proxy. For example, proposals to fit an odour control tower onto a distillery in Edinburgh in 2009 divided opinion amongst the local populace (Daily Record, 2009), some of whom feel that the smell of brewing and distilling is a critical part of Edinburgh's (olfactory) identity (see Tibbitt, 2014). One Edinburgh citizen has noted of the distilling smell "*It is very much part of Edinburgh. Smells define a place and they're important to identify with something.*" (BBC News, 2009).

Linking elements of the scope and duration of smell production with aspects of smell reception/consumption, Henshaw (2014) proposes a multi-layered conceptualisation. This suggests that urban smellscape can operate at the micro-level of the specific site, the midi-level of the neighbourhood, and the macro-level of the whole city. Smell reception at the micro-level is dominated by olfactory 'top notes', which are intense and sensed immediately by the potential receiver, but tend to be episodic in duration, dissipating rapidly. At the macro-level, 'base note' odours exist, which have a background depth for which immediate reception is less likely, but which can linger for much longer in duration and become sensed over time (subject to the vagaries of habituation). Thus, olfactory production and its subsequent reception/consumption could affect the way people perceive urban places at various spatial scales. Analogous to manner that Theriksen et al. (2010) referred to the social construction of urban places in terms of the 'city of words' versus the more material 'city of stones', perhaps this concept needs to be stretched into a 'city of smells'. If smell is important in the way place meaning is constructed, then this raises a question about how smell is currently (and might be) employed in the marketing of cities.

### **Marketing urban places through smell**

Existing literature regarding the active use and manipulation of smell within an urban context has focused on basic management of odours, typically unpleasant or unwanted ones, for the purposes of environmental improvement. Redefining the work of Rodaway (1994), Henshaw (2014) has identified four separate management and control processes for urban smellscape, namely, *separation* (i.e. spatial/temporal separation of odours through planned activity or displacement), *deodorisation* (i.e. planned removal of odours of dirt or waste), *masking* (i.e. the overlaying of one odour with another to hide/change the original odour), and *scenting* (i.e. the introduction of an odour for its specific qualities or characteristics). Whilst these odour management strategies are useful for understanding the mechanisms by which smell might be manipulated in an urban context, they do not explicitly identify how smell is currently used in city *marketing*. In the following subsection we explore this issue, before examining, in turn, the spatial, technological and ethical challenges of using smell in an urban marketing context. This links back to the first contribution of this paper. We then move to consider possible blueprints for future action where marketing the city of smells is concerned, which raises issues relating to our second and third contributions.

#### Current use of smell in city marketing

Above, we identified how the types of odours used in scent marketing within typical service environments can be broadly categorised in terms of marketer scent, product scent and ambient scent (Bradford and Desrochers, 2009). Current limited evidence of activities relating to these categories in the context of cities mainly encompasses marketer and product scents, through the impregnation of promotional items and tangible goods with what are perceived as place-related smells. Thus, the occasional use of smells in promotional tourist literature and guides to enhance the visitor experience when navigating urban space draws on notions of the marketer scent, in the sense that smell is being deliberately used to help promote the place product in question. A good example is a recent guide produced for the city of York in the UK, which aims ‘to give visitors “a scents of the city” [sic.], and is infused with a range of smells, from horse hair, hoof oil, grass and fruit punch (to depict a day at the York Racecourse) to loose leaf tea and spiced cake (to represent afternoon tea)’ (Smith, 2014).

The production of souvenir goods incorporating smells that have become associated with particular cities is more an example of product scent, in that the smell of the product is not specifically designed to market the city in question, but may still do so by virtue of any implicit associations made by consumers between the smell of the product and the city from which it originates. Thus, numerous souvenirs from the Italian city of Parma are impregnated with the smell of the violets that grow in abundance in the region, and with which the city has become

closely associated. However, such deliberate association and promotion of an urban place through one particular odour is arguably an example of olfactory stereotyping. Reflecting recent critiques, this bears similarities to superficial, top-down place marketing activity, where places are viewed by marketing agencies through a highly reductionist eye (see Braun et al., 2013; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Warnaby and Medway, 2013).

Ambient scent, which, as noted above, has been the focus of much research and practitioner action in the context of conventional commercial servicescapes, appears more difficult to capitalise on for urban place marketing purposes. This is primarily because ambient scents are subject to a number of spatial, technological and ethical challenges which render their introduction and transmission within and beyond the urban areas from which they originate both complex and potentially problematic. These issues are explored below.

#### *Spatial challenges in marketing the city of smells*

Olfactory marketing in an urban context presents a number of challenges. Unlike stereotypical indoor retail and service environments where scenting is used as a marketing tool, urban space is not usually physically bounded and protected from the elements. This means that ambient smells introduced into an urban context are affected by external environmental conditions such as wind direction, temperature, local topography and micro-climates linked to the built environmental form (Henshaw, 2014; Sarkar et al., 2003). This can render odours within urban space discontinuous, fragmentary (Drobnick, 2002) and subject to dispersal at varying rates. Furthermore, unlike the private, commercial space of many traditional servicescapes, cities represent public space, certainly in relation to the streetscape, and this links to ethical challenges discussed below.

The configuration and design of the urban spatial form is, of course, the remit of planners and architects. Whilst these professions have an inherent understanding of visual (e.g. the appearance of buildings and lighting), tactile (e.g. pavement/walkway surfaces and textures) and even aural (e.g. designing buildings/areas to deflect traffic sound) stimuli within urban space, smell seems to be a relatively neglected sensory consideration. An insight into current thinking is the UK's *Urban Design Compendium* (Davies, 2000), a publication that guides local authorities and professionals in designing high-quality urban realms, and which poses the question "What scents can be added?". It emphasises the fact that many built environment practitioners think of the urban smellscape at best in terms of a blank spatial canvas onto which ambient odour can be overlaid (i.e. intentionally introduced or manufactured), rather than also

understanding smell as an inherent (i.e. unintentional and authentic) ambient characteristic of the city.

#### *Technological challenges in marketing the city of smells*

The deliberate or intentional introduction of ambient scents into the bounded servicescapes of retail and hotel settings is well documented. However, cities, with their challenge of unbounded space and rapidly changing – and often uncontrollable – environmental and climatic conditions, exacerbate the inherent difficulties of deliberately introducing ambient odours in urban areas, either targeted at specific individuals, or across wider pockets of urban space. Nevertheless, efforts have been made to do this, albeit in largely experimental contexts to date. For example, scientists at Meijo University, Japan, have developed equipment which tracks a person's movement as they walk along the street and can fire a scented ring of smoke through the air at speed to the nose (Nakaizumi et al. 2006). Thus, the means of delivering a smell can be more precisely targeted and spatially flexible than the baked potato smell in the McCain outdoor advertising campaign discussed above.

Although the use of technology to introduce ambient smells into urban space is fraught with difficulties, it might have greater traction in virtual or online representations of cities, although the technology to accomplish the digital transmission of smell is still nascent. Earliest developments included a device developed at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, combining 96 different chemicals in different proportions to create a wide variety of smells that can be communicated when online (USA Today, 2006). More recently, at an IEEE Virtual Reality Conference, technologists exhibited a smell screen that makes related smells appear to come from the exact spot on an LCD display showing the image of the given smell source, such as a cup of coffee (Hodson, 2013). Affordable variants of this technology are now being developed for smart phones (Hickley, 2014). The potential of such innovations for online city marketing campaigns to potential tourists, via the highlighting of smells that might be encountered on a vacation to the place in question, is intriguing.

#### *Ethical challenges in marketing the city of smells*

The above discussion around spatial and technological challenges poses a number of ethical issues. Starting with spatial considerations, the intentional introduction of ambient scents into any environment for marketing purposes raises questions of power and control over space. These questions become more pressing with regard to urban areas, as they generally represent the public realm rather than a private commercial servicescape, which would usually afford a

degree of choice to the consumer as to whether they enter it. A key issue here concerns the *degree of liking* for a smell, emphasising the fact that the same odour may carry a positive connotation for one person, but might be disliked or considered a pollutant by another. This also reflects the difficulties in preventing exposure to an olfactory stimulus given the inherently embodied nature of its consumption (i.e. it is inhaled into the body). In a marketing context, similar observations have been made for aural stimulation through muzak (Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2008). Furthermore, there are cultural variations in smell perception across societies (Damhuis, 2006; Schleidt et al., 1988), and according to age and gender (Kivity et al., 2009). A given smell within an urban context could therefore be associated with a range of responses, including sickness, nausea and illness (Fletcher, 2006).

This suggests that if ambient smells are to be introduced intentionally into urban environments for marketing purposes, they may need to be 'narrowcasted' (so that they are only targeted towards individuals who have previously agreed to receiving the olfactory stimulus in question), as opposed to being broadcast more widely. In theory, some of the emergent technology described above might allow for this, but this too raises a number of additional ethical questions, such as: On what basis would urban place consumers be targeted with certain smells? How might they opt in to (or out of) receiving such olfactory stimulation? How could it be ensured that such stimulation was narrowcasted to the extent it did not 'pollute' the atmosphere for any others sharing urban (and typically public rather than private) space?

#### Blueprints for future action

Given these various challenges, the scope for using intentional olfaction in the marketing of cities is currently limited. As a result, a more pragmatic approach may be to emphasise or celebrate those ambient smells that *already* exist within urban space (as a result of some form of urban activity or manufacturing process) through various marketing communication tools and channels, rather than trying to create or replicate an urban olfactory experience. This sidesteps many of the technological and ethical challenges outlined above.

To be useful in marketing terms, the smells emphasised would need to be of wide enough scope and long enough duration to become an identifiable 'olfactory brand asset' of the urban area in question, thus facilitating wider promotion to external audiences. An example of this type of unintentional ambient smell being used in a place marketing sense, albeit at the scale of a town rather than a city, occurs in Grasse in southern France. Home to a number of perfume manufacturers, the smell that lingers over the town from their activities has clearly become a

recognised brand asset in the marketing of Grasse to tourists as the 'World Perfume Capital' (see, for example, [www.grasse.fr](http://www.grasse.fr)). Similarly, the smell of the breakfast cereal Cheerios is considered by many to have become an essential element in the place identity of the US city of Buffalo, where it is manufactured. One blogger fully recognises the place marketing potential of this:

*'The Cheerios smell is an underutilized aspect of Buffalo. Why doesn't the city market this?... There are t-shirts. A Facebook group. That's at least enough to constitute the critical mass needed for something to at least be "a thing". All I'm saying is: for a place known for chicken wings, manufacturing, and the assassination of a U.S. President, it's not so farfetched to use "Cheerios smell" for the betterment of the city's image'* (Robison, 2012).

From a marketing perspective, narratives such as these can act as an informal word-of-mouth for the town or city in question, especially in various social media forums. When smells become synonymous with a particular place in this manner, they become woven into the collective memory and understanding of its residents and visitors. This, in turn, may trigger emotional nostalgic reactions, manifested by the plethora of postings relating to olfaction and places on various online chatrooms, as noted earlier.

There is also an opportunity to consider the potential of urban olfaction from an *experiential* marketing perspective. In particular, the use of smellwalks, in which users of urban space embark on a guided tour of the ambient smells (typically unintentional) that pervade cities, has been recognised as a means for enhancing the consumption experience of urban space (see Henshaw, 2014, for a detailed discussion of the development of this technique). Smellwalks fit into a long-standing category of experiential marketing approaches for urban places, ranging from guided routes taking in key visual features, through to themed tours highlighting more ephemeral and (arguably) imaginary subjects (e.g. ghost walks – see Inglis and Holmes, 2003). It is also relevant to note that smellwalking developed out of wider work on sensewalking, dating back to the 1960s (see Southworth, 1969), much of which investigated the possible impacts of sensory deprivation on individuals' appreciation of urban space. Indeed, one outcome of Devlieger's (2011) research into this subject in the Belgian city of Leuven was the creation of an alternative tourist guide and walk specifically for people with sensory impairments, primarily as a means of enhancing their urban experience. This demonstrates the potential for olfaction in the experiential marketing of urban space, particularly for those with a non-olfactory sensory deprivation (especially sight).

Similar to smellwalks, another way in which olfaction could be used in the experiential marketing of urban space is through the use of smellmaps, where the location of different smells can be highlighted as sites to visit (or trails to follow) in urban space; rather like a smellwalk without a guide. Smellmaps provide the potential to move towards a more inclusive form of place marketing, which becomes especially evident through social media and crowd-sourced apps such as [www.stinkymaps.com](http://www.stinkymaps.com) that encourage anyone to record and locate their perception of a smell against a Google Maps backdrop. Such developments allow for a variety of voices to be heard, and potentially challenges hegemonic views (not least held by place marketing practitioners) about what a city should, or should not, smell like. This also relates to this paper's third contribution of demonstrating how olfaction can be an effective means of moving place marketing towards a more participatory *modus operandi*.

Even though the digitisation of smell is still nascent (see above), the use of social media platforms to talk about smells within a place can be a vital part of olfaction's contribution to collective place identity. Residents and other place users can develop their own dialogue about the smell of a place and what it means, thereby projecting their 'city of smells' to the outside world in the form of their own 'city of words' (after Therkelsen et al., 2010). This involvement of place users in the development of messages relating to places, whether these incorporate smell or any other senses, links through to notions of co-creation of value within the urban servicescape, and resonates with growing calls in the literature for bottom-up rather than top-down (and often homogenising) place marketing activities, involving place users (residents, tourists etc.) rather than just place marketing professionals (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Braun et al., 2013; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Warnaby and Medway; 2013).

## **Conclusion and research agenda**

This paper has demonstrated that olfaction has the potential to provide an additional dimension to urban place marketing in the future, particularly with regard to ambient smells, which can be intentionally or unintentionally introduced into the urban environment. Regarding the former, we show that these are particularly affected by a range of spatial, technological and ethical challenges, making their use by city marketing practitioners nascent as yet. Nevertheless, given the pace of technological developments in the chemical reproduction and subsequent transmission of smell, it is entirely within the realms of possibility that the future 'city of smells' might be broken down into its constituent olfactory parts, with odours, or distinct scent ingredients of place, drawn upon to market



a sensory experience of the city vicariously in a virtual or remote context. Alternatively, such technology could be used to develop some form of augmented reality which enhances the actual lives and experiences of city users, thereby deepening and enriching their appreciation of the place, and especially so if they are subject to some form of non-olfactory sensory deprivation. This approach accords with deliberate scenting practices witnessed in more stereotypical services marketing contexts (e.g. Bone and Ellen, 1999; Davies et al., 2003; Doucé and Janssens, 2013).

In light of the challenges facing the intentional introduction of ambient smells into urban space, we have also argued that a more organic use of unintentional urban smells created over time (as typified by Edinburgh's 'Auld Reekie' or the smell of Cheerios in Buffalo) has perhaps been overlooked in place marketing effort. As well as overcoming some of the ethical dilemmas surrounding the deliberate use of manufactured odours in public space (as opposed to the private space of managed retail/service settings), the incorporation of unintentional, ambient smells into place marketing effort through more traditional means of communication and promotion may have other benefits. These relate to the fact that such smells can become synonymous with the place itself, and can provide the stimulus for a co-created place identity and narrative. This may occur through nostalgic associations, especially when the smells in question relate to former manufacturing or commercial activities within the locale, in turn creating a basis for place marketing messages that can be communicated and promoted more widely. Thus, smell itself becomes interwoven with the histories, stories, emotions and memories associated with a place. This can lead to a complex amalgam of intangible benefits that may prove attractive to those existing and potential users seeking the experiential dimensions of the place 'product'. Whether such smells are liked or contested may not always matter, provided they stimulate a connection with the place in question, or a debate about it. The case of 'Auld Reekie' typifies this.

This ability of unintentional smells to promote unique place identity, and engender more inclusive place marketing processes, illustrates a move to celebrate rather than suppress difference in place marketing activities. Certainly, place marketing campaigns, and associated communication and branding efforts, have been criticised in the literature for their sameness (see Clegg & Kornburger, 2010; Eisenschitz, 2010). As Warnaby and Medway (2013, p. 14) note: *'The danger for place marketers is that in commodifying place as a product or brand to be promoted to selected audiences via a particular narrative, the essence of place – its unique identity that distinguishes it from other places – gets lost... Consequently, those who feel a strong (alternative) attachment to the place are marginalised, and a place becomes placeless'*. The recognition and promotion of unintentional urban smells offers the opportunity to counter this homogenising veneer of stereotypical place

marketing activity with a more 'curatorial' approach to marketing urban space. Crowdsourced smellmaps, social media chatrooms on the topic of smell, and even the use of organised smellwalking as a co-created form of entertainment *in* and engagement *with* urban space, offer all place users the opportunity to develop their own interpretations of a city. These can, in turn, become a point of difference and help promote the distinctiveness of the urban place in question. At one and the same time, therefore, the dual criticisms of place marketing effort as promoting and reflecting homogeneity through a top-down approach by place marketing practitioners and managers (Braun et al., 2013) are tackled.

Smells may also have implications for place marketing purely from the consumer perspective. Being in a city or town is a multi-sensory experience and odours are an important part of this. The leverage of smell in place marketing campaigns provides the opportunity to move beyond an ocular fixation in promotional effort towards greater limbic stimulation, thereby creating potential for consumers to have a stronger emotional response *to*, and immersive experience *of*, the place product itself. This hints at a potential for smell to amplify our experience of place, reflecting Tafalla's (2011) belief that the world is both a less beautiful and a less ugly place without smell. Marketing efforts focused towards tourists are beginning to recognise this, as they have begun to shift their emphasis in the last decade from a focus on what you can 'see' in a particular place, to what you can hear, touch and even taste (Medway, 2015). There seems little harm in adding what you can smell to the experiential list.

Our identification of the potential of smell in the marketing of places signals a further overarching theoretical contribution for this paper, in terms of the rethinking place marketing from non-representational perspectives. The emergence of non-representational theory in social-science disciplines such as geography during the 1990s suggests that human interaction with space and place is less about what we or others perceive ourselves to be (e.g. tourists, residents) within it, and more about an embodied and, thereby, a necessarily and uniquely individual experience of place via all the senses. This echoes Tuan's (2004, p. 165) understanding of how feelings of belonging to a place might occur: *'Home that can be directly experienced – not just seen, but heard, smelled and touched – is necessarily a small and intimate world. It is this direct experience that gives home its power to elicit strong emotional response.'* Put otherwise, human navigation and understanding of place is more about an individualised 'somatic reaction' than a socially constructed 'semantic reduction' (Thrift, 2003). There are also parallels here between geography and ideas from environmental psychology, in terms of place attachment through affective and individual experience of a locale.

In contrast to such perspectives, place marketing, through tools such as segmentation, has been traditionally obsessed with aggregating groups of people (tourists, residents, business users, etc.) together for the purposes of targeted communication (e.g. Kotler et al., 1999). Yet an emphasis on embodiment and the unique nature of a place through the sensory experiences of the individual suggest segmentation, as a means of aggregating consumers, may be a somewhat inappropriate activity where place products are concerned. As Lorimer (2005, p. 86) notes '*There is no "one-size-fits-all" policy for accessing embodied knowledge and emotional response*'. This point is emphasised by Dann and Jacobsen (2010) in their examination of tourism smellscape: Thus, they imply a need for tourism destinations to be able to accommodate the individually centred desires of not just the *flâneur* or *voyeur*, for the ocular senses, but also the *dégustateur* or *flaireur* for matters of taste and smell. Our paper, therefore, highlights the potential for rich theoretical synergies between place marketing, embodiment and non-representational perspectives. This will require multi-disciplinary thinking across subjects such as tourism, geography and environmental psychology, as well as marketing.

Future research could examine empirically how olfaction shapes both consumers' understanding of cities and their wider perceptions of urban place identity, and determine how urban places might be marketed more effectively to consumers on the basis of smell. In terms of the former (i.e. identifying how olfaction shapes individual consumers' understanding of cities) there is clear scope for researcher-observed or accompanied smellwalking with consumers as they move around urban space, in an attempt to gather data on how smell influences their spatial affect and cognition in this context. More remote approaches to gaining consumers' viewpoints on these issues might come through the collation and analysis of results from crowdsourced smell maps and netnographies relating to smell. From a marketing practitioner perspective, interviews and questionnaire surveys could be useful in determining the current use of olfaction in place marketing effort, and how it might be leveraged in the future.

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