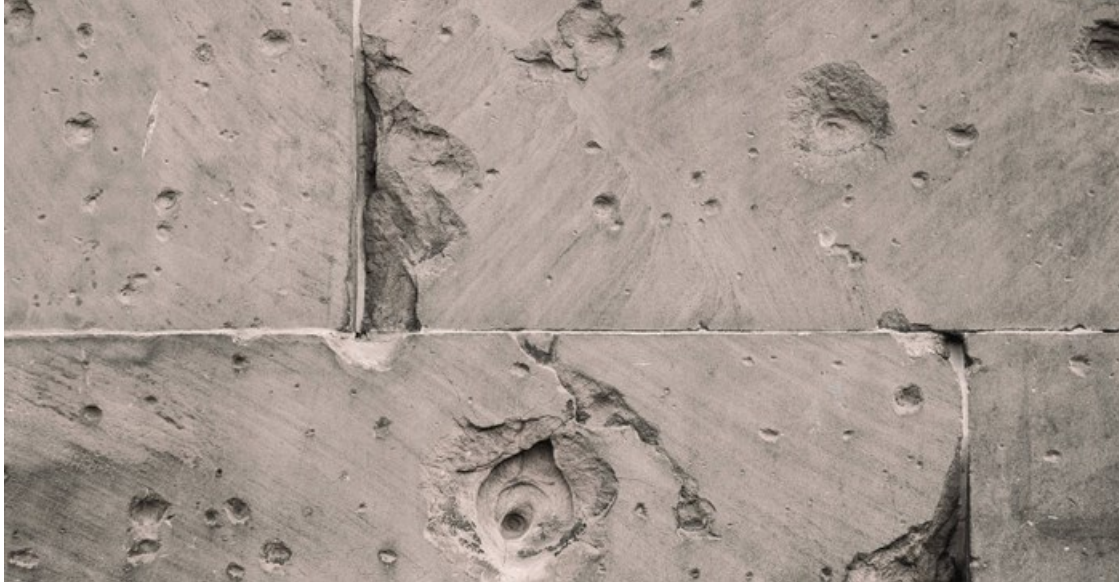


City brands as building blocks of the nation brand

 By [Manusha Pillai](#)

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In recent years, the discipline of nation branding has become a new frontier in how nations position themselves to compete for global share of, amongst others, attention, tourism, investment and skills. Cities have become an integral pillar in building strong competitive nation brands because a nation is, after all, a collection of cities - or city brands.



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Improvements in the standards of socio-economic and human development can significantly influence the brand of a country. Many indices, including amongst others, the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index, the Institute for Management Developments World Competitiveness Yearbook and the Mo Ibrahim Index, which evaluate national competitiveness include improvements in socio-economic conditions as measures and indicators.

While policies which can impact on development can be made at a national level, the real evidence of their implementation is experienced by citizens at city and local levels. This experience – positive or negative – contributes towards building the city brand and ultimately the nation brand. A cohesive brand experience at the city level will go a long way towards giving expression to the national brand identity.

Cities contribute significantly to socio-economic growth and development

In addition to contributing to the national brand, cities contribute significantly to socio-economic growth and development. According to the 2016 Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Programme which has published *Redefining Global Cities: the seven types of Global Metro Economies*, "with more than half the world's population now living in urban areas, cities are the critical drivers of global economic growth and prosperity. The world's 123 largest metro areas contain a little more than one-eighth of global population [or 13%], but generate nearly one-third of global economic output."

The Brookings Institute also surmises that with greater urbanisation, cities are “at the centre of global economic development. The share of global population in metropolitan areas has grown from 29% in 1950 to well over half today, and it is predicted to reach 66% by mid-century.” This trend is mirrored in Africa where “since 2010 annual urban populations have grown fastest in Africa (3.55%) and Asia (2.50%), greatly exceeding the pace of urban growth in North America (1.04%) and Europe (0.33%).”

Recognising the role of cities, the United Nations has dedicated Sustainable Development Goal 11 to [Making] cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, since “cities connect all other goals together; their density and economies of agglomeration link economy, energy, environment, science, technology and social and economic outputs.”

To date however not enough is known about the dynamics of efficient city brands although their value in national development is recognised globally.

SA will contribute to global knowledge systems on city dynamics

This is about to change with the establishment of an international consortium called the Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods (CSHLC). The CSHLC will be administered at Glasgow University with partners located in South Africa, China, Tanzania, Rwanda, India, Bangladesh and Philippines. The work of the Centre has just been boosted by the award of a multi-million-pound grant from the UK’s Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) which will fund 37 interdisciplinary projects over the next four years.

South Africa will contribute to global knowledge systems on city dynamics through its representation on the CSHLC by the Human Sciences Research Council.

It is anticipated that the Centre will conduct comparative studies of urbanisation and urban neighbourhoods to understand the dynamics of city development. Amongst others, the work of the Centre will aim to respond to the following questions: how cities foster inclusive economic growth and social transformation, and how can neighbourhoods be made more equitable and integrated?

In the responses to these questions, policy and decision makers will better understand how to make cities work efficiently and effectively towards the common good of the citizens which live in them. In this regard, the CSHLC can be a powerful resource for global good while influencing the thought leadership on building strong, resilient and successful city brands which can benefit the discipline of nation branding.

ABOUT MANUSHA PILLAI

Manusha Pillai is currently the Director: Stakeholder Relations and Communications. Prior to this she was General Manager: Communications at Brand South Africa and has also been at the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Home Affairs as well as Government Communication and Information Systems. She was also part of Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma’s transitional team as she prepared to take the helm of the African Union Commission.

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