



PLACE MARKETING AND LOCAL PROACTIVITY IN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF BENONI

MARIAN WALKER

Place marketing involves the re-evaluation and re-presentation of a place in order to create and market a new image for the locality so as to enhance its competitive position in attracting or retaining resources (Ashworth and Voogd 1988; Paddison 1993; Short *et al.* 1993; Ward and Gold 1994; Short and Kim 1998; Ward 1998). According to Paddison (1993), place marketing is particularly dominant in times of economic change and instability and involves numerous participants and partnerships: the private sector, real estate developers, local authorities, national governments and NGOs. While place marketing has a considerable history, particularly in cities based on industrial activities, since the 1970s it has increased in intensity, scope and quality (Ward 1994, 1998). This has mainly been the result of various forms of restructuring at the global, national, regional and local level. Local authorities regard place marketing as a potential solution to managing the consequences which restructuring has brought, particularly the increased inter-urban competition (Short *et al.* 1993; Ward and Gold 1994; Fitzsimons 1995; Short and Kim 1998). Place marketing strategies have subsequently emerged as a distinctive element in local economic development and urban regeneration schemes throughout the world.

Numerous studies have been made documenting the important role played by local authorities in local economic development in South Africa (Nel 1994; CDE 1996; Nel and Meston 1996). Investigations of earlier traditions of local economic development (Robinson 1990; Nel and Rogerson 1996) and place marketing as a distinct feature of local economic development (Kentrige 1993; Rogerson 1999) have been undertaken for South Africa. However, very little is known about how, in times of economic crisis, place marketing strategies have formed the basis of the 'economic survival' of South African towns and cities.

This paper undertakes an exploration of the fundamental role that place marketing and the proactivity of local authorities has played in the economic survival and development of Benoni. Two main phases of local proactivity and place marketing can be identified, the first beginning in the 1930s and reaching its peak in about 1947, and the second, still in its initial stages, commencing in

1997. Each of these phases was preceded by the lack of commitment to economic development on the part of the local council. The paper illustrates how a variety of factors, at various levels (global, national, regional and local) contributed to galvanising the Benoni Council into becoming more actively involved in the economic development and future of their town, and later, city. The analysis draws on the records of the Town Council of Benoni from the State Archives in Pretoria, promotional material from Benoni (including the city's web site at <http://www.benoni.org.za>), reference to the Greater Benoni Land Development Objectives framework, and telephonic and personal interviews with various members of the Benoni City Council and community.

After a brief discussion of the international experience of place promotion, the paper outlines the economic problems faced by Benoni during each phase, the causes for them, the promotional strategies that were developed to address them, and the impacts that they engendered. A subjective analysis of the types of advertisement designed and used by the councils is also included in the discussion. Recent place marketing strategies have received much criticism regarding the main beneficiaries, the coherency of the strategy adopted and the suitability of the imagery produced (Neill 1993; Fitzsimons 1995; Kenny 1995; Leitner and Sheppard 1998). The last section of this paper will therefore provide a critical discussion of the current place-marketing programme undertaken by the Benoni City Council.

PLACE MARKETING: THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Since the 1970s a key element in the local economic development (LED) strategies adopted by local authorities in many North American and West European cities has been that of place marketing (Short *et al.* 1993; Barke and Harrop 1994). Ashworth and Voogd (1988:65) define place marketing as 'specific planning actions designed to improve the relative market position of cities with regard to particular activities'. Place marketing involves a 'translation of what is local into a larger, national system of meaning as part of a competition for private investment and growth' (Kenny 1995:441). This is achieved through the 'conscious use of publicity and marketing to communicate selective images of specific geographical localities or areas to a target audience' (Ward and Gold 1994:2). It has been asserted that in practice place marketing for local economic development resembles the business practice of marketing (Holcomb 1993). According to Ward and Gold (1994:9) 'marketing is a business practice devised to promote a tangible and clearly defined product that is literally sold to clearly defined customers'. During the last few decades places have become increasingly viewed as bundles of social and economic opportunities that can be packaged and sold as 'commodities' to be consumed by a variety of users – investors, residents and visitors (Holcomb 1993; Philo and Kearns 1993). However, Fitzsimons (1995) argues

that the objectives of place marketing are broader and more inter-related than those governing ordinary products. The objectives of place marketing are seen to include raising the competitive position of the city, attracting inward investment, improving feelings of well-being in the resident population, and creating employment (Philo and Kearns 1993; Fitzsimons 1995).

Although place-marketing strategies have been the mainstay of policies for LED for a considerable length of time (Ward 1994, 1998), in contemporary place marketing greater emphasis is afforded to *how* marketing is expressed. The main thrust of current place marketing activities is on the rebuilding and reconstruction of the image of a city through the use of promotion and specifically targeted activities to reflect and bolster this image (Ashworth and Voogd 1988; Paddison 1993). Not only does place promotion function as an awareness-raising exercise, but it is frequently used to alter negative perceptions and attitudes that people may have towards a place in an attempt to attract inward investment. This is based on the recognition that investment and locational decisions made by industrial and commercial executives with regard to a place are strongly influenced by the image that is projected (Burgess 1982; Paddison 1993).

The international experience shows that place marketing has increased in importance, scope and intensity since the 1970s as localities strive to manage the impacts engendered by globalisation and political change (Harvey 1989; Paddison 1993; Young and Lever 1997; Short and Kim 1998). According to Short and Kim (1998:55), changes in the global economy have led to a decline in the manufacturing base of many North American and West European cities. The numerous economic problems that this has created have plunged such cities into a 'crisis of representation'. In response, local authorities have had to become far more 'innovative and entrepreneurial, willing to explore all kinds of avenues through which to alleviate their distressed condition and thereby secure a better future for their population' (Harvey 1989:4). Cities have had to become more competitive in order to attract 'footloose' international investment, tourist flows, consumers, public-sector funding and retain existing businesses (Goodwin 1993; Short *et al.* 1993; Ward and Gold 1994; Young and Lever 1997; Leitner and Sheppard 1998). The pressure on local authorities to become more proactive in LED, particularly in Britain and North America, has also been prompted by the emergence of a neo-liberal political environment, which stresses market-led solutions to crises, and the reduction in the level of real public-sector funding. In alleviating the 'crisis of urban representation' the promotion of a positive image of a city is regarded as being of critical importance. In old industrial towns, in particular, a variety of direct and indirect strategies have been adopted to replace negative images with new (often 'post-industrial') ones (Short *et al.* 1993; Short and Kim 1998). Fretter (1993) asserts that a distinctive feature of recent LED strategies is that they have become more demand-orientated in character, designed to meet the

specific needs of a desired target group, as opposed to the supply-based approach of conventional planning. According to Fitzsimons (1995:8), in order for place marketing strategies to be successful, several factors have to be established beforehand: a shared vision developed by the community, an audit of the city's strengths and weaknesses, identification of the target customers, knowledge of competitors, and an identification of the city's unique selling points. In the context of these changes at the global and national level, Short and Kim (1998:58) maintain that the pressure on cities to include place marketing as part of a broader strategy for LED is very real, for 'cities that fail to market themselves successfully face the risk of economic stagnation and decline'. This is echoed by Holcomb (1994:119) in the words 'any city that does not make the effort at direct advertising is dead, and sure to fall behind the times'.

PLACE MARKETING FOR INDUSTRY: BENONI 1930-1950

In the period after the First World War the impetus for the adoption of place marketing strategies to stimulate industrialisation in South Africa came from the national government. During the war local manufacturing and other industrial related enterprises flourished. Seeking to capitalise on the economic potential which this could generate, the national government, together with the South African Railways and Harbours (SAR&H) and other bodies such as the Advisory Board of Industry and Science, began a massive advertising campaign overseas to attract European investors to the Union (SAS 176 G4/4/29). As much as £10 000 per annum was spent on marketing South Africa overseas. This expenditure was justified by the SAR&H:

What South Africa has to offer as her contribution to world development must not be allowed to lie dormant, it must be proclaimed from the housetops. If we want to advance we must take the broad view and much will be gained by the vitalising energy of sound publicity propaganda. (SAR&HM 1923:50)

In addition to this, it was asserted that 'publicity, resulting in progress, is the surest means of securing and maintaining a far-reaching condition of prosperity' (ibid.). In conjunction with this campaign, the government also provided machinery to local areas in order to boost and facilitate the expansion of manufacturing in South Africa (MB 1/3/9). Local municipalities were able to promote their economic prospects and potentials to a wide range of international and local businessmen at the numerous trade fairs held in the 1920s and 1930s, the most notable being the British Empire Exhibition (1924) and the South African Empire Exhibition (1936) (MGT 263 103). Although initiated at the national level, the government and the SAR&H actively

encouraged individual municipalities to get involved in the process of industrial development through advertising both internationally and locally. It must be said that the manner in which the various South African towns began to promote themselves and the incentive schemes developed in order to attract investors were closely related, at least in part, to this broader publicity drive. Nevertheless, the development trajectories subsequently pursued were strongly influenced by distinct local processes and factors. From as early as the 1920s, therefore, South African towns possessed a considerable degree of autonomy and were encouraged to become self-sufficient in order to achieve economic growth and development. Since most of the East Rand towns in the 1920s were still rather small, attracting industries was envisaged as a logical component of town-building (Harrison 1996).

Benoni, like many of the other cities on the Witwatersrand, evolved as a consequence of the discovery of gold. From early on, however, the possibility of an alternative economic base based on industry was present in the minds of the local authorities, albeit not actively pursued (Humphriss and Thomas 1968; Cohen 1982). This is evident in the *Benoni Herald's* comment on the council's reactions to enquiries made by British industrialists about available facilities in South Africa – 'We have been so engrossed in our one industry that the mere thought of establishing others seems preposterous ... however, reduced mining operations have yet to be encountered and the creation of further industries is a vital question' (quoted in Humphriss and Thomas 1968:278). A large segment of the early population in Benoni consisted of immigrants from highly industrialised countries, many of whom realised the value and necessity of an industrial sector in a town whose economy was based on gold, a wasting asset. Not only was the Witwatersrand regarded as being 'the natural manufacturing centre for South Africa because it possesses all the characteristics which are to be found in the great manufacturing centres of Europe and America' (Humphriss and Thomas 1968:278-79), but the advantages of the railways, the cheap water and power, and the highest population in the Union, presented suitable conditions for the development of secondary industry. Despite this, however, prior to the 1930s secondary industrialisation in Benoni was severely limited in both scale and scope, with only three industries of note established in the town – Eclipse Tube Mill Liners, Vulcan Engineering and the African Boring Company (Cohen 1982). While gold mining stimulated commercial and business developments in the town centre it failed to stimulate secondary industry (Cockhead 1970). Although the Benoni Town Council took steps to introduce an industrialisation policy in 1921 by obtaining land for industrial sites – which were offered very cheaply at R200 per acre – and by diverting the main railway line so that it ran alongside the sites (MB 2/1/11; MB 2/1/30), its commitment to developing a manufacturing sector was, at best, half-hearted (Humphriss and Thomas 1968; Cohen 1982). It was at this time that an advertising sub-committee was

established as a complement to these new developments. Its approach was, however, somewhat unimaginative – blue enamel plates, describing Benoni as a ‘clean, progressive town’, were displayed on railway stations all around the country. Not only was the council reluctant to commit finances to local and international advertising, but it was unwilling to supply basic services (roads and telephones) to the industrial sites. This unenterprising attitude of the council served to discourage rather than attract inward investment (Humphriss and Thomas 1968; Cohen 1982). Indeed, a member of the Town Council was led to comment that ‘while Benoni is making rapid strides in population and as the capital of the Far East Rand, it must be admitted that its industrial progress apart from the mines is not what its friends could desire’ (Humphriss and Thomas 1968:281).

It was the threat of an economic crisis which proved to be the key motivating force behind the shift to a more proactive approach by the council (Cockhead 1970). The aftermath of the 1922 strike, the threat of closure of the New Kleinfontein Gold Mine in 1929 and the Depression of the early 1930s significantly weakened the economy of Benoni. The development of manufacturing and other industries came to be seen as crucial to the ‘economic survival’ of the fledgeling town (*ibid.*). In an attempt to wean the economy from its dependence on mining, the Benoni Town Council undertook a massive campaign to attract secondary industry. The campaign consisted of addressing five issues.

- Getting land zoned and laid out for industrial activities since by 1937 all previous sites that were laid out in the early 1920s had been sold.
- Providing efficient infrastructural services for industrialisation.
- Expanding municipal amenities to meet the new demands (providing water, electricity, telephones and roads). As a result of an enlarged electricity supply scheme undertaken by the council in 1932 Benoni was able to offer the lowest rates for electricity in the Union (MB2/1/7F4/A). A new reservoir was also built around this time. Each industrial site was provided, free of charge, with railway sidings. Improvements were also undertaken to beautify the residential section of Benoni and to promote cultural and sporting activities.
- Ensuring an adequate and controlled labour force. Because the majority of the unskilled labour force was obtained from a nearby township (Wattville) steps were taken to improve their overall living conditions. The main reason for this was that the township acted as a ‘black spot’ in Benoni – attracting unwarranted attention and deterring prospective industrialists.
- Planning these improvements and developments in conjunction with an extensive and expensive advertising campaign to promote Benoni as an ‘ideal’ residential and business area (Benoni Town Council 1956; Humphriss and Thomas 1968; Cohen 1982).

By the end of the 1930s a prominent industrial journal was to comment of Benoni 'the Benoni Municipality has played an important role in the industrial development of the town, and it is to be congratulated in its enterprise in this direction' (*South African Industry and Trade* 1941:27). The council's recognition of the importance of a committed and proactive approach to LED is evident in the words of a member: 'Any decision we make in the future should be in keeping with the boldness and vision of the past. They will shape the future of a greater Benoni and a prosperous and happy community. By making decisions appropriate to greatness, we may achieve greatness' (Benoni Town Council 1956:115). What follows is an analysis of the various types of promotional material that the council devised and published in various journals, magazines and newspapers in order to promote Benoni to industrialists.

In the early years of place marketing in South Africa the most basic tool used to convey deeper meanings was through the use of distinctive key words and slogans to front promotional campaigns. The standard approach was to link the name of the place with industry, prosperity, progress or any other positive sentiment (Lammas 1998; Ward 1998). Key reinforcing words, such as 'centre', 'hub', 'gateway', or 'heart' were frequently used. Benoni claimed variously to be 'a hub of the East Rand', 'the industrial hub of the "Golden East"' and 'the centre of the huge Witwatersrand gold mining area' (SAR 1933:25; SAR&HM 1926:2132). The visual equivalent of the key word was often a map (Lammas 1998; Ward 1998). Since a fundamental concern of the Benoni Town Council was to draw investment from distant sources, a map was used to indicate where the town was actually situated. At the same time, however, the inclusion of a map was often used to support claims of geographical centrality invariably involving a distortion of spatial realities to justify claims. As evident in Figure 1, Benoni is positioned in the centre of the map and is depicted as being larger than the surrounding towns, particularly Germiston, Boksburg and Pretoria. This, as well as the lettering used, lends credence to Benoni's claims as an 'industrial hub'. According to Lammas (1998), locational considerations were given further weight by the presence of a railway. The fine matrix of railway lines and roads projecting outwards from the town illustrates its 'easy access' to all industrial endeavours and proximity to cities such as Johannesburg and Pretoria. The clustering of mine headgears around the town supports its assertions of economic success and well-being. Another visual signifier that was frequently adopted was the use of the cog wheel, one of the most potent symbols of industrial well-being (Ward 1998). The turning wheel of industry gives the assurance of prosperity, progress, production and employment.

In later advertisements photographs were included to visually reinforce the messages of the accompanying text. The inclusion of lists of established businesses in the town added further credibility to Benoni's claims of current

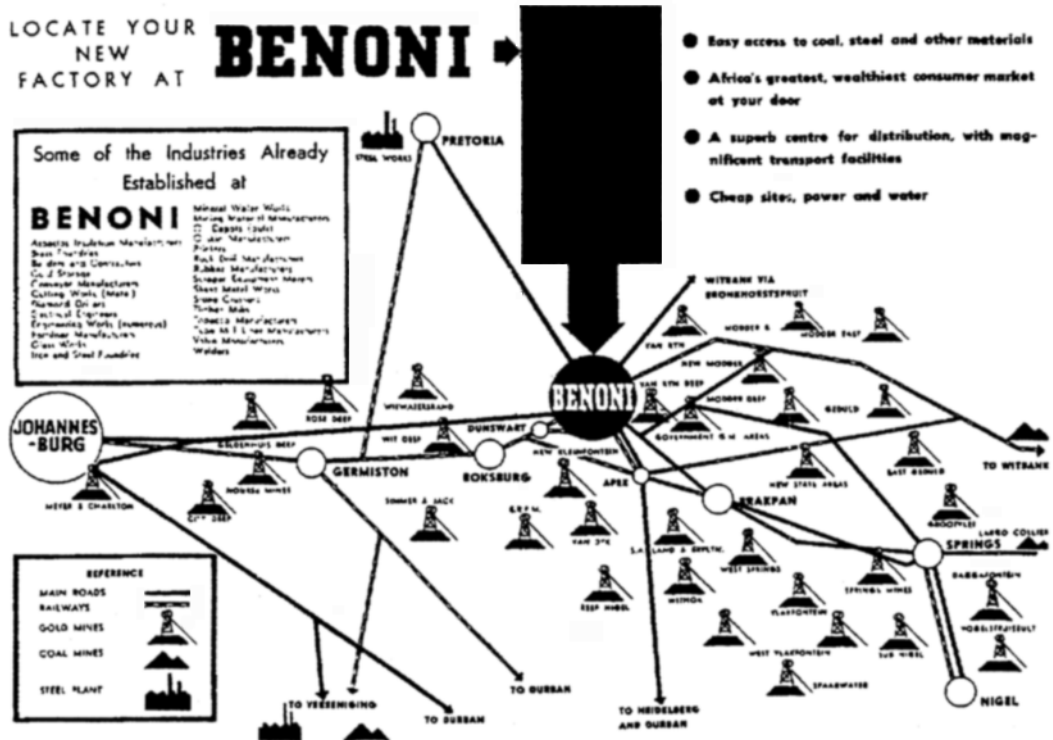


Figure 1: Examples of early advertisements in Benoni

and future success (Lammas 1998). At the same time, the phrasing of the advertisements enhanced this – ‘Benoni means business’ and a place ‘no “go-ahead” industrialist’ could possibly ignore. The Dunswart Iron Works and the Standard Brass Foundry are rated not only as Benoni’s ‘bright industrial stars’ but also as the nucleus of a national asset (*SA Mining and Engineering Year Book*, 1928:246). Benoni saw its growth as an advantage to attract industry, ‘among the towns owing its origins to the presence of a goldfield, Benoni ranks high as a place of meteoric development’ and ‘Benoni is the fourth largest town in the Transvaal’ (*SAR&HM* 1926:2132). Benoni described itself as being ‘pulsingly progressive’ offering ‘certain prosperity’ to any industrialist prepared to settle in the town (*SAR* 1933:31). Since the main focus of the advertisements was on attracting skilled labour (the backbone of the emerging economy) reference to unskilled labour remained in the background of promotional imagery (Lammas 1998). cursory references are made to an ‘ample’ and ‘plentiful’ labour supply in Benoni. In longer brochures detailed information regarding the climatic, social and cultural attributes of the town accompanies the industrial text, thus presenting Benoni as a ‘cultured and well-ordered place of residence’ and indeed a town of ‘balanced opportunities’.

It is important to note that Benoni was not the only East Rand town involved in place marketing at this time. Germiston advertised itself as a place 'where industry and pleasure harmoniously intermingle', Boksburg as 'an oasis amongst the mine dumps', Brakpan as 'a pleasant and progressive East Rand centre', and Springs as 'a metropolis of the future' (SAR 1933:15, 20, 32, 37). Thus a certain degree of inter-urban competition existed from the outset.

In assessing the advertising campaign, which Benoni launched between 1930 and 1950 to attract industry, it is necessary to draw on records of correspondence between prospective industries and the Benoni Town Council to determine the number of industrial sites sold (Cohen 1982; MB 2/1/11). The records indicate that before the 1930s the rate of secondary industrialisation was slow since only a few sites were sold. During the decade, however, particularly from 1935 onwards, industrial development proceeded at a tremendous rate (Cohen 1982).

It was during the late 1930s, too, that large overseas firms (mainly engaged in heavy industry) as well as a number of smaller firms, began establishing themselves in Benoni. In 1937 there were so many applications for industrial sites that the council was forced to apply for an extension of the existing industrial area (Humphriss and Thomas 1968). While the metal and engineering sector in Benoni was small in the early 1930s, the onset of the Second World War gave impetus to its rapid development and expansion. While the council continued its advertising campaign during the 1940s, leading to the influx of many new industries, the expansion of existing industries was mainly due to the demands of the war. The turning point in Benoni's economic history was 1947. From that year onwards the town was economically independent of the mines (Humphriss and Thomas 1968; Cockhead 1970; Cohen 1982).

From the 1950s, place marketing in South Africa became a central government concern and was strongly linked to the decentralisation and deconcentration policies associated with apartheid social engineering. In many places, particularly on the East Rand, place marketing strategies for inward investment did not resume prominence until the mid-1980s and, in the case of Benoni, from 1997 (Rogerson 1999).

PLACE MARKETING IN BENONI SINCE 1997

Reorganisation of the economy to meet the requirements of the capitalist economy since 1994 has exposed South African cities to many of the processes experienced by North American and West European cities in the past few decades (CDE 1996 1997). Increasing integration with world markets has thrust South African cities into direct competition with international cities and in many of them this has intensified existing inter-urban competition. At the same time, the government's current macro-economic policy (Growth,

Employment and Redistribution Strategy – GEAR) identifies achieving internationally competitive industries and enhancing economic growth and well-being as long-term economic goals for the country. The implementation of this strategy has led to the restructuring and relocation of economic activities and increasing uncertainty in the local labour market, local income and tax base in many places (RSA 1997). According to Rogerson (1997:180-81), it appears that some of the broad factors propelling South African local authorities to become more actively engaged in LED activities are directly linked to and reflexive of the international experience, particularly in areas based on manufacturing and industrial activities. These include increasing unemployment, decentralisation of central business districts (CBDs), threat of mine closure, and the fear of losing out on potential economic activities in the absence of such active involvement. In order to manage and cope with the new challenges and opportunities which restructuring has brought, municipalities have been forced to become more entrepreneurial in their approach to development (RSA 1997, 1998).

While these broad economic changes have played a significant role in heightening the need for more efficient and effective local authorities, they have occurred in conjunction with numerous political changes. According to the Department of Constitutional Development, municipalities have a critical role to play as policy makers and innovators in the creation of local prosperity (RSA 1997:1). The new constitution urges local governments to take the initiative in promoting the social and economic development of their communities. Local governments have, therefore, been forced to become more developmental in their approach to LED (RSA 1998). The restructuring of central-local state relations in South Africa, involving the decentralisation of both powers and responsibilities from national to provincial and local levels of government, resembles similar shifts that occurred in early 1980s in North America and the United Kingdom (Harvey 1989; Leitner and Sheppard 1998). One of the distinctive features of LED is that 'the locus of decision making [shifts] closer to those most affected by economic change' (Sengenberger 1993:319). In becoming more 'developmental' new policies and programmes have subsequently been developed of which local marketing and business promotion are a key feature (RSA 1997).

With its history rooted in mining and industrial activities, the East Rand, comprising Alberton, Boksburg, Benoni, Brakpan, Delmas, Germiston, Heidelberg, Kempton Park, Nigel and Springs, is often referred to as South Africa's 'workshop'. Indeed, the region represents the largest clustering of manufacturing in the country (CDE 1997). Because of this shared economic dependence on manufacturing the development challenges facing the region are inevitably similar differing only in scale and complexity. The CDE (1997:6) points out that since the 1980s manufacturing on the East Rand has stagnated – manufacturing output was flat in constant terms during the 1980s with only

a marginal increase in formal employment. Economic decline on the East Rand has mainly been the result of restructuring in the metals and metal-working sector. Economic problems are aggravated by the fact that while primary sector activities have decreased significantly in the 1990s, the tertiary sector has increased. Employment in the primary sector, however, far exceeds that available in the tertiary sector. The only viable option to local authorities in terms of creating future economic growth and employment opportunities is to develop the secondary sector (GBTLC 1998:21). Future development trajectories of the East Rand are also being affected by rapid population growth. In 1995 it was estimated that as much as 30 per cent of Gauteng's official population of 6,9 million people resided on the East Rand (CDE 1997:6). Unlike the de-industrialisation which occurred in industrial centres in Western Europe and North America, decline on the East Rand is not inevitable. Not only does the East Rand have a relatively diverse manufacturing base, but the region has a future as the transport hub of southern Africa. This has been facilitated by the expansion of air traffic into Johannesburg International Airport in recent years and the construction of new manufacturing, retail and courier warehousing in the vicinity (*ibid.*:14). The reality facing the East Rand, however, is that 'without sustained economic growth, economic stagnation and decline, greater poverty and accelerated urban blight will result' (*ibid.*:6).

Attracting inward investment, however, has been hindered by the negative perceptions which investors hold for the region as a whole. It has been maintained that 'the East Rand generally has a poor image compared to the northern suburbs and there is a perception that violence is more prevalent on the East Rand' (Bloch 1995:8). Not only have the crime, social inequalities and violence that were prevalent in the mid-1990s affected economic strategising for growth, but they have compromised the ability of the region to compete for international and national recognition.

A survey of the economic performance of the individual East Rand cities in 1991 revealed that Greater Benoni made an overall contribution of 9,5 per cent to the regional GGP (GBTLC 1998:23). Compared to other cities such as Germiston, Boksburg, Kempton Park and Springs (only marginally) this was the fourth-lowest contribution. Between 1980 and 1991 Benoni experienced the third-lowest growth in GGP after Kempton Park and Alberton. From these figures it is apparent that in the early 1990s economic growth in Benoni was relatively slow. This poor economic growth had a direct effect on its ability to compete effectively in the regional market (GBTLC 1998).

Recent changes in patterns of spatial organisation have also contributed to Benoni's economic decline. In 1996 and early 1997 massive decentralisation of business activities, particularly those associated with transportation, contributed to the economic decline of the City's CBD (Anon, BCB, personal communication, 1999). It has been asserted that the reasons for

decentralisation in South Africa mirror those that have occurred elsewhere: businesses trying to lower building costs, moving closer to employer's residence, and moving away from areas characterised as crowded and crime-ridden with a high prevalence of street hawking activities (*Financial Mail*, 1999). As a result of retailers and companies relocating, particularly to the East Rand Mall area and to new office parks, a new employment mix in the CBD has emerged – convenience stores and hawkers – presenting the council with a set of new development challenges and opportunities. The fact that 21 per cent of the population of Benoni was unemployed and 21 per cent engaged in the informal sector in 1998 has long-term implications for the future of the city (GBTLC 1998). The amalgamation of Benoni with its surrounding townships of Daveyton, Wattville and Actonville in the post-1994 period has also broadened and enhanced the economic and social responsibilities of the council. With a weakened financial base the council has had to seek new ways of acquiring resources in order to undertake development projects and maintain the city. These economic problems have been compounded by the fact that investors have a negative image regarding Benoni. Not only do they consider the city to be physically remote on the East Rand – that it acts as a dormitory town for workers in Pretoria and Johannesburg, but the dirtiness of the city and the problem of crime have acted as further deterrents. In the early 1990s a survey revealed that Benoni was only ranked in third place as a development destination on the East Rand (GBTLC 1998). The economic reality facing the city is that without new businesses and an expansion of existing ones, further economic decline is inevitable (GBTLC 1998).

Since the responsibility for tackling developmental problems at the city level rests with the local authority, the Benoni City Council has had to adopt a more entrepreneurial and proactive approach towards LED. According to the CDE (1996:24) the long-term success and viability of urban entrepreneurialism and LED is dependent on nine factors:

- Understanding the global and regional realities in which their cities function
- Assessing the city's prospects for growth or decline in the light of these new realities
- Ensuring that all key stakeholders in the city are kept informed of the latest trends
- Ensuring social collaboration between stakeholders
- Ensuring that the regulatory environment and operating procedures do not hinder entrepreneurial activities
- Acting entrepreneurially in promoting the city rather than trying to become an entrepreneur
- Learning how to create new resources to overcome small budgets, legislative constraints and other obstacles

- Seeking processes that enable and empower people to participate in solving problems and meeting challenges rather than seeking 'solutions'
- Having a long-term vision

In 1997 the council, together with representatives from the various departments within the council and representatives from civil society formulated the Greater Benoni Land Development Objectives which included a Spatial Development Framework, a document detailing the LED plans for the city over the next five years (GBTLC 1998). Various SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analyses were conducted in order to assess Benoni's position and potential contribution at the national, regional and local levels. From this a vision for the city and specific strategic action plans to achieve co-ordinated development were devised.

Since the key economic issue identified by the GBTL (1998) was the need to attract new industries and develop existing ones, the Benoni City Council has adopted a programme of reimagining the city as a place of industrial dynamism and thus restoring investor confidence in the city. While earlier advertisements focused on attracting commercial and retail developers to Benoni, recent strategies have concentrated on creating a more diverse economic base for the city. While the main emphasis is on attracting manufacturing-related enterprises, the establishment of retail and office activities is being actively encouraged. A sum of R1,7 billion has been set aside for the redevelopment of Benoni by 2007 (*Engineering News*, 1998). The GBTL (1998) identified five general issues requiring immediate attention:

- The need to address the problem of crime, security and dirtiness. In October 1998 the private sector together with the council launched 'Operation Clean-Up' in an attempt to clean up industrial areas (Swanepoel, personal communication, 1999). While crime and security are persistent problems, measures are being adopted to improve conditions for those engaged in SMMEs.
- To upgrade the CBD. Decentralisation has changed the nature of the CBD. The council wants to stimulate office development in the CBD particularly in the vicinity of the Lakeside Mall. This is a relatively new development since the East Rand as a whole has generally not been considered an office market by the property industry. For many years the East Rand's manufacturing firms have remained largely dependent on producer service complexes in central and northern Johannesburg (Sandton and Randburg) (CDE 1997). Since the CBD has largely been taken over by hawkers, segments of the Benoni Chamber of Commerce are currently investigating ways in which informal street traders can be moved into vacant shops with low rental in the CBD; these could then be sub-divided into small affordable sections.

- The council has set aside 435,7 hectares of proclaimed industrial land and about 10 000 hectares of undeveloped land exists for commercial, industrial and residential development.
- The council has had to become more proactive with regard to potential investors. The Benoni Marketing Department in conjunction with various organisations (such as George Rennie) has developed a fast-tracking team to give advice to potential investors in order to speed up developments. The primary objective of this team is to reduce red tape to a minimum to ensure the speedy processing of applications passing through the council's decision-making channels. The council has also introduced a Business Award as a means to stimulate greater co-operation and linkages between the council and local businesses.
- The council has had to change the negative perceptions which Benoni residents have of the council. This has involved introducing a Council Newsletter, holding regular meetings with the various departments, and changing the logo of the city. While the council has sought to become more active and committed in guiding the future of the city, the contribution of the local citizens is equally important. This is pointed out by the Marketing Manager who states that 'our influence over the product is limited: the spirit of the city is in the hands of the people of the city' (ibid.).

These developments have been coupled with an extensive programme to upgrade the physical infrastructure of the city. With the backing of the Eastern Gauteng Services Council (EGSC) the Benoni Parks and Recreation Department undertook an extensive programme of upgrading the Wattville/Sinaba and Willowmore Park stadiums. Other usable sports facilities for the various communities of Benoni were also completed in 1999 (Venter, personal communication, 1999). The most impressive development to date in Benoni, however, has been the Lakeside Mall. One of the threats identified by the GBTLC (1998) was the East Rand Mall which was drawing vital resources and finance out of Benoni. It was the result of this, together with a demand by Benoni residents and property developers for a retail and entertainment centre, that steps were taken to develop a 'flagship' project of the scale required to kickstart development in the city (*Civil Engineering and Building Contractor*, 1998). According to Fitzsimons (1995:26), 'the flagship idea has been embraced by many city governments as a way in which to restore confidence in parts of the city with weak property markets and to encourage investors and developers to follow suit'. The Lakeside Mall is conveniently situated in a highly visible point 200 metres south of the intersection of Tom Jones Street and the N12 highway. The Mall was designed after extensive study of the shopping activities and retail developments overseas (*Civil Engineering and Building Contractor* 1998). The most obtrusive feature of the

Mall is a 160-metre-long outsized replica of a Mississippi paddle steamer, the *Lakeside Queen*, which has been built on the edge of the Civic Lake.

The intention of this R332-million waterfront development was to create a 'theatre experience' for shoppers from Benoni, Brakpan, Springs and Germiston. The Mall was also designed as a community project. Through an investment system established by the developers Colliers RMS North, residents in Benoni, Etwatwa and Wattville as well as big businesses co-own the Mall (*Star* 28 April 1999). Through the project a total of 1 942 local employment opportunities were created. The Lakeside Mall was planned in conjunction with the revival of the CBD. Due to its proximity to the CBD it is hoped that the Mall will stimulate growth in the CBD, rather than detract from it (Swanepoel, personal communication, 1999).

Another significant development, and one which received just as much attention, has been the hosting of the Womad (World of Music and Dance) festival for the first time in South Africa in Benoni in 1999 (Pahala, personal communication 1999). Benoni won the bid to host this travelling international music festival against competition from Cape Town and Johannesburg. With extensive television and radio advertising before and after the event, as well as an attendance of more than 18 000 people, this three-day festival (12 to 14 February 1999) served as an indirect promotional strategy for the city. Indeed, according to the Marketing Manager, 'Womad is just one element of a major campaign of re-adjusting Benoni' (Swanepoel, personal communication, 1999). Fitzsimons (1995) asserts that winning a bid to host an international event, whether sport or culturally related, creates the momentum for future development and asserts the credentials of the place to a wide and influential audience. Success becomes a potent promotional message in itself.

CURRENT PLACE PROMOTION IN BENONI

The Marketing Department and the Benoni Publicity Department are the two most important organisations involved in the promotion of Benoni at the national, regional and city level. While the City Council was engaged in promotional activities in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, the stylistic treatment of imagery and language lacked creativity and innovation. Conventional slogans and clichés abound in the advertisements – 'Whatever your dream ... you can find it in Benoni' and 'Think of all you've ever wanted in a town ... then think Benoni' – illustrates this. Words such as 'pleasant', 'progressive' and 'peaceful' mask the true level of progress and development within the city.

Perusal through magazines such as *South African Municipalities*, *South African Provinces, Cities and Towns* and various Local Government Yearbooks reveal similarities between the advertisements devised by the council in the early 1990s and those adopted elsewhere in South Africa. During the 1990s,

however, there has been a marked revolution in the quantity, quality and complexity of the promotional material, distinguishing it from previous approaches. In many ways the themes and mediums used in South Africa have kept pace with trends overseas. According to Ward (1998:182), videos, faxes and the Internet have increasingly been adopted in order to achieve greater audience coverage. In addition to this, the graphics used are more impressive and colour is more extensively utilised. Brochures are better designed and used more professionally. Numerous photographs accompany the advertisements and the paper itself is usually of a high gloss or satin finish (*ibid.*). At the same time there appears to be a marked sensitivity to broader concerns and requirements of the business community. In particular, greater reference is made to the quality of the environment, the residential facilities and the city's general attributes, justifying it as a good place to live and work (Fretter 1993; Ward 1998; Rogerson 1999). Many of these features are apparent in the city's web site (<http://www.benoni.org.za>) and in a promotional brochure brought out by the council in early 1997. Photographs accompany the text, extensive reference is made to the infrastructure and residential conditions, the finish is of a high quality and colour abounds. Nevertheless, the same basic devices as before, such as an emphasis on centrality and locality (proximity to Johannesburg International Airport, surrounding CBDs and major national highways), remain. Again, the map in the brochure reinforces the city's claim to centrality. By adding a third dimension to the area of Greater Benoni the illusion that Benoni is significantly larger than its neighbours, especially Germiston, is created. The city's favourable position is reinforced, furthermore, by the inclusion of arrows and reference to holiday destinations such as the Kruger National Park and Durban (Figure 2).



Figure 2: A map of Benoni used in a promotional brochure (early 1997)

Since 1997 the Benoni City Council has adopted a radical shift in its approach to place promotion. Under a determined and proactive Marketing Manager a more honest and frank presentation of Benoni has been adopted as part of a broader strategy of revitalising and reimagining the city (Swanepoel, personal communication, 1999). The main technique used has been to confront people directly with the immediate responses and prejudices which the mention of the word 'Benoni' conjures up (Figure 3). A good example of this is 'Move your business to Benoni ... it's not as insane as it sounds' – the suggestion is followed by the anticipated reaction. The council's admission that 'our city has enjoyed a mixed representation not through any fault of its own' is not, however, unique to Benoni. It is asserted that the whole of the East Rand suffers from an 'unfortunate credibility problem'. The use of clichés and exaggeration which accompanied previous advertisements has been replaced with more realistic words, such as 'useful'. Moving to Benoni is described as being 'a very sensible proposition'. Previous drawcards such as locality and accessibility to the airport and national highways are regarded as 'accidents of geography'. Since these will always be a distinctive feature of Benoni, emphasis is placed rather on available support services which the council offers (fast-tracking team, foreign investment grants, tax holidays, discounts on service tariffs) which investors are likely to find more appealing. Only cursory reference is made to the residential and cultural aspects of the city. Only one photograph accompanies the advertisement to illustrate the city's cultural and residential attributes. The entrepreneurial approach of the council clearly resembles the new demand-orientated approach practised elsewhere rather than the supply-based approach of previous years. The response that the advertisement is intended to generate shows a marked departure from previous approaches – 'If Benoni is beginning to sound a little less quirky than you thought at first, now is a good time to suggest you call for more information' – it is a suggestion rather than a command. Relocation to Benoni is justified by the council's assurance that 'We'll prove to you that relocating to Benoni can make your business more efficient and more profitable', followed by the words 'Which, of course, is the perfect response to all those amusing comments you'll hear about the dangers of emigrating to the Far East'.

While these two advertisements were published in national newspapers, the council also bought airtime on a local radio station (Highveld Stereo) at the end of 1998 and early 1999. In the advertisement, which involves a discussion between two men regarding the relocation of business to Benoni, a similar approach is adopted. The advertisement confronts the negative attitudes and reactions which people have towards Benoni as a business destination. Each point made by the speaker regarding Benoni's suitability for business is refuted by the other's laughter. This background laughter is directly linked with the word 'insane' in the final line, 'Move your business to Benoni ... it's not as insane as it sounds'.



Even we have to admit that in some quarters, the East Rand suffers from an unfortunate credibility problem.

Which is surprising when you consider the advantages of doing business in our city.

As a glance at the map will confirm, we're a mere nine kilometres from the main cargo centre at Johannesburg International and closer still to the passenger terminals.

The airport's heli-stop is less than ten minutes' flying time from our own modern heli-stop and conference centre.

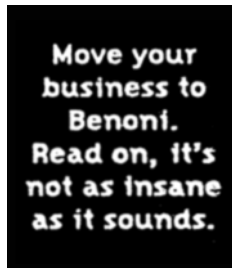
The Witbank Highway passes our front door, offering swift access to Johannesburg's CBD and, in the opposite direction, a direct link to Mpumalanga and the Maputo corridor.

Perhaps you can begin to understand why a 1997 research survey by Urban Development

Studies identified Benoni as the most preferred business and residential address on the East Rand.

Accidents of geography aside, there are plenty of compelling economic arguments in favour of an investment in Benoni.

Our City Council has created a broad range of establishment incentives and also acts as a facilitator with government and



private economic development agencies.

Among the inducements offered are favourable electricity tariffs for certain industrial users, tax holidays based on business type and workforce utilization, as well as foreign investment grants

of up to R250 000.

The Council's fast-track business team will help potential investors identify specific opportunities and will guide them through the entire process from choosing a suitable site to organizing the roof wetting party.

If Benoni is beginning to sound a little less quirky than you thought at first, now is a good time to suggest you call for more information.

We'll prove to you that relocating to Benoni can make your business more efficient and more profitable.

Which, of course, is the perfect response to all those amusing comments you'll hear about the dangers of emigrating to the Far East.

Contact Albert Swanepoel,
Benoni City Council Marketing
Telephone (011) 741-6207 or
(011) 741-6256. Fax (011) 741-6255
e-mail: opendoor@icon.co.za

Visit our website

<http://www.benoni.org.za>



Figure 3: An example of current advertising in Benoni

Perhaps one of the most powerful visual signifiers of this new approach to place promotion in Benoni is the erection of a new welcoming sign at the entrance to the city. The previous sign read 'Welcome to Benoni – Industrial Hub of the East Rand'. Now visitors, residents and business people alike are greeted with the words 'You're in Greater Benoni – Good Decision'.

EVALUATING CONTEMPORARY PLACE PROMOTION IN BENONI

The international experience reveals that considerable debate surrounds the merits and demerits of contemporary place marketing strategies, particularly with regard to the coherency of the strategy adopted, the main beneficiaries, and the suitability of the imagery produced (Neill 1993; Fitzsimons 1995; Kenny 1995; Leitner and Sheppard 1998). Although evaluating the immediate impacts of the current place marketing strategy in Benoni is restricted by the fact that the campaign is still in its initial stages and that access to records is limited by the need to maintain confidentiality, a general assessment can be made by relating the current developments in the city to these three criteria.

It has been asserted that to be effective, place marketing strategies need to be well co-ordinated, achieve the goals and targets identified, and be capable of additionality (Fitzsimons 1995). Rather than occurring in an *ad hoc* fashion, the aims and vision for the long-term development of Benoni have been clearly identified in the Greater Benoni Land and Development Objectives and Spatial Development Framework (GBTLC 1998). This document was formulated only after extensive audits were undertaken to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the city at the local, regional and national level. Not only are the various departments and persons responsible for implementing specific activities identified, but the estimated costs and time required to initiate the tasks are also provided. The various approaches that have been devised in order to integrate the council with the private sector and community do permit a certain degree of flexibility with regard to additions and amendments to the development framework. While place marketing has been identified as one of the key strategies for kickstarting economic growth and development in the city, it is not being implemented in isolation. A variety of other projects targeting a range of social, financial, physical, environmental and institutional issues are also being undertaken by the council. It has been asserted that factors such as location, workforce, the proactive approach of the council, education facilities and personal communication between the council and investors are often of greater importance in influencing business decisions than the projected image (Barke and Harrop 1994:109). In the case of Benoni, however, it appears that the reimagining of the city has been the stepping-stone to the establishment of many of these features. While businesses may have been attracted by the support services offered by the council they were indirectly responding to the city's new image. According to Benoni's

Marketing Manager, the response to the campaign, in terms of attracting inward investment, has been an 'overwhelming success'. While Gauteng had been the target audience he received enquiries from both small and large-scale firms from as far afield as Cape Town (Swanepoel, personal communication, 1999).

LED in Benoni is, however, constrained by the degree to which incentives can be offered (Rogerson 1997:182). Like other South African local authorities, Benoni is restricted by the Local Government Ordinance (17 of 1939 Section 80B). Not only are they limited in their ability to offer financial incentives to relocating businesses in the form of rebates or tax holidays, but the Department of Finance has also placed a fixed limit on the rate of growth of municipal budgets as a means to protect poorer local authorities. This places a constraint on urban regions that are rapidly developing. The situation is further aggravated by the complete absence of any institutional mechanism (such as a city or urban development fund) that might facilitate or enhance economic intervention. In addition to these constraints, at the city level the City Council is caught in a catch-22 situation with regard to the incentives that they can offer. Although amalgamation of 'old' Benoni with the surrounding townships has potentially increased the local tax base, a culture of non-payment persists and this is undermining the council's ability to provide incoming investors with financial incentives. The council cannot afford to offer rebates, however, and this is what investors want (Swanepoel, personal communication 1999). Although Benoni is a relatively small city in South Africa, financial constraints such as those identified above highlight a perplexing problem which the country as a whole faces. In an increasingly globalised world, competition for 'footloose' investment requires huge expenditure plans at the individual city level in order to compete effectively. Where public-private partnerships and support from organisations such as the European Community are able to provide the finances required for extensive flagship developments, the flows of capital to these cities will be greater than the ones to those cities who lack this competitive advantage. It is unlikely that small cities such as Benoni, in the light of the current financial reality in South Africa, will ever receive the benefits experienced elsewhere in terms of 'footloose' international investment flows. At the same time, at the local level, the lack of finances places definite parameters on the extent of the city's promotional campaign. In this regard, the marketing manager is currently faced with the dilemma of choosing between placing an advertisement in a national newspaper or over the airwaves, but not both, as finances are limited (*ibid.*).

In considering the effectiveness and success of a place marketing strategy it is necessary to consider who the main beneficiaries are. According to Bianchini and Schwengal (quoted in Neill 1993:597), what can result from flagship developments is the possibility of the 'co-existence in the same city of "small

islands of regeneration" with growing social polarisation and injustice'. Harvey (1989:14) points out that frequently 'the image of prosperity conceals all ... masks the underlying difficulties and projects an imagery of success'. Interviews with respected members of the Daveyton and Actonville communities, who have been integrally involved in community upliftment for a long time, revealed that contrary to the international experience there is great optimism within the local population regarding current developments in Benoni. The member from Actonville, in particular, envisages infrastructural developments such as the Lakeside Mall as a solution to current social problems, achieving unity amongst residents and gradually alleviating the employment crisis (Anon, Actonville, personal communication, 1999). The fact that they perceive the current vision of the city in an optimistic light suggests that there is a direct correlation between the aims of the council and the trajectory pursued, and that the Benoni local authorities are indeed 'developmental'. According to the *Star* (28 April 1999), 'the Mall has turned the tide, and prospects for retail and entertainment business have improved'. Illustrating this, retail developments undertaken by private developers in the 'old' Benoni area alone include the Northfield Square, the new Lakefield Square and Brentwood Square (still in the initial stages). The fact that the Lakeside Mall was designed primarily as a community project and as a means to stimulate growth and development in the adjacent CBD indicates that a significant advancement has been made in Benoni over the international experience of flagship developments.

In formulating an assessment of Benoni's current place marketing strategy it is also necessary to consider the likely long-term success of the city's reimagining programme. According to Goodwin (1993:149) the 'formation of new images is an issue of challenge and contestation'. While place marketing schemes are frequently designed with the principle objective of altering the negative perceptions and attitudes that people may hold towards a particular place in order to attract inward investment, it has to be asked whether such an objective can really be achieved. Cooke (1989:296) asserts that localities 'are actively involved in their own transformation, but not necessarily masters of their own destinies'. According to Goodwin (1993:149), the 'building' and 'revolutionising' of an urban landscape is never just a physical and economic issue, there are complex social, cultural and political dimensions included as well. In this regard, while developments such as the Lakeside Mall may succeed in transforming the physical appearance of Benoni, true reimagining of Benoni rests with changing the negative mindset that people have towards the city as a potential business, residential and tourist destination. Changing the perceived image of Benoni means restoring the image that existed in the 1940s. This involves overcoming the numerous economic and political events which caused a negative perception of the city to emerge: the decline of the East Rand's mining and manufacturing sectors in the 1980s and 1990s; the violence

of the early 1990s; and the centralised nature of place marketing from the 1950s to the 1980s. Although some progress has been made in terms of changing the city's image as a potential business destination, achieving the long-term objective of a positive external image of all aspects of Benoni is a complex problem requiring the resolution of a multitude of diverse issues and debates.

THE FUTURE OF PLACE MARKETING IN BENONI

As previously mentioned, Benoni is one of nine cities comprising the East Rand, all of which share a common economic base in manufacturing. A broader examination of place marketing on the East Rand reveals that the city is not alone in its endeavours. All the East Rand towns emphasise things such as locality, incentives and a willing and facilitative council in their place marketing strategies (Kentrige 1993; CDE 1997). The fact that similarities exist in promotional strategies on the East Rand is not a unique feature. Commenting on the international experience, Ward and Gold (1994:4) state that 'the process of imitation ... demonstrates a general paucity of creative ideas and effectively ensures that the vast majority of place promotional campaigns rarely manage to cross the threshold of ephemeral indifference'. Perhaps the only real feature that distinguishes Benoni's approach from those of the other cities is its emphasis on honesty and frankness. It could also be added that it shows evidence of being the most recent and 'revolutionary' of the current campaigns being practised on the East Rand. Prospective investors are therefore confronted with cities who are all vying for the same things (investment, visitors and tourists). The East Rand is also competing against other fledgeling manufacturing and industrial areas in the province, particularly Midrand. Midrand advertises itself as being 'the heart of South Africa's economic powerhouse', 'the fastest growing town in Africa' and 'the jewel in the Gauteng crown' (*Gaffney's Local Government in South Africa* 1999). Although the Greater Benoni Land Development Objectives emphasise negotiation and discussion between the Benoni City Council and surrounding cities when designing or implementing development plans, no move is being made at the city level to co-ordinate a regional promotional strategy. The same could be said, however, for other cities on the East Rand – Springs, Alberton, Kempton Park and Boksburg (Kentrige 1993). While a certain degree of competition between cities is necessary to maintain and enhance local proactivity, competition of the type currently characterising the East Rand, cannot assist in increasing national economic growth (CDE 1997). More often than not, cities are indirectly affected by the spill-over effects which result from individual promotion schemes. A classic example of this exists in Benoni. Although Tsogo Sun lost its bid for a casino to be established there, Carnival City in Brakpan has resulted in positive spin-off effects for the city. Not only do visitors to the casino have to travel through Benoni to get to Brakpan,

bringing associated benefits, but recently a casino-related enterprise purchased a large tract of land in Benoni (Swanepoel, personal communication, 1999).

Proposals have been put forward to create a megacity on the East Rand. The response of the Benoni Marketing Manager to this, particularly regarding the future of the city and the current marketing strategy, is ambivalent. While it may lead to greater national economic growth – the co-ordinated clustering of manufacturing activities in the region may result in the East Rand as South Africa's 'workshop' – the effects at the individual municipal level can be adverse. The marketing manager asserts that the creation of a megacity may lead to regional reorganisation and administration of funds, in which case Benoni, with its smaller financial base, may lose out to larger cities. If, however, growth continues as it has since 1998, then it might benefit from amalgamation. The likely impact of these developments on the place marketing initiatives of the individual municipalities comprising the East Rand is also a matter of considerable speculation: amalgamation may lead to a single promotional strategy being adopted for the East Rand as a whole, or current programmes might be allowed to continue but subject to specifications decided at the regional level.

CONCLUSION

'Change is the essence of the city economy' (CDE 1996:7). As cities throughout the world strive to adjust to the demands and rigours engendered by global economic restructuring and political change, local authorities have had to become more proactive and developmental in their approach to local economic development. Many local authorities view place marketing as a tool that can be used to enhance the competitive position of their cities in order to attract 'footloose' investment. This paper aimed to demonstrate the crucial role that place marketing has played in arresting the economic decline in Benoni in two periods of its history, the 1930s and in the post-1997 period. In each case a variety of factors – global, national, regional and local – weakened the economy to such an extent that the council was forced to intervene. In both phases advertising was coupled with a strategy of urban enhancement and upgrading. While earlier advertisements depended heavily on the use of exaggeration and clichés to convey their messages, a noticeable rethinking and reconceptualisation of the approach and aims of place marketing has occurred since 1997. The emphasis now is on alleviating the negative perception that people have of Benoni and is more demand-orientated in nature. With regard to the practice of place marketing in future, it is evident that considerable restructuring and adjustment will occur in Benoni, especially if plans for a megacity on the East Rand are approved. Place marketing, however, will continue to feature and local authorities will still be responsible for LED. In the final analysis, it is important that cognisance be taken of a statement made by

the CDE (1997:1) that 'no city can afford to rest on its laurels. No city can assume that the future will be like the past'. This study of Benoni's economic development gives credence to this fact.

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