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Personality Association and Celebrity Museumification of George Best

(with nods to John Lennon)

Abstract

It is common practice for cities to be associated with celebrated sons and (sometimes) daughters. This is tied to aligning the branding process to a selected individual's personality, achievements or celebrityhood to 'sex up' the city's image. In this paper we compare and contrast the 'museumification' of George Best in Belfast and John Lennon in Liverpool. Our findings show, as expected, similarities in how both artists have been museumified in their respective cities; more importantly, however, we also demonstrate significant differences in how the celebrity museumification and associated landscaping has been received in Belfast and Liverpool. Firstly, it is claimed that Liverpool's association with Lennon is based upon a 'highly selective' reading of his life and 'cleaning up' of his past; however, this is not the case with Best in Belfast. Secondly, the celebrity museumification of Lennon received widespread local support; this is not the case with Best due to an ongoing debate about his suitability as a Belfast icon. We problematise this situation and ruminate as to why Best is seemingly more divisive compared to Lennon. Beyond the spatial spotlight of Belfast and Liverpool, the findings from this paper offer insights and lessons for place branding professionals and practitioners in other cities around the world.

Keywords

Branding; celebrities; association; museumification

Introduction

This paper presents a case study of personality association and celebrity museumification that will be of interest to place branding practitioners, and those from the academic community. It is common practice for cities to be associated with celebrated sons and (sometimes) daughters (Ashworth, 2009, 2010; Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2011, 2016; Bergien 2019; Hakala et al, 2015; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2015; Scaramanga, 2012). This is tied to aligning the branding process to a selected individual's personality, achievements or celebrityhood in order to 'sex up' the city's image (Boland, 2013). This can attract mobile capital, and stimulate cultural consumption, international tourism and employment creation; e.g. the huge economic footprints of Elvis Presley in Memphis and the Beatles in Liverpool. Gregory Ashworth's¹ (2010: 229) important text on

¹ The late Gregory Ashworth (2009, 2010) wrote the most dedicated and detailed texts on this subject. Other authors tend to refer to this debate, and his work, whilst analysing broader issues concerned with city branding.

personality association mentions the “museumification of the artist”. We apply this concept to iconic footballer George Best, with a comparative nod to musician John Lennon. The data collection draws upon academic studies of reimagining Belfast and Liverpool, plus papers on Best and Lennon; for secondary sources we engaged with official documents, stakeholder websites and media commentary on the current rebranding of both cities. Our findings show, as expected, similarities in how both artists have been museumified in their respective cities; more importantly, we also demonstrate significant differences in how the celebrity museumification and associated landscaping has been received in Belfast and Liverpool. Firstly, Liverpool’s association with Lennon is, claims Kruse (2005a), based upon a ‘highly selective’ reading of his life and ‘cleaning up’ of his past; however, this is not the case with Best in Belfast. Secondly, the celebrity museumification of Lennon received widespread local support; this is not the case with Best due to an ongoing debate about his suitability as a Belfast icon. We problematise this situation and ruminate as to why Best is seemingly more divisive compared to Lennon. Beyond the spatial spotlight of Belfast and Liverpool, the paper offers insightful lessons and applied learning for place branding professionals and practitioners personality association.

Practising place branding: associating people with place

There is an extensive body of literature on place branding that draws upon different theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, case studies and geographic scales (Boisen et al, 2018; Braun et al, 2013; Cleave et al, 2016, 2017; de Noronha et al, 2017; Giovanardi et al, 2017; Glińska & Gorbaniuk, 2016; Hanna & Rowley, 2013; Kavaratzis, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2015, 2018; Lichrou et al, 2017a; Lucarelli, 2018; Oliveira, 2015; Pike, 2013; Vanolo, 2018; Vuignier, 2017; Warnaby & Medway, 2013; Zenker, 2018). The wider context is cities’ involvement in intensified ‘inter-urban competition’ (Peck, 2014) has generated a ‘worldwide diffusion’ of place branding (Brenner & Schmid, 2015). Basically, those responsible for city economies (and other territorial units) have become preoccupied with image and perception, i.e. how cities (regions, nations) are experienced, understood and viewed by external (and internal) audiences. So many of the concepts, ideas and approaches used to brand goods and services in the private sector are adopted by professionals and practitioners involved in city planning and place management (Grenni et al, 2019; Lucarelli & Heldt Cassel, 2019; Porter, 2020; Van Assche et al, 2019). Lichrou et al (2017b: 2) explain:

“Behind the notions of place marketing and place branding usually lies the assumption that, not too differently from goods and services, cities, countries and other spatially extended ‘products’, can be managed, developed and promoted following a marketing business philosophy”.

There are ‘many instruments’ available to city planning and place management organisations (Ashworth, 2010; Boisen et al, 2018; de Noronha et al, 2019; Giovanardi et al, 2017; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Vinyals-Mirabent et al, 2019). Personality association is one of those instruments. It is not a stand-alone strategy, rather it is often used in conjunction with signature buildings and hallmark events that feed into, and complement, a wider package of branding strategies designed to construct ‘unique selling points’ enabling cities to compete in highly competitive global ‘place wars’ (Peck, 2015) or, using a non-militaristic analogy, ‘beauty contests’ (Boland, 2013). Personality association involves cities being associated with the ‘unique qualities’ of a specific individual(s), where the aim is to create a ‘special link’ between the person(s) and the place (Ashworth, 2009, 2010; Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2016):

“As people are unique then places will acquire this character of uniqueness through this association with a nominated individual. Furthermore, the nature of these associative attributes, as well as their existence, are assumed to enhance the place in some way. It is in this sought for transference of associations from person to place, that the branding lies” (Ashworth, 2010: 223).

Thus, territories become intimately interwoven with the lives and memories of certain individuals as “Salzburg becomes monopolistically synonymous with Mozart, Liverpool with the Beatles and Nottingham with Robin Hood” (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2015: 166). Visual artists, urban designers and architects’ propensity to generate ‘distinctive/creative work’ renders them more ‘notable/noticeable’, making them valuable for branding purposes. Examples include Gaudi and Barcelona, Mackintosh and Glasgow, Dali and Figueres, Hundertwasser and Vienna, Dudok and Hilversum, Raphael and Urbino, Cezanne and Aix-en-Provence; similarly, historical figures include Socrates and Athens, Descartes and Franeker and Erasmus and Rotterdam (Ashworth, 2010; Bergien, 2019; Giovanardi, 2011). Another category involves linking music to the place and its people. This ranges from classical composers to popular performers such as Wagner and Bayreuth, Elgar and Hereford, Presley and Memphis and, as noted above, the Beatles and Liverpool; or groups of musicians such as Motown in Detroit, Country in Nashville and Jazz in New Orleans.

Then there are associations between writers/dramatists and their places of birth/focus: e.g. Shakespeare's Stratford, Wordsworth's Lake District, Austen's Bath, Hardy's Wessex, Couperus' The Hague and Joyce's Dublin. Sometimes lived realities do not matter. For example, city leaders in Stratford, Canada created a sophisticated association with an esteemed British writer (www.stratfordfestival.ca/):

“The second most important annual Shakespeare festival in the world and largest in North America...The non-existence of any historical connection between the town and the personality, who had been dead for 200 years before the town was even founded, has proved no disqualification” (Ashworth, 2010: 226).

In the current climate of celebrityhood, branding often connects to a living person (Benwell et al, 2013; Currid-Halkett & Scott, 2013). Typically, they are high profile individuals in sport, entertainment, politics etc. with significant ‘media induced fame’ who endorse the place. According to Ashworth (2010: 227, 288) celebrity branding (when applied to places) draws upon the person's fame - “someone we know and recognise, if not respect”; so, in contrast to personality association, “the perceived qualities of the individual being mentioned are not specifically being recruited to apply to the place”. David Beckham is an exemplar. His transfer from Manchester United to Real Madrid in 2003 stimulated an astronomical upturn in Real's commercial appeal²; indeed, rather harshly, it is “speculated that the true impetus for the transfer was more Beckham's global celebrity and iconic appeal rather than his playing ability” (Vincent, 2009: 175). ‘Beckonomics’ had the same impact when he moved to LA Galaxy in 2007³. Another example is ‘starchitecture’ (Niculae, 2016). The (‘star’)architect - global brand names such as Ghery, Foster, Rodgers, Libeskind⁴ - become as important to the city because the “building endows the place not only with a recognisable physical signature but also with a cachet of artistic patronage and global significance” (Ashworth, 2010: 226). Additionally, deceased people are used for celebrity branding. Frequently, this involves naming cities or spaces within cities - ‘nomenclature without association’ - such as Washington DC and Nelson Mandela Urban Region, or airports such as Charles de Gaulle Paris, Oliver Tambo Johannesburg and JFK New York.

² Club revenue from merchandise sales (e.g. replica shirts) rose by 67% in his first season; then there was the huge income generated from lucrative tours that tapped into new markets in Asia and America.

³ The club sold out their luxury suites, attracted 11,000 season ticket holders, secured a \$20 million shirt sponsorship deal and increased merchandise sales by 700%.

⁴ Daniel Libeskind redesigned the World Trade Centre as a symbol of American fortitude following the 911 terror attacks on the Twin Towers; Norman Foster's Gherkin reflects London's world city status (as in New York the site was severely damaged, in this case by an Irish Republican Army (IRA) bomb in 1992); finally, Frank Ghery's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is one of the most recognisable buildings in the world.

Celebrity museumification and divisive personalities

Adinolfi & van de Port (2013) note there is a long tradition of constructing memorials or museums from the 'living quarters' of 'extraordinary people'; in this sense, museumification involves shifting the language of location from ordinariness to extraordinariness. We adopt an extended view of museumification (whilst remaining cognisant of Roberts & Cohen's (2014: 251) caution over the "museumification of culture and everyday life"). In line with Adinolfi & van de Port (2013: 286) museumification can be attributed 'to any object'; moreover, it can be read "as an expressive form, a particular mode or register of representation, a medium, a "language"" (also Meyer & de Witte, 2014). Likewise, Dellios (2002: 1) argues museumification is a 'process' that is not confined to the spatiality of a museum; instead, in the "interpretive medium of museumification, everything is a potential 'artefact'". In this broader conceptualisation a variety of museumifications occur in the contemporary city; beyond a former home, office or atelier, numerous cityspaces contain signifiers and signposts, memories and memorabilia dedicated to the person and their life. A crucial question asked by Dellios (2002) concerns the 'socio-cultural implications' of museumification; this forms a core component of our comparative analysis of local reactions to the museumification of George Best and John Lennon.

A second important issue for professionals and practitioners is that celebrity branding and personality association are "not always an easy route to successful branding" (Bergien, 2019: 307). This is because certain celebrities are prone to being 'more divisive' due to their complex personalities, controversial lifestyles and bad behaviour. They can exhibit 'inappropriate' or 'completely undesirable' characteristics (Ashworth, 2009, 2010), or display 'immoral behaviour' and 'criminal activity' (Keel & Natarajan, 2012). The examples cited in the literature include Hitler and Braunau, Al Capone and Chicago, Billy the Kid and New Mexico. Associations with such individuals "may not be viewed as advantages by the place management agencies concerned and place-personality disassociation is likely to prove very difficult for them to achieve" (Ashworth, 2010: 228). Relatedly, Kruse (2005a) contends that connecting people to place can involve 'highly selective' readings of a celebrity's life and a 'cleaning up' of their past. Similarly, others speak of how prominent figures from the past are 'fabricated' and 'fumigated' then served up by 'merchandising interests' as sanitised commodities for undiscerning tourist consumption (Hollinshead, 1998; as in Fjellman's (1992) study of the Disney complex in America - what he called 'distory'). Divisiveness, bad behaviour, selective readings of life events, cleaning up/fabricating/fumigating a person's past are central to this practitioner-focused case study paper.

Celebrity museumification of John Lennon

The Beatles exemplify personality association and celebrity branding. The 'Fab Four' left an indelible cultural and economic imprint on Liverpool, what Kruse (2004) calls a *Beatlespace*. In another paper he explains "The marketing of a Beatles landscape in Liverpool has become a well-coordinated and highly lucrative industry" leading to a global 'secular pilgrimage' to the city (Ibid, 2005a: 89). Strikingly, Beatles-related sites are responsible for £89.1 million turnover and 2,335 jobs in the local economy (Yates et al, 2016). Moreover, the Beatles are elevated to 'patron saints' of the city, while Lennon is lauded as "Liverpool's very own Shakespeare" (Quinn, 2004: 339). Interestingly, Currid-Halkett & Scott's (2013) study of the geography of celebrity and glamour cites Liverpool as an exemplar 'unpromising case' (i.e. non-global city) that has acquired significant status through its association with the Beatles. From a practitioner perspective, the city is emblematic of how branding professionals "frequently seek to raise the profile of their city by promoting celebrity connections" (Ibid, 2013: 8-9).

The association with the Beatles and Lennon in particular is manifest in signature buildings. In 2001 for the first time in the UK an airport was named after a famous person. The rebranding of Liverpool John Lennon Airport was regarded as a "fitting and lasting tribute" to the slain star (BBC News, 2001: np). Kruse (2005a: 107) explains "the renaming of the airport demonstrates the city's official attitude toward its association with the Beatles and John Lennon specifically". A year later the National Trust acquired Lennon's childhood home and, along with the other band members, it forms part of the Beatles tourist trail (Inglis, 2005). On this, Kruse (2005b: 485) refers to "a pastiche of authentic and inauthentic places, of replicas, of brightly colored coaches that take passengers on a Magical Mystery Tour of the Liverpool suburbs". Other examples include Beatles souvenir shops, themed bars (e.g. the Cavern), annual Mathew Street music festival and statues of John Lennon at the local airport and in the city centre. Also, as the city hosted the 2008 European Capital of Culture, headlined by Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr, a 'luxurious/exclusive' Beatles-themed hotel opened (www.harddaysnighthotel.com/). Reinforcing the city's connection to the 'Fab Four' and their global significance for Liverpool. The celebrity museumification of John Lennon involves the standard museum of his former home, also incorporating other 'objects' and 'artefacts' that form a 'representation/interpretation' of him and his achievements. It shows that the museumification of Lennon is not confined to his childhood home, rather it constitutes a

variety of museumifications in cityspaces that contain signifiers and signposts, memories and memorabilia dedicated to Lennon's life.

Interestingly, the celebrity museumification of Lennon is questioned. Kruse (2005a: 107) claims local stakeholders "embrace *selected* discourses associated with Lennon, while ignoring others". These include illegal drug user, radical political activist, Republican (i.e. IRA⁵) sympathiser and woman beater⁶ (BBC News, 2000; Davies, 2000; Inglis, 2005; McDonald, 2006). Connecting back to an earlier point, this hints at the 'fabrication/fumigation' of Lennon's life and a 'cleansing' of his past leading to a 'sanitised' image of him that suits the city. Kruse's (2005a: 111) conclusion sets the context for Best and Belfast:

"The commercial coordination of the Beatles landscape of Liverpool is highly selective and involves, to some degree, what Fjellman (1992, 59) referring to the treatment of history by Disneyland, terms "distory" - the cleaning up of the past. Such is evident in the representation of the Beatles in Liverpool. In terms of the Beatles' association with Liverpool, "unpleasantries [are] dropped from history, and stories of the past [are] told in the carefully (and commercially) remythologized form"".

Celebrity museumification of George Best

Belfast is a unique city that has long wrestled with a deep seated image problem. During Northern Ireland's "Troubles"⁷ over 3,700 people lost their lives, estimates vary between 50,000 and 100,000 were physically injured and countless more emotionally and psychologically scarred (Cunningham & Gregory, 2014; Devine et al, 2017; Nagle, 2018). As the epicentre of the conflict Belfast acquired the "reputation as a place of murder, mayhem, and mindless acts of violence" (Brown et al, 2013a: 1258) which had huge implications for the city's economy, society and body politic. The situation improved significantly from the mid-1990s with paramilitary ceasefires and the Good Friday Agreement⁸; this meant the 'Troubles' were officially over creating the conditions for a cessation of violence. More recently Belfast has experienced a significant image transformation as a 'post

⁵ Irish Republican Army, a paramilitary organisation that waged a war against what they regarded as the British occupation of Northern Ireland. Their objective was British withdrawal and a United Ireland.

⁶ It is important to read these events in the context of the time in which they took place, i.e. 1960s and 1970s.

⁷ In 1921 the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland divided the island of Ireland into two separate political jurisdictions. Six north eastern counties (with an in-built Protestant majority) became Northern Ireland while the remaining 26 counties formed the Free State or Eire, from 1949 it became the Republic of Ireland. From 1969 onwards fierce violence erupted between Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries; the former seeking a united Irish Republic, the latter defending Northern Ireland's British status.

⁸ Signed in 1998 between the British and Irish Governments, and the main political parties in Northern Ireland, paving the path for peace, power sharing and a political solution to the conflict.

conflict' city (Murtagh, 2018; O'Dowd & Komarova, 2013; Shirlow, 2006) evidenced by its reputation as a serious site for private investment, retail shopping, cultural consumption, event hosting and international tourism - all seriously limited (or absent) during the 'Troubles'. This neoteric narrative has been propelled by the 'urban beautification' (Hodson, 2019) of the city centre and waterfront that now represent a 'competitive city' that is 'open for business' on the world stage (Boland et al, 2017; Neill, 2011). Compared to the city centre and waterfront nothing definitive has been written on Belfast's association with George Best. His importance is mentioned in some papers (e.g. Brown et al, 2013a; Hill & White, 2012; Irvine, 2005; Neill, 2006; Rolston, 2012) but there is no dedicated academic analysis *vis-a-vis* Lennon and Liverpool (e.g. Kruse, 2004, 2005a, b, 2009; also Inglis, 2005). The closest is Bairner (2006) on how Best's cultural grounding as an Ulster Protestant shaped, and conflicted with, his future life.

George Best was one of the greatest footballers to have graced the game; he belongs in the same world class company as Pelé, Maradona, Messi and (the Portuguese) Ronaldo. During the Swinging Sixties Best became the first celebrity footballer and due to his stunning good looks, sublime skills and fashion sense he was known as the 'Fifth Beatle' or 'El Beatle'. The Beckham of his generation. Sadly, Best was plagued by alcoholism which significantly contributed to his untimely passing in 2005 aged 59 (controversially, following a lifesaving liver transplant in 2002 he continued to drink alcohol). Since his death a 'special link' (after Ashworth, 2009, 2010) between the person and place has been cultivated in much the same way that Liverpool embraces its famous son. Brown et al (2013a: 1263) believe Belfast's "icons are self-destructive sporting legends, such as George Best and Alex Higgins"⁹. In a more sympathetic piece, Bairner (2006) argues that whilst both men struggled with alcoholism there were personality differences between Best and Higgins, and also between Best and Van Morrison (another famous - musical - 'Belfast boy'). In addition, he suggests that Best's Ulster Protestant upbringing contributed to his 'social dislocation', and ultimately his alcohol abuse, as he struggled to deal with life in England as a famous footballer¹⁰.

Following his death¹¹, Best's name, life and memory has been museumified in Belfast, mostly by 'non-official' agencies (after Ashworth, 2009, 2010). First, newly painted murals adorned gable

⁹ Two-time world snooker champion who also suffered from alcohol addiction, and public and private displays of unacceptable behaviour.

¹⁰ His mother also died of alcoholism aged just 54. It is claimed she struggled to cope with her son's fame, with alcohol dominating her life (Davies, 2009).

¹¹ Prior to this he received an Honorary Doctorate from Queen's University Belfast (BBC News NI, 2001) and became the first person to receive the Freedom of Castlereagh, the local authority area of Belfast where he lived (Lowry, 2002).

walls in East Belfast where he grew up; this was an exercise in eulogising a deceased sporting icon as Best is claimed as a cherished son of the Protestant East Belfast community¹². It also coincided with the Northern Ireland Government's *Shared Future* strategy and *Reimagining Communities Programme*. New public art aimed to 'challenge sectarianism' through removing 'inappropriate and aggressive' paramilitary murals (Hill & White, 2012; Rolston, 2010). In this context, "Loyalists looked to local heroes - most notably George Best" (Rolston, 2012: 452). This artistic museumification included other celebrated sons. Beyond Best, transitioning from hard-edge Loyalist signifiers in the East involved "celebrating the achievements in sport [George Best], literature [C.S. Lewis] or music [Van Morrison] of the "sons of Ulster" rather than the dogs of war" (Irvine (2005: np)¹³. Interestingly, despite the movement away from militaristic murals the city has developed a lucrative 'dark tourism' industry linked to locations where awful atrocities took place during the conflict (BBC, 2018).

Let us consider other aspects of Best's museumification. In 2006 Belfast City Airport was renamed in honour of George Best. Approvingly, Neill (2006: 119) argued this rebranding gave "a much-needed resonance to the saying, sadly heard less these days, "Belfast and proud"". In the same year airline operator Flybe named a Dash 8 (Q400) aircraft *The George Best* and on the first anniversary of his death Ulster Bank issued one million commemorative five pound notes. In 2011 16 Burren Way¹⁴ on the Cregagh Estate was renovated and opened its doors to the paying public; for £70 per night visitors can 'experience life' in George's scrupulously time warped former home (www.georgebesthouse.com). This location also forms a significant stop on the George Best Trail as enthusiasts enjoy his childhood haunts, e.g. school, ice cream parlour, chip shop, cinema and, of course, football fields (Connswater Community Greenway, 2019). More recently, on 22nd May 2019 - what would have been Best's 73 birthday - a life-size statue funded by public donations was unveiled close to the national stadium¹⁵. The Belfast Telegraph (2019: np) explained "the Manchester United and Northern Ireland star has been immortalised in bronze in the shadow of Windsor Park, the stadium he graced so many times for his national side". Finally, there are plans to open a £15 million 65 bedroom George Best Hotel complete with a rooftop statue of Best

¹² The West is predominantly working class Catholic-Nationalist, South is more middle class and mixed, large parts of the North are divided between working class Protestant-Unionist and Catholic-Nationalist housing estates separated by interfaces and peace walls/lines.

¹³ In the West of the city the same spatial marking is in evidence, this time with Republication memorialisation.

¹⁴ Best's former home is owned and operated by the EastSide Partnership, a social partnership involving community, statutory, political and business members (www.eastsidepartnership.com/background). Profits from the home are channelled back into the local community through the Partnership (McAdam, 2017).

¹⁵ The Nationalist community do not view Windsor Park as their national stadium. That would be Croke Park or the Aviva Stadium in Dublin, Ireland.

(again life-size) enjoying a panoramic view of the city centre (the launch date has been deferred due to planning and building regulations and funding issues with the company). The website states: “The luxury boutique hotel...will celebrate the life of the iconic footballer” (<https://georgebesthotel.co.uk>), while the ‘Beautiful Belfast boy’ statue “will create a permanent tribute and memorial to the football star” (Colhoun, 2018: np).

The above reveals the museumification of Best’s life in Belfast’s built environment, cultural landscape and civil airspace. As with Lennon, this incorporates the museumification of his former home, plus other ‘objects’ and ‘artefacts’ that construct a ‘representation/interpretation’ of him and his life. Additionally, it reveals the museumification of Best is not limited to his childhood home, rather it includes a range of other museumifications in certain cityspaces containing signifiers and signposts, memories and memorabilia dedicated to his life. This can be read as the construction of a ‘Bestscape’ (after Giovanardi, 2011) or ‘Best landscape’ (after Kruse, 2005a). There are lots of similarities between Best in Belfast and Lennon in Liverpool, i.e. childhood homes, airports, hotels, statues, tourist trails etc. The celebrity museumification of Best is very different to the sectarian territoriality (O’Dowd & Komarova, 2010) of paramilitary murals, flags, emblems, kerbstones etc. So, in that sense, transitioning from the hard edge paramilitary territorialisation to the softer celebrity museumification of Best’s life can be read in a positive light. However, as with Lennon other aspects of Best’s life raise concerns. When under the influence of alcohol Best displayed a ‘dark side’ (after Kaplan et al, 2010) and ‘undesirable characteristics’ (after Ashworth, 2010) leading to ‘immoral behaviour’ and ‘criminal activity’ (after Keel & Nataraajan, 2012). These included a short prison sentence for drunk driving, serial adulterer and most seriously high profile acts of violence towards women¹⁶ (BBC News, 2002; Campbell, 1999; Farndale, 2006; Hari, 2007; Harphem, 2005).

Whilst there are similarities with the celebrity museumification of Lennon and Best in their respective cities, there is an important difference. In Liverpool there was widespread support for the renaming of Liverpool John Lennon Airport (Kruse, 2005a); however, this was not the case in Belfast. Instead, in 2006 there was resistance to the rebranding of George Best Belfast City Airport; media reports indicated public opinion was deeply divided, with one poll showing 52% in favour

¹⁶ On one occasion in a ‘drunken rage’ he punched and kicked his second wife leaving her with cuts, bruises, fat lip and a black eye; on another, during a ‘mutual fight’ she ended up in hospital with a broken arm (“The best place for her” he snapped at reporters); on a third occasion she awoke to find Best ‘hacking off her hair’ and ‘scribbling over her flesh’ with a marker pen. However, in other accounts his former wives inform that an abstinent Best was calm and considerate as opposed to explosions of anger when intoxicated (Bairner, 2006).

and 48% against (Irish Examiner, 2006). Indeed, his family were “taken aback by the ferocity of some of those opposed to the renaming” (Henderson, 2006: np). To this day, Best’s suitability as a Belfast icon periodically resurfaces as a source of public scrutiny. For example, following the recent statue unveiling a national radio phone-in debated his ‘chequered history’ with equally passionate voices on either side (The Nolan Show, 2019). This raises an interesting question for branding practitioners: why is the museumification of certain celebrities ‘more divisive’ (after Ashworth, 2010) than others ?

One explanation is that Lennon was/is a genuine global icon who was far more influential, more widely appreciated on many different levels beyond his music. According to Inglis (2005: 451) the band he led were “catalysts for the unprecedented social and cultural transformations of the 1960s”. Specifically on Lennon, Kruse (2005b: 457) argues “the ongoing fascination...stems from the fact that there is no single, essential discourse with which he can be defined”. This feeds a constant ‘rewriting and rereading’ of his life, beliefs, personality, characteristics, influence etc. Such that, “After his death, John Lennon the Beatle was reinvented - as spiritual leader, as political activist, as avant-garde artist, as religious messiah, as contemporary philosopher, as intellectual guide” (Inglis, 2005: 451). Since 1980 there has been a ‘continuing metamorphosis’ in Lennon’s shift from pop star to historical figure. Best, for all his incredible footballing skills, charm, charisma, beauty, he simply did/does not operate in that league. Yes, he entertained millions and influenced a generation of footballers in the UK and Ireland, but he had no global influence as per Lennon; e.g. part of Central Park in New York was renamed Strawberry Fields, Vedado Park Havana, Cuba was renamed John Lennon Park, plus there is a John Lennon Wall in Prague. Best remains a cherished localised figure - the ‘beautiful Belfast boy’ - who enjoyed fame, and some notoriety, in England, was well known in parts of Europe (Manchester United won the European Cup in 1968) and was reasonably well known in America (where he played football in the late 1970s). The truth is Lennon remains a global icon which explains why parts of his questionable past are accepted or glossed over, i.e. ‘sanitised/fumigated/fabricated’ (after Fjellman, 1992; Hollinshead, 1998; Kruse, 2005a). In Best’s case, his more tightly spatialised (in)fame(y) is more prone to closer critical inspection. Read differently, the breadth and scale of Lennon’s ‘register of representation’ (after Adinolfi & van de Port, 2013) enables him to eschew the interrogation that Best still faces today feeding challenges to his celebrity museumification in Belfast.

Connecting back to another important point in the literature, in contrast to John Lennon there is no hard evidence of ‘sanitising/fabricating/fumigating’ (after Fjellman, 1992; Hollinshead, 1998)

George Best's life. In fact, the reverse is true. As we discussed above his personal difficulties and associated unacceptable behaviour are very much in the public domain. Contrary to Lennon there is no 'cleaning of the past' (Kruse, 2005a). Rather, Best's past is regularly revisited; most recently on BBC Radio Ulster 23rd May 2019. The hotels named in honour of Best and Lennon are revealing. The Hard Day's Night Hotel makes no mention, even indirectly, of Lennon's past behaviour some of which placed him under the radar of the British and American Intelligence Services. Indeed, we could legitimately ask why such information should be discussed on an official website created to attract wealthy tourists. In contrast, this is not the case with the George Best Hotel. One interpretation is the website's litotic language (see below) synopsis Best's life in a way that limits his past behaviour to mere 'laddish affectation' (after Hari, 2007). Notably, there is a very clear acknowledgement that he was plagued by alcoholism and made mistakes that negatively affected his life and reputation. So, as we consider the emboldened text this is not an example where important parts of Best's life are being 'fumigated/fabricated/sanitised':

"The life of George, both on and off the pitch captivated millions and ensured he became a household name, often gracing both the front and back pages of newspapers...Soon after George's footballing career started to slow down, **his personal problems started to dominate his life**...He had a reputation for not only being an incredibly talented footballer but also a bit of a lady's man, **often gracing the front pages stumbling out of the clubs in the early hours** and having a host of various female friends...As a 'normal' lad from Belfast this life was new to George and he quickly found the temptation too hard...**George's troubles with alcohol continued to have a severe impact in his life**" (<https://georgebesthotel.co.uk>).

However, with respect to other aspects of Belfast's past there is evidence of 'sanitising/fumigating/fabricating' historical events. Several authors have identified the 'selectivity of history' with regard to Belfast's waterfront (e.g. Neill, 1995, 2006, 2011; also Boland et al, 2017; Brown et al, 2013b; Coyles, 2013; Hodson, 2019). There are two dimensions to this. Firstly, the labour market was dominated by Protestants and discriminated against Catholics in terms of access to employment; secondly, the rebranding of an area associated with a huge loss of human life. On the latter, the redeveloped waterfront is known as Titanic Quarter (formerly Queen's Island) - the location where the ill-fated ship was built. Neill (2006: 109) questions the wisdom of renaming an urban space after a tragedy that cost 1,517 lives; he cites the "active celebration in representing the post-conflict city through association with the greatest of all 20th-century symbols

of human *hubris*'. More pointedly, Brown et al (2013b: 595) argue 'Titanic has become "an iconic superbrand of the mortality market...[and] a prime example of myth making". Additionally, the city's trade in 'dark tourism' and specifically the sanitised, partial and competing constructions of history from Loyalist and Republican tour guides (Hill & White, 2012; Leonard, 2012; Skinner, 2016) is another dimension of a fumigated/fabricated past(s). So, in a Fjellman (1992) sense both the waterfront and 'dark tourism' represent 'cleaned up' and 'selective tales' specifically constructed to suit their respective money-making commercial operations.

Conclusions

This paper has offered a case study that is relevance to branding practitioners. In the UK George Best and John Lennon are exemplars of personality association and celebrity museumification. At this point in time they are the only two people to have airports named after them¹⁷. Aside from airport rebranding, both feature prominently in other aspects of celebrity museumification, such as bespoke hotels, public art, life-size statues, guided tours, souvenirs, memorabilia etc. In so doing, their lives and memories generate tourism, income and employment in their respective cities; admittedly, the economic footprint of the Beatles is far greater in Liverpool. The value of our findings for branding professionals is that we show important differences in how celebrity museumification is played out in Belfast and Liverpool. Firstly, in Belfast there is no hard evidence of 'sanitising/fumigating/fabricating' George Best's past; in fact, the reverse is true in that his life remains a source of public debate; connecting to Dellios (2002) on the 'social and cultural implications' of museumification. However, this is not the case with John Lennon as he remains a celebrated global icon such that his equally questionable past is conveniently glossed over by local stakeholders and his adoring (local, national and global) fans.

We end this paper with two key conclusions for branding practitioners. Firstly, unlike Lennon Best's behaviour continues to offend certain sections of the local population, particularly the victims of domestic violence. In this sense, he is an example of how a deceased celebrity, who is still 'in living memory', remains 'subject to controversy' (Ashworth, 2010). Secondly, it is unfair that Best is treated differently to Lennon. Expressed in more pointed language: is Lennon's moral (and intended financial) support for an armed paramilitary organisation that was responsible for almost 60% of killings during the 'Troubles' (Roche, 2019) less indefensible than Best's violence on women? Whilst not excusing or downplaying Best's behaviour, there does seem to be a double

¹⁷ Recent suggestions include naming Manchester Airport after deceased musician Mark E Smith - the city's 'greatest cultural icon' (Louder Than War, 2018) and Glasgow Airport after Billy Connolly who is suffering from Parkinson's Disease (Dingwall & Ferguson, 2019).

standard in comparison to Lennon, especially given that he too was guilty of violence on women. In this sense, are George Best and John Lennon any different to or other highly celebrated men with feet of clay (e.g. JFK, Winston Churchill, Samuel Beckett etc.)? An interesting finding for branding professionals and practitioners is that it would seem that flawed celebrities are more useful for personality association and the wider rebranding of the city:

“We celebrate gifted people, but only if they are flawed. Sometimes we even celebrate people with more flaws than gifts...I suppose flawed celebrities are more interesting. If airport names commemorated famous people who led worthier lives - Sir Trevor McDonald, say, or Sir Bobby Charlton, or even, bless him, Sir Paul McCartney - you might feel a certain ennui when touching down in Britain” (Farndale, 2006: np).

For those professionals involved in place branding this paper has revealed how two comparable cities treat their famous sons similarly **and also** differently. Importantly, exposing this difference allows branding practitioners to “better understand the linkages between place and celebrity” (Kruse, 2005b: 456). For example, given the level of public scrutiny of George Best does this mean that people in certain cities care more about who is their designated celebrity son? Future research could drill down to excavate the contours of resistance to personality association and celebrity museumification so that we can more clearly understand the seeds of antagonism (i.e. is it class based, age related, gender centric etc.?) Instructively, the Best case provides a concrete example of how personality association and celebrity association are not straightforward or uncomplicated for branding professionals. In one sense, the softer celebrity museumification of a ‘Bestscape’ involves moving away from the hard edge paramilitary landscape. In another, it creates a new set of ethical and moral questions for branding practitioners. In Belfast and beyond - i.e. lesson for other cities - we suggest that in an era of #metoo (Philipose, 2019; Rodino-Colocino, 2018; Zarkov & Davis, 2018) it is important to revisit the suitability of male figures as icons and ‘honoured legends’. The Belfast case offers important insights for branding professionals and practitioners in other cities who are involved in/contemplating personality association and celebrity museumification, particularly in terms of the potential for negative public reaction to the celebrated individual. Finally, it is advisable that city leaders and other key stakeholders, especially those responsible for place branding, tap into, and are cognisant of, the feelings of local people towards the intended celebrity.

Conflict of interest

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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