

# Title: Branding Stratford: Social Representation and the Re-making of Place

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## **Abstract:**

As part of the societal world, architecture and urban space do not have any ‘objective’ quality. They are representations. Their meaning is produced through the negotiation and interaction of individuals, groups and classes. Yet, such ‘subjective’ meanings do have a ‘material’ relevance, as they reflect a dialectical process between the functions, forms, ownership and practices of space. They reveal construal and construction: the way in which architectural spaces are represented on the one hand, and the way in which they are physically constructed and used on the other. Nowhere does this become more evident in our current society than in the arguments around urban renewal and regeneration. The Westfield Stratford City is a typical example.

Part of the vast process of the urban regeneration of East London prompted by London 2012 Olympic Games, Westfield is a massive complex of luxury shops, restaurants, bars and five star hotels. It is seen by investors and local and national political authorities as capable of transforming Stratford into a site for shopping, tourism and leisure. It does this in numerous ways, one of which involves reconfiguring the image of the region through the press and media - through visual imagery and linguistic manipulations that promote a neoliberal agenda of gentrification that simultaneously devalue the existent societal structures and communities in the area. This paper offers a Critical Discourse Analysis of the manipulation of Stratford’s image by government, business and the media and suggests that the purely financially motivated misrepresentation it reveals, is typical of the urban regeneration ethos at work across the developed world today.