

Live Music, Intercity Competition, and Branding

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In 1991, Texas' state capital, Austin, branded itself the "Live Music Capital of the World," a designation that has become central to the city's competitive strategy. The existing literature on Austin's urban entrepreneurial strategy, reflecting the dominant trends in academic discussions, focuses on how this branding campaign cultivated and exploited the geographical particularities of the city's cultural infrastructure. However, I contend that the success of this effort also has been driven by the changes brought about within the music industry. In particular, I argue that this is related to the changing value of live-music within the music industry and especially the elevated position of music promoters (those firms that rely on live music as an essential part of their business) in the industry. As this lecture shows, the city's branding efforts are reinforced by the industrial success of two of the music industry's mid-sized promotional firms, SXSW Inc. and C3 Presents, Austin-based firms that, perhaps unwittingly, trade on and receive an extra-economic benefit (in the form of an economic rent) from the city's live-music reputation.