Branding Helsingborg City for Domestic and International Students

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Abstract

The student group is an emerging target with high potential for both the service industry and municipalities. However, previous studies scrutinizing this segment have been limited despite its significance. The aim of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of how domestic and international students perceive Helsingborg city and to offer insight into the key factors influencing students' perceptions towards Helsingborg. The methodological design of this study involved two semi-structured focus groups and online document analysis where the purposive sampling was served in. To analyze data, six categories of city brand image attributes developed by Brandt and De Mortanges (2011) were adopted in this study. Empirical findings revealed that students perceived Helsingborg according to the six attributes; "activities and facilities", "physical environment", "people", "accessibility", "economy", and "brand and reputation" (Brandt & De Mortanges, 2011). In addition, there were shown differences between domestic and international students' perceptions especially in terms of "Swedish national brand image" which was newly added in the six categories by the researcher. Perceptions were also different depending on the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of participants even in the same domestic student group. For branding Helsingborg, therefore, both physical and socio-cultural attributes need to be integrated and those key attributes should be personalized and customized in accordance with students' nationalities, ethnic backgrounds, and cultural proximity that will contribute to the optimization of the positive city brand image formation.

Keywords: city branding, destination image, key attributes of the place image formation, student segment, students' perceptions and experiences, service management

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Hyunah kim

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Neglected Student Segment in the Field of City Branding

Many scholars have paid attention to the origin of the city and it has been stated that the origin of towns is derived from its function as a market (Melović, Mitrović, & Djokaj, 2017). For example, Max Weber, a German sociologist mentioned that term of "town" is rooted from the word "oikos" indicating transactional actions or a marketplace where such transactions happen in (Paliaga, 2013, p. 83; Weber, 1978). In the same vein, practitioners such as municipalities and marketers have invested considerate effort and fund to differentiate their cities so that they could survive from competitions in the globalized era, which resulted in city branding (Michalis Kavaratzis, 2004). For these reasons, research on how to attract more competitive visitors or residents also has been conducted since those segments were regarded as a driving force to accelerate drastic growth of the city in economic and cultural aspects (Zenker, 2009).

Among various segments, the importance of the student group has been increasing more and more in the market these days. According to the *Global Report on the Power of Youth Travel* (UNWTO, 2016), students are one of the fastest increasing segments forming 23% out of the whole one billion international travelers' group in 2015, and the market value of the student travel in 2014 was boosted as approximately USD 286 billion. King and Raghuram (2013) also emphasized that the volume of international students' migration has risen in most countries for the last decade since 1998 and increasing students' mobility is still a globally occurring phenomenon.

The reasons why academia and industry have regarded students as one of the most promising targets are because their visits induce economic and cultural boost on the cities by expanding possibilities of the consumption, investment, and employment. Mosneaga and Winther (2013) suggested that European countries like Denmark have attempted to attract more student

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migrants since they brought economic benefit. On the other hands, Insch and Sun (2013) emphasized social and cultural advantages that students can bring by vibrantly engaging in cultural events and activities such as leisure, art or voluntary work, shopping and nightlife while Monaghan (2010) argued that host cities derive benefit of diversity, highly educated experts, and young population from student visitors. Based on existing travel trend reports and research released by organizations and academia, it is reasonable that lots of cities have conducted customized marketing campaigns for attracting and retaining the talented student segment (María Cubillo, Sánchez, & Cerviño, 2006; Petruzzellis & Romanazzi, 2010).

In addition, there seems to be a high probability that the range of this student segment could be stretched further which in turn, would expand their power and potential in the market. In other words, the student group not only has a potential simply as exchange students or travelers who tend to stay in a short period but also there is a possibility for this group to be converted into the long-term residents, for instance, if they are employed or settle down in the cities for other reasons after graduation (Chatterton, 1999). King and Raghuram (2013) suggested that the shorter students stay (for one year or less), the higher they have a probability of returning home countries while students with the long-term mobility (more than three years) are more open-ended to the possibility of coming back to homelands, which can result in immigration. As to this broad potential, Insch and Sun (2013) emphasized that students' impression and experience towards the host cities not only influence their own decision-making on the future career or study after graduation but also affect other potential student visitors' decision by WOM.

As the student group is such an emerging segment with high potential as the source of profit for the service industry, previous studies have scrutinized this segment from different aspects even though current studies remain in its crawling stage. Scholars similarly pointed out that in-depth understanding of students' travel expectation, motivation, satisfaction, and destination loyalty is of significance for the related industries to attract them effectively (Kim, 2008). Comparing travel patterns and motives between the domestic and international student groups, some scholars revealed that student segment's travel motivation, loyalty,

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expectation, and satisfaction towards a destination are likely to rely on their demographic characteristics such as nationality, cultural background, and gender (Field, 1999; Kim, 2008).

Despite its contribution, there is a lack of study investigating this promising student segment's "perception and experience" towards the "city" itself in a broader context. Most of the current studies have mainly focused on their behavior, travel pattern, expectation, and motivation. Lots of studies touched short-term visitors such as exchange students, and places addressed in the case studies were narrowed down to the "study destinations", "university cities" or "travel destinations" (Mosneaga & Winther, 2013). It can be assumed that studies on "long-term" students' perceptions and experiences towards a certain city in a more general context were relatively limited in the previous research since this student segment seems to be underestimated as wanderers with less probability of becoming constant and stable source of economic and social advantages or neglected due to other constraints such as political or diplomatic controls (King & Raghuram, 2013; Mosneaga & Winther, 2013).

1.2. Limited Research on City Branding for Student Segment

As addressed above, as a tool for communication with the local or other stakeholders, city branding has been utilized by marketers with a purpose to differentiate cities and defeat other competitors in the globally marketized environment by attracting visitors (Ahmad, Abdullah, Tamam, & Bolong, 2013; Mihalis Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Melović et al., 2017). In the same vein, Chapleo (2011) emphasized that most practitioners in his research went to the consensus that the branding process should be regarded as managerial philosophy as well as a prerequisite for the success of any enterprise, institution, state, and city, which represents a specific way of communication between the service providers and their target groups.

However, the field of city branding from the perspective of students has been rarely inquired. As Mihalis Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) mentioned, city branding itself has been paid

less attention compared to the traditional field of product branding even if the city brand is a priceless asset of municipalities and the local to retain competitiveness for thriving in the internationalized world. Scholars suggested that the field of students' perceptions with regards to the cities has significantly been ignored and to handle this issue, some studies adopted city banding models to investigate critical attributes of the cities behind the students' perceptions (Brandt & De Mortanges, 2011; Insch & Sun, 2013; María Cubillo et al., 2006).

Regarding key factors or attributes of the city, many researchers have recognized that city branding starts with place image formation through perception, feeling, and thinking process, followed by the formation of city identity or brand image (Melović et al., 2017). Based on the prerequisite that major purpose of city branding is to marketize and differentiate a city itself, previous studies have specified which factors and associations make cities different and unique (Ahmad et al., 2013; Melović et al., 2017). Melović et al. (2017) also mentioned that municipalities need to project favorable and positive images in targeted customers' thoughts and minds which will increase the competitive advantages of the city.

However, most previous studies investigating attributes from the students' perspective mainly focused on students' decision-making towards "university" itself (Briggs, 2006; Holdsworth & Nind, 2006) or marketing "university city" (Brandt & De Mortanges, 2011; Insch & Sun, 2013). Also, it has been reported that existing studies on city branding remained in the level of the commercial approach and it has been often regarded simply as a tool of marketing (Mihalis Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Melović et al., 2017) which means there is a lack of the holistic understanding of how to brand a city as a long-term strategy for attracting more students. Some prior research only approached in commercial aspects while other studies merely focused on socio-cultural aspects when it comes to city branding. Hence, in this study, both commercial and socio-cultural aspects will be linked together and integrated to provide a holistic and balanced insight into city branding.

1.3. Aim of this Study and Disposition of the Research Questions

In this study, Helsingborg city was chosen as a case of the research. With 145,000 of population, Helsingborg in Skåne County is the 9th biggest city in Sweden (Campus Helsingborg website, 2019) having a high potential of fast growth rate, 15% in last 10 years (Business Helsingborg website, 2018). Since Lund University opened its second campus in Helsingborg in 2000, at least 4,000 students newly visit this campus annually from around the world (Campus Helsingborg website, 2019) and close to 41% of the city's whole population have post-gymnasium educational backgrounds with 165 nationalities (Business Helsingborg website, 2018).

Helsingborg municipality also recognizes the city's high potential and endeavors to upgrade its reputation. For example, Helsingborg city released its initiative, "Helsingborg 2035" with a vision of becoming "an exciting, attractive and lasting community" (p. 1) and "the creative, united, global and balanced city" (p. 2), and the main aim of this vision is to attract coworkers, employers, entrepreneurs expecting the synergy effect from the hub of education, research, and business they have (*Guide to Vision Helsingborg 2035*, 2019), thereby it can be assumed that Helsingborg city takes student target into consideration for achieving this goal and vision. Despite its significance, analysis of how students perceive and experience Helsingborg city also has been rarely investigated so far.

Therefore, this study will examine how the student segment perceives and experiences Helsingborg and how they cognize and value the images of the city by analyzing key factors. The aim of this research is to deepen understanding about critical factors forming city Helsingborg's images in domestic and international students' perceptions. In this study, key factors contributing to the successful place-making will be also elaborated from the perspective of students. What kind of cognitive and affective perceptions students have, and

how students engage in creating the city's image and shaping the city brand will be also analyzed.

With this study, both domestic and international student group who have experiences of studying, living, working, and traveling in Helsingborg were investigated to include both short and long-term visitors' perspectives. To grasp the holistic perceptions towards Helsingborg, this study attempted to embrace the broad student groups who think the city as study or travel destination as well as those who regard the towns as places for inhabitation through employment and migration after graduation. Accordingly, the research questions of this study can be developed as below:

RQ1: What are the key factors influencing students' perception and shaping the image of Helsingborg?

RQ2: How do domestic and international students perceive Helsingborg respectively?

1.4. Outline and Structure of this Study

This study is organized in five different chapters. In following Chapter 2, existing literature concerning the place and destination image will be addressed. How the place image is formed and attributes consisting of perceptions will be mentioned in this chapter. Adding to this, previous literature on the evolutionary process from city marketing to city branding will be delved into further. In Chapter 3, how this study is methodologically designed to investigate students' perceptions will be elaborated with grounds why those methods are selected. After illustrating empirical findings attained from two focus groups and netnography, all data will be analyzed by adopting Brandt and De Mortanges (2011)'s six categorizations. Lastly, summary, reflection, limitation, and contribution of this study will be followed in turn, in the last chapter.

Chapter 2. Understanding Theoretical Background of City Branding from the Student's Perspective

In this chapter, the theoretical background delved from previous literature will be presented to provide basic knowledge. For supporting to understand the topic of this study, this chapter will be divided into two sections. Based on the aim of this study, which is providing an in-depth insight of critical factors shaping city's images in students' perceptions, the first section portrays general literature review on destination image, place branding, and key attributes of city branding extracted from prior researches. In the following section, the conceptional framework suit for analyzing key factors of branding Helsingborg will be presented, which will be connected to give responses to the research questions and aims of this study.

2.1. Image of Place as a Source for City Branding

To begin with, to introduce a conceptual structure of this chapter, prior literature on the place and destination image will be firstly portrayed since construction and development of the place image occurring through the visitor's perception are often regarded as a prerequisite for place branding (Mihalis Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). Adding to this, according to Meffert and Burmann (2002), image-based city branding is adequate to aim for the external group such as visitors, tourists, and potential entrepreneurs while identity-based city branding is effective to target internal segments such as existing residents. For these reasons, previous literature on place image formation and development were chosen prior to present other researches on the city branding, which in turn, the literature on key attributes of city branding will be followed by bridging the context between place image and city branding.

The researches investigating the process of destination image formation and transformation have been paid huge attention from scholars in the field of service management discipline. Since Gunn (1972) elaborated the concept of destination image, it has been inquired by academia and regarded as one of the most important factors influencing travel motivations in travelers' decision-making process (Chung & Chen, 2018; Gartner, 1994; Gunn, 1972; Sirakaya, Sonmez, & Choi, 2001). Regarding the place image, Crompton (1979) defined it as "the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination" (p. 18) and Kotler and Andreasen (1991) also referred to "a sum of beliefs, ideas, impressions that people have of a place, they represent a simplification of a large number of associations connected with the place" (p. 102).

It has been reported that the place image formation can be a dualistic process involving different actors, for example, some scholars insisted it is a mutual two-way process between the travelers and associations which forms place images (Marine-Roig, 2015). Similarly, Papson (1981) mentioned that through the dialectic relationship and intertwined interactions, tourists project place images in their perceptions with specific intentions. Tasci and Gartner (2007) contended that image formation process is a mentally descriptive construct with the information provided by "two ends", which is "the destination and the receiver" (p. 414).

Despite its simplified compartmentalization, it seems that the image formation process is a complicated procedure involving multiple associations. Within this intertwined process, place images are constituted by visitors' perceptions, attitudes, preferences, evaluations as well as key values or attributes of the place itself (Chung & Chen, 2018). In the same vein, Sirakaya et al. (2001) divided variables affecting consumers' decision-making process into two groups: psychological (images, beliefs, and attitudes) and non-psychological variables (destination attributes, benefits, costs), arguing that the former one influences visitors from the inside of them whilst the latter one evokes externally.

Concerning those physical and non-physical variables, existing studies acknowledged the importance of travelers' affective and cognitive perceptions towards a certain place. For instance, Lehto, Lee, and Ismail (2014) argued that destination image consists of cognitive images which refer to information, knowledge, and belief individuals possess and images that are the individual's independent emotion and feeling towards the destination. Scholars argued that these components of cognitive and affective images intertwined each other, in turn, result in projecting comprehensive destination image as Crompton (1979) argued that the destination image is a constructive gestalt structured by place's attributes and travelers' perceptions.

According to Mihalis Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005), this cognitive and affective process of mental imagination can be called as branding, which is a ground for marketers to form favorable and positive mental images towards the place. In the same vein, Braun and Zenker (2010) defined the brand as "network of associations in the consumer's mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioral expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communications, values, and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design" (p. 5). The place image takes a grave role in forming stable image and identity when travelers choose destinations to visit, which has been of significance for marketers to increase customers' re/visit and loyalty (Marine-Roig, 2015). Hence, it has been reported that stereotype perception or deteriorated place images that travelers have regarding the destination are frequently attributed to one of the important factors to evaluate whether a certain destination would be able to attract more visitors or not (Marine-Roig, 2015; Tan, 2017; Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014).

For these reasons, Tan (2017) emphasized the significant role of the WOM (Word-Of-Mouth) urging that destination marketers should proactively engage in travelers' information collection and destination evaluation process through the social media websites since it could give a grave impact on the formation of destination images. Since the place images predominantly affect customer loyalty, satisfaction, and travelers' willingness to revisit (Zhang et al., 2014), prior studies have pointed out that place images can be purposively

chosen, projected, designed and constructed by destination marketers or local municipalities with special intentions or aims for attracting target visitors (Marine-Roig, 2015).

Parallel to these studies on positive images formation, re-branding, destination image recovery, it has been shown that previous studies expanded its territories into the national brand image recovery. Martínez and Alvarez (2010) addressed that destination marketers need to reinforce the positive place images whilst disassociate negative values and characteristics with the destination image, for example, by decoupling destroyed specific destination images from the country's brand image. With this concern, place image attributes were often related to the national brand and image of the country as below (Chung & Chen, 2018):

> *some researchers have argued that a country's image and a tourism destination image (TDI) are tied together (e.g. Nadeau et al., 2008), as external and internal information sources help people form a favorable or unfavorable image of the country, which would increase or decrease the intention to visit the tourist destination* (Chung & Chen, 2018, p. 57).

Among those place image attributes, interestingly, many scholars have recently emphasized cultural and social attributes constituting the place images. Chung and Chen (2018) emphasized the importance of the travelers' "perceptions of the place's sociological, political, and/or cultural characteristics" (p. 56) in the decision-making stage on destinations. For this reason, Sevin (2014) interpreted the place branding as "a social phenomenon" (p. 48) with socio-cultural associations based on the individual's perception. Some scholars suggested the cultural and psychological proximity of tourists can be a grave antecedent to form destination images (Kastenholz, 2010; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Given that significance, however, social and cultural key attributes and factors affecting the destination images have been attained less attention (Chung & Chen, 2018).

2.2. From Product Branding to Place Branding

It has been reported that many scholars regarded the purpose of city branding is the marketization whilst others objected this by putting more emphasis on the social and cultural implications of city branding. Elaborating the process on how the product branding was transformed into the city branding, and how place marketing was evolved into the place branding, Mihalis Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) suggested that there were a lot of debating opinions concerning the aim of city branding, since the history of research with regards to the city branding has not been long, and there exists a gap of two different approaches on place branding: one of those approaching from public sector place and another considering the place as a commercial place product.

Marketers attempted to apply the approach of product marketing to the place marketing since the early 1990s, and the corporate branding triggered the evolution of place marketing into the place branding (Mihalis Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Melović et al., 2017). Thus, some scholars argued that place branding was inherently originated from the market principle and its purpose is to sell the place in the market and defeat other competitors, which serves as a tool for city management and urban planning (Mihalis Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). In traditional studies, scholars recognized a city as the place product and suggested to differentiate a city for surviving in the market (Mihalis Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Melović et al., 2017).

In the same vein, Melović et al. (2017) mentioned that place branding has contributed to differentiate cities and nations to thrive in globalized competition. Defining that word "town" is coined from "market" in German, Melović et al. (2017) addressed the birth of the city cannot be detachable with marketization. Based on this, they suggested that the city needs a combination of certain factors to sell itself to the market as a product does in the same way to differentiate itself in the marketplace. Similarly, Michalis Kavaratzis (2004) suggested that city branding is regarded as a means of attaining competitive advantage for achieving

economic benefits such as investment and employment, and image formation is a starting point of city branding. He suggested city branding largely depends on the city image's communication and construction which take place in perceptions of all stakeholders.

2.3. From Commercial Approach to Integrated Approach

On the contrary, other scholars emphasized an integrated approach rather than the commercial approach by suggesting those socio-cultural aspects of city branding. They highlighted a holistic viewpoint embracing social and cultural aspects by multiple stakeholders. For example, Chapleo (2011) argued that branding should not be done only focused on marketization since socio-cultural and educational aspects of service that place can provide, also needs to be taken into consideration. Similarly, Michalis Kavaratzis (2004) put importance on socio-cultural values, city identity, prevention of problematic social issues, and social integration when it comes to making city brands.

In addition, Michalis Kavaratzis (2004) presented a notable standard of setting attributes for establishing city brands. He suggested that city brands should fulfill as much as various stakeholders' needs and interests like spreading the wide umbrella to cover every different actor who belongs to the town. In order to implement place branding successfully, the city should be regarded as the whole entity and it needs to present its own unique story to the audience by showing multiple images which are projected to people's perceptions in the unique, but also coherent and consistent way so that they can be integrated into the complete city image (Michalis Kavaratzis, 2004).

It is notable Michalis Kavaratzis (2004) emphasize the balanced and customized application of city branding considering each town's characteristics and uniqueness, otherwise, it could cause urban sameness issues. In this point of view, it can be stated that city branding is not only a great tool for developing a city's identity but also preventing it from de-

individualization and other social issues that a city can encounter. Michalis Kavaratzis (2004) also mentioned that city branding can be an alternative to improve the limitations of existing short-term commercial city marketing strategies.

2.4. Multiple Attributes and Factors for Branding a City

After configuring the aim of city branding, researchers have delved in inquiring which components give grave impacts on city images. Melović et al. (2017) clarified specific factors and attributes affecting the place image formation to help cities to develop unique and original characteristics so that they can attract more visitors. They mentioned that "branding of cities is based on a combination of various factors and components that with their combination we can build a recognizable image, which further contributes to higher tourism turnover and stronger competitiveness" (p. 51). In other words, the city brand can be regarded as a gestalt of intertwined unique components and attributes. The overall attributes addressed in prior literature were presented in the table (see *Table 1,* pp. 22-23).

Reaching out to the field of place brand management, Hanna and Rowley (2011) roughly divided criteria constituting place brand as tangible (physical) and intangible (socio-cultural) associations. Tangible attributes refer to landscape, infrastructure, architecture which are combined with functional attributes whilst intangible attributes include more cultural, symbolic and service-related values such as brand articulation, Word-of-mouth, brand experience which are associated with experiential attributes (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Similarly, other studies have dealt with a wide range of physical, social, political, and cultural components consisting of images of the place such as tourist attractions, facilities like shopping centers, park, population, cultural or sports events and festival, urban design (Melović et al., 2017).

Hanna and Rowley (2011) explained that functional and physical attributes influence experiential and emotional attributes in turn. It is notable that they attempted to examine the relationship of each attribute, for example, relations between brand infrastructure and leadership to offer holistic viewpoints and to embrace various stakeholders involved in the managerial process. Clarifying interaction and influence within these factors, their study gave a grave contribution to enlightening a comprehensive understanding of each component's relationship (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).

To include more abundant place brand attributes, some scholars applied personality model to their studies. Ahmad et al. (2013) analyzed the residents' perceptions towards the Malaysian city by adopting the City Personality Scale which categorized the personality of the city brand into four dimensions; Malignancy, Sophistication, Peacefulness, and Uniqueness. This scale used in their study was originally inspired by dimensions of the brand personality developed by Aaker (1997) that elaborated city brand's traits as five clusters such as Excitement, Competence, Sincerity, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. All attributes developed by literature addressed only intangible, psychological, and socio-cultural aspects of associations of the city image. Even though this topic of city brand personality is still contentious and debatable, it has widely been dealt with in this field (Merrilees, Miller, & Herington, 2009; Pride, Morgan, & Pritchard, 2002).

With more specified socio-cultural attributes, Merrilees et al. (2009) elaborated antecedents of values and attributes composing city brand from the residents' perspective. He also emphasized the most important attributes as determinants are social attributes such as social bonding, safety, and business creativity. Similarly, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) emphasized the affective traits of destination image (relaxation, excitement, adventure, knowledge, escape, social, prestige), in the same vein, Gallarza, Saura, and García (2002) mentioned psychological attributes of place image formation such as information, social interaction, resident's receptiveness, and originality. Other intangible attributes such as business creativity, brand intention, ambiance, international reputations, and social bonding were also mentioned broadly (Hankinson, 2004; Hanna & Rowley, 2011; Merrilees et al., 2009).

Based on attributes resulted from existing literature (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gallarza et al., 2002; Hankinson, 2004), all physical and socio-cultural key attributes can be roughly clustered into eleven factors; cultural activities (sports events or festivals), government services (well established educational facilities and opportunities, authorities' decision-making process, health care), transport (road conditions and traffic), attractions (nature, clean environment), shopping, quality of experience (safety, cleanliness, business creativity, business-friendly atmosphere, employment opportunities), brand image (lifestyle and reputation), intentions (plans to live here longer in the future), social bonding (diversity or intimate atmosphere to make friends easily), economy, and people (population, demographic characteristics).

2.5. Developing Conceptual Framework: City Branding Attributes for Student Segment

Among those literature inquired city branding attributes, Brandt and De Mortanges (2011) elaborated salient attributes affecting the students' perceptions by applying mapping analysis of the brand concept. Analyzing values related to the city's culture, infrastructure, and heritage, they categorized them into the six clusters of attributes which students consider when they choose study destinations. Brandt and De Mortanges (2011)'s six attributes include "economy" (public and private service, university partnership), "activities and facilities", "physical environment" (safety, parks and nature, cleanliness), "people" (a large number of population and students), "accessibility" (centralized library and campus, infrastructures and transportation) "brand and reputation" (university image and recognition, international reputation on both city and university).

Based on prior literature, six attributes categorized by Brandt and De Mortanges (2011) was applied in this study to develop a conceptual framework which will be used in chapter 4 for analyzing the findings of this study. The reason why these six categories were adopted is that

their work was the rare study delved into the city branding attributes from the students' perspective. Even if a lot of researchers have paid attention to city image attributes, there has been a lack of research on the key attributes shaping the students' perceptions when they are experiencing a certain city (Brandt & De Mortanges, 2011).

Since other literature were more focused on tourism destination image attributes from travelers' point of views or general city branding with broad targets, attributes were limited to entertaining and recreational aspects. On the contrary, Brandt and De Mortanges (2011) emphasized attributes such as the economy and people that seem to be important attributes for students but seldom mentioned in other literature. For example, they mentioned the university's partnership with local companies, business opportunities, population, number of residents and students, which are more specifically designed attributes aiming for student segment.

However, six attributes of city branding suggested by Brandt and De Mortanges (2011) seem to be more focused on university city branding, which does not correspond with the topic of this study. In this study, research questions and aim of research put more emphasis on the general city branding from the students' perspective as addressed in the previous chapter. Hence, another attribute such as Swedishness developed from the findings of this study, was newly added to adjust the conceptual framework in accordance with the aim of this study. Even if "brand and reputation" is included in six categories of Brandt and De Mortanges (2011), it is limited to address university image and recognition, city or university's international reputation which is quite narrow to embrace Swedish national brand images and values that was revealed in this study as key attributes, especially for international students.

Authors	Key Factors and attributes
Aaker (1997) Five city brand personality traits	Excitement, Competence, Sincerity, Sophistication, and Ruggedness
Ahmad, Abdullah, Tamam, and Bolong (2013) Four dimensions of city brand personality	Malignancy, Sophistication, Peacefulness, Uniqueness
Baloglu & McCleary (1999) Traits of destination image formation	Quality of experience (hygiene, infrastructure, safety, nightlife, entertainment, accommodations, beaches, friendly people) Attraction (cultural/historical attraction, scenery, nature), Value/Environment (good value for money, good climate, unspoiled environment), Relaxation/Escape, Excitement/Adventure, Knowledge, Social, Prestige
Brandt and De Mortanges (2011) Six categories of students' beliefs when selecting the university town	Activities and facilities, physical environment (safety, parks and nature, cleanliness), people (population and students), accessibility (centralized library and campus, parking, infrastructures and transportation) economy (public and private service, university partnership, successful companies), brand and reputation (university image and recognition, international reputation on both city and university)

Gallarza, Saura, & García, (2002) Tourism Destination Image attributes most often studied by previous researches	Various activities, landscape & surroundings, nature, cultural attractions, night life & entertainment, shopping facilities, sport facilities, transportation, accommodation, climate, Information available, gastronomy, price & value & cost, relaxation & massific, accessibility, safety, social interaction, resident's receptiveness, originality, service quality
Hankinson (2004) 11 cluster descriptor (attributes) of tourism destination brand images	Activities and facilities (shopping, accommodation, city centre), Business tourism (conference facilities, city-owned places), Main economic activity (financial and commercial activities), Accessibility (transportation), People characteristics (mixed demographic, youth oriented), Economic development (high investment, expansion), Industrial environment, History, heritage & culture, Ambience (attractive, cosmopolitan, vibrant, genteel, sleepy), External profile (well-known), International reputation
Hanna and Rowley (2011) Tangible and intangible attributes of city brand	landscape, infrastructure, architecture, associations, brand articulation, Word-of-mouth, brand experience
Merrilees et al. (2009) City brand attributes from the literature	Nature, Shopping, Transport, Business Creativity, Brand, Intentions, Cultural activities, governmental services, Social bonding

Table 1. City Brand Attributes studied by previous literature.

Chapter 3. Methodological Design for Understanding Students' Perception towards Helsingborg

In this study, two different qualitative methods, focus groups and netnography are combined and they were adopted to response the research aim of understanding students' perceptions and experiences towards Helsingborg, based on the suggestion that more than one qualitative methods are appropriate to triangulate subjective experience, individual insights, values, and meanings (Bryman, 2016; Kozinets, 2002). Netnography, which is a web-based document analysis with assistance from UGC (User-generated content) in the social network website (Kozinets, 2002) and the focus groups were conducted to investigate and compare students' image perceptions and experiences to identify key attributes of Helsingborg. The focus groups were divided into domestic and international student groups to examine the difference or similarity between two groups' perceptions.

Netnography was applied to grasp students' common perceptions and images which reflect the social consciousness towards the Helsingborg since netnography is a suitable method for investigating subjective values and meanings in the socio-cultural context of texts and images (Kozinets, 2002). As addressed in the previous chapter 2, mental imagination process is a prerequisite of the place branding formation since images projected in individuals' perceptions formulate a specific city brand (Mihalis Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005).

Emphasizing the importance of the customer orientation when it comes to conducting place branding, Mihalis Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) suggested that consumers construct the sense of a specific place in their minds through three procedures; the process of place planning/designing, the process of utilizing the place, the process of indirect experiencing the place (through media such as films, books, or social network websites). Hence, in this study, the process on how students make use of Helsingborg would be found through the discussion of focus groups conducted for two days whilst the process on how they make sense of

Helsingborg in their brains could be presented during the netnography on contents they created on the social network website. The process on how the place is designed was excluded in this study since the student segment is the main concern of this research rather than the municipality or service providers who are involved in the city planning process.

With these grounds, the focus groups and netnography were chosen as a tool for grasping students' perception and images towards Helsingborg which will be reflected during their discussions and their utilizations of the UGC (User Generated Content) in the social network website. One of the popular social network websites, Instagram was selected to examine pictures, captions, texts, and hashtags created by students regarding Helsingborg. Instagram contents were investigated to grasp how students perceive destination images or how they reshape social reality and interpret existing images created by both students themselves and other actors.

Regarding data collection from netnography, the NVivo12 which is the qualitative analysis software was utilized to code data as well as extract most frequently addressed keywords since that frequency represents the most important traits which customers perceive and value (Silverman, 2013). Adding to this, Sotiriadou, Brouwers, and Le (2014) also argued that NVivo is more effective when diverse sorts of data such as photo, video, text and audio are analyzed and when the small size of a sample is used, and it is also efficient to apply when the research design contains semi-structured interview or an interpretive study.

To begin with, most contents (pictures and texts including captions and hashtags) were gathered from Instagram accounts of individual students or students' community in Helsingborg such as "Campusvanner". Since some of the data were written in Swedish, they were separately selected and then translated in English by using Google translate. Despite this attempt, a few words were still shown in Swedish. Those words were chosen again and manually translated by the researcher to be included in the collected data group.

Prior to conducting the 'word frequency query', the author configured a setting of NVivo12 on this wise. Only words addressed at least more than twice, and less than 2,000 times were collected, instead only once mentioned words were excluded since there was a lower possibility that those words addressed less than twice contain meaningful implications on them. Subsequently, the author utilized 'grouping with specializations' filter since lots of synonymous words were still shown. These words with similar meanings were classified together into each group with specialized meanings.

After both 'word frequency query' and 'grouping with specializations', top 10 most frequent keywords were selected and finally clustered in NVivo12. The Tree Map (See *Figure 2*) was referenced as a standard and utilized as an indicator lamp when categorizing each word into related synonymous groups since this visualization was helpful for classifying words in synonym groups with more assured objectivity and reliability. The Tree Map was created automatically in NVivo12 when the filter of grouping was conducted. In this process, some of the irrelevant words which could not belong to any group were also excluded. As a result of this, total 15,564 words resulted at the end, and they are classified into 10 of nodes of key attributes: acted, activity, changed, event, move, communication, period, organization, construction, work (see *Table 2*).

3.1.1. Focus Groups for Domestic and International Students

The focus groups were conducted twice and lasted one or 1.5 hours and total of 12 participants were involved in two groups each with 6 people. Covering participants' perception of city images and values, focus groups were conducted over two days respectively in the separated place at Helsingborg campus of Lund University and were held on 15th and 22nd of March 2019 from 16.00 to 17.15. For the first 15 minutes, students spent time reading introductory instructions and asking questions while chitchatting together or having a coffee break for warming up and building mutual trust with the researcher and other

participants prior to the focus groups. This is aimed to establish rapport "between the parties that enables the interview to flow more freely" (May, 2011, p. 106) and make democratic and comfortable atmosphere (Silverman, 2013).

Throughout the focus groups, the researcher did not interfere with conversations happening between students and maintained distance from their brainstorming and discussion process. The researcher mainly attempted to listen to their verbal expression and interaction. While they were interacting with one another, repetitive expressions, frequent vocabularies, terms or jargons were noted by the researcher. Since the major goal of this methodological design is to acquire raw data under the condition and state of nature, it can be stated that the role of the researcher remains as a complete observer (May, 2011).

Focus groups consisted of two groups: Domestic students focus groups (FG1) and International students focus group (FG2). Participants divided into two different groups were also selected with intention; one group (FG1) consisted of foreigner students who have the experience to live, study, travel or work in Helsingborg at least for two years while another focus group (FG2) is for domestic Swedish students who have experienced Helsingborg. Demographic characteristics of each group varied. FG1 contained discussants holding bachelor or master degrees with age ranged from 25 to 48 years old (mean: 31.7), with five males and one female with diverse nationality and ethnicity spanned from Hungary (D1:M28), Spain (D2:M32), China (D3: F25), Switzerland (D4: M27), Indonesia (D5: M30), Sri Lanka (D6: F48).

On the other hands, FG2 involved domestic Swedish students whose age varied less than FG1 (range: 21-31, mean: 25.8) including four males and two females with various ethnical backgrounds. FG2 involved five students from university (bachelor/master level) and one student from högskolan (Swedish higher education institution). The number of FG1 and FG2 was six each, hence total 12 members were engaged. Based on data from previous literature, a guideline of the focus groups was developed. Therefore, it can be stated that focus groups

conducted in this study are semi-structured with purposive intention by the researcher (Bryman, 2016; May, 2011).

To start with, a pilot focus group for the international student was conducted with the extra introductory explanation on how it will proceed, but this procedure was omitted in the second focus group for the domestic student to save time. Instead, brief instructions were sent by email in advance one day before the focus group was held. All conversations were recorded during the discussions and transcribed after thoroughly (Bryman, 2016; May, 2011) and the researcher took pictures of papers where participants wrote down their keywords to remind the context of debate after the focus groups. After focus groups, keywords suggested by students were identified and categorized into six attributes clusters of city branding (Brandt & De Mortanges, 2011). All those findings were developed into the tables (see *Table 4* and *5)* to compare with those from the second focus group.

3.1.2. Applying Brain Writing Technique for Emptying Brain and Idea Generation: the NGT (Nominal Group Technique)

As VanGundy (1984) mentioned, brain writing technique is originally derived from group brainstorming method for encouraging new idea with regards to products. Brain writing technique including silent discussion and writing ideas individually, was aimed to empty brain and accelerate idea generation, and with these advantages, it was generally adopted by both practitioners and researchers (VanGundy, 1984). While traditional brainstorming is an appropriate method for generating "new product ideas" (p. 67), newly improved brainwriting is more suitable for expressing ideas and perceptions related to a certain social reality and phenomenon (VanGundy, 1984). Therefore, for encouraging students to have an open discussion and free idea development, brain writing technique was employed in this study.

Among six different types of brain writing skills (VanGundy, 1984) nominal group technique (NGT), which was originally suggested by Delbecq, Van de Ven, and Gustafson (1975), was adopted in this research. As the NGT is primarily used for problem-solving or decision-making mainly within intraorganizational groups, it has been widely utilized for consumer research and public policy development since this method was designed for identifying consumers' perceptions towards a certain shopping behavior or practice (Claxton, Ritchie, & Zaichkowsky, 1980). For these grounds, the researcher assumed that NGT is suitable for achieving the research aim of this study, which is to examine perceptions towards Helsingborg city, focusing on intra-student groups.

The second reason why NGT was adopted in this study was because of convenience and efficiency for analysis on the individual's perception. It has been reported that exploratory nature and structure of NGT have an ability to enhance the analytical process and to identify themes, attributes, factors in relation to a certain research problem because each participant generates themes by writing their ideas on each card and then those themes can be easily categorized (Calder, 1977; Claxton et al., 1980). Given that the first research question of this study was to understand critical attributes shaping students' perceptions, NGT can be considered as a more suitable method enough to develop thematic words and to enhance categorization than any other focus group techniques.

Comparing other focus group techniques, Claxton et al. (1980) suggested that superior strengths of NGT enable to clarify priorities within individual discussants and to compare differences and similarities between multiple focus group sessions, which is aligned with the second research question of this study, comparing domestic and international student groups. Also, NGT is well-known as a less time-consuming and effective method compared to other brainwriting techniques since NGT relieves tensions and reduces possible conflicts between discussants (VanGundy, 1984). Since brainwriting technique applied in this study was organized with the special intention to examine key attributes which students highly value when they perceive Helsingborg, it can be stated that semi-structured focus groups, specifically nominal group technique was employed in this study (Bryman, 2016).

The structure and order of group brainwriting technique were organized on this wise. First, without preliminary discussion, participants are recommended to write individually at least 15 ideas (with keywords) related to their individual experience and values on Helsingborg. They allowed to write any short sentences or keywords popping up in their mind. Neither any conversation nor discussion is allowed at this stage, so it proceeded as silent writing to accelerate emptying idea and keywords generation.

Second, all participants revealed their own notes on the desk and gave short presentations about it in turn for 15 minutes. Meanwhile, every idea from notes was transcribed by the researcher on the paper grouping similar keywords into the same divisions. The researcher sometimes engaged in the conversation by asking questions for clarifying the meaning of certain keywords or encouraging every member to have equal chances to give a speech.

Third, the researcher distributed papers to students and let them choose some ideas from all listed keywords. Then participants ranked the most relevant attributes of Helsingborg giving them numbers on each attribute (for example, giving 1 for the most relevant value and assigning 2 for the second-relevant idea). This process also proceeded silently for 10 minutes.

Fourth, the researcher counted all votes and showed those results to participants. Presenting the list of ranked ideas, the researcher let students discuss freely on why they ranked in certain ways. Participants proactively showed their opinions and gave feedback to one another while reflecting their own thoughts, sometimes revising or developing their decisions further. By encouraging participants to tag labels to the most critical attributes, affinity diagram of key attributes was developed which serves as an umbrella concept of data analysis of this study. All these labels were gathered and reformulated into the subtitles in following chapter 4.

Prior to the focus group, consents were informed for participants to assure if they would agree to join the focus group. At the same time, they were notified that all conversations would be audio-recorded during the focus groups. However, some participants confessed they felt uncomfortable and burden to be audio-recorded which could violate the privacy of participants (Bryman, 2016). It could also damage the natural data-occurring condition of the setting since the researcher often had to interrupt conversations between discussants for clarifying meanings or asking questions which could make the research environments artificial (Silverman, 2013).

3.2. Netnograhphy

In this study, netnography was adopted as one of the mixed methods since it is suitable for scrutinizing online contents reflecting subjective perceptions and experience of individuals (Baka, 2015). Netnography is an analytic method applying anthropological techniques for investigating cultural characteristics and customs among the specific online community with assistance from a computerized software (Kozinets, 2002; Silverman, 2013). Thus, netnography was adopted in this study since it was shown that many students tended to capture the moments of experiencing Helsingborg and express them in online space. Contents created in the virtual space can be interpreted as results of making sense of place by students' group.

For grasping students' perception, Instagram, one of the popular social network websites was selected in this study. The first reason why Instagram was prioritized as the source of data among other websites was its rapid growth since 2010 when Instagram launched its service (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). Its monthly active users exceed 1 billion, and more than 500 million stories are uploaded per day (Instagram, 2019). Most student communities in Helsingborg have their own accounts on Instagram to promote their events and activities where vigorous engagement and active participation of students were easily captured in. The

second reason was that Instagram is a famous social media platform specialized in image sharing with simplified usage of texts and hashtags (Eagar & Dann, 2016). Even though it is one of the most famous photos creating and sharing platforms, it has been rarely examined by researchers (Hu et al., 2014). In this study, with an abundant number of images and texts, it was suitable to observe and catch the student group's perception through their proactive interaction.

Data were gathered from 15th March to 1st April since the most student activities are vigorous at this season for welcoming newly coming students. Since posts created from January 2014 to March 2019 were selected for raw data of this study, it can be stated that "generic purposive sampling" was applied in this research (Bryman, 2016, p. 419). Data were gathered from the three types of posts; Instagram accounts related to the campus and educational facilities (400 posts), student-organized activities and socializing groups related accounts (400 posts), and private students' accounts with hashtags such as #helsigborgcampus and #campushbg (400 posts). Repetitive or irrelevant posts were excluded among those 1,200 posts, hence total 1,000 posts were gathered as a data set. The posts generated by the municipality and governmental organizations were excluded since they represent the perspective of service providers. Instead, the posts including pictures, captions, and hashtags (#) were gathered from both student communities and students' private accounts of Instagram.

For the campus and educational facilities related accounts, Total six accounts were investigated; @campushelsingborg (37 posts out of total 146 posts), @helsingborgen (30 posts out of total 64 posts), @mihstudent (55 posts out of total 92 posts), @alumniforeningen (total 13 posts), drivkrafthelsingborg (40 posts out of 268 posts), @servicemanagement (total 225 posts). The contents created by students were collected and contents generated by service providers were excluded given that the aim of this study is to examine students' perception of Helsingborg.

For student activities and socializing group related accounts, @stampus_hbg (40 posts out of total 787 posts), @agora_hbg (36posts out of total 897 posts), @helsingborgsstudentkor (52 posts out of total 88 posts), @campusvanner (total 72 posts) were delved into. Since most of those organizations' accounts were operated voluntarily by students, the researcher could select relevant data from them. For private accounts operated by students, data were extracted by searching with hashtags #helsigborgcampus (total 1040 posts) or #campushbg (total 200 posts). Excluding overlapped contents, total of 1,000 posts were selected. Using hashtags ensure to find relevant data since it was difficult to find it from randomly selected students accounts.

All characters extracted from the Instagram accounts were put together in the one file. Some captions and hashtags written in Swedish need to be delivered to Google Translate to translated into English. However, a few words were secondarily selected and translated by the researcher manually since they failed to be translated into English through Google Translate for unclear technical reasons. Every translated word was then categorized into the synonym clusters where each word was supposed to belong to.

At the stage of data coding and analysis, NVivo12, the qualitative analysis software was employed since it is suitable software for counting the frequently addressed words so that data can be retrieved and coded (Silverman, 2013). It can be assumed that these frequent words represent key attributes influencing students' cognitive and affective process and meaningful values that student segment perceive. In the same vein, Bryman (2016) suggested that through the frequency counting of NVivo12, a certain degree of preference, significance, and predilection regarding particular keywords can be measured and presumed.

Retrieved data from Instagram accounts were coded into NVivo12, followed by the word frequency query. As a result, 15,564 words were counted and shown in the Word Cloud (See *Figure 1*) and Tree Map of text corpus (See *Figure 2*), then those keywords were categorized into ten synonym clusters with proper labels to express each word's characteristic. As addressed previously, only words counted more than twice and less than 2,000 times were

filtered through the preliminary configuration of this software to collect data with meaningful and relevant importance. Excluding words such as "the", "a", "is", words with a minimum length of three characters were analyzed and 1,000 most frequently mentioned keywords were shown in the result. Filtering "grouping with specializations", words with more specialized definitions and meanings were classified prior to run the word frequency query. A table of the word frequency query result was developed, and only the top 10 most frequent keywords were ranked in the list because of high volumes of the results (see *Table 2*).

3.3. Ethical Consideration, Validity & Reliability for Qualitative Research

For conducting netnography, protection of privacy was ethically considered throughout the process of data gathering, analysis, and presentation. Previous studies stressed that rigid ethical research guideline and standards should be ensured as one of the six steps for netnography (Kozinets, 2010), for instance, in the sense of "stating your name", "being honest", "using your existing social media profiles", "asking permission when needed", "gaining clear consent for interview, citing and giving credit" (Kozinets, 2007, pp. 19-20). In this study, the researcher's own existing Instagram account was utilized when accessing other users' profiles and accounts. The researcher cited all sources of data that were quoted in this study.

Also, all private information including facial images, usernames, and IDs in the pictures retrieved from Instagram were blurred out to keep them confidential and anonymous (Bryman, 2016). However, the aim of this study and the researcher's identity were not announced to the owners of data due to the limited research duration and to maintain the research environment as a state of nature to gain naturally-occurring data, in turn, it probably enhances the reliability of this study (Silverman, 2013). In addition, the process seeking approvals to use data and asking consents from owners was omitted, which remains as an ethical limitation of this research (May, 2011). In addition, considering that validity and

reliability are critical for assuring generalizability in terms of qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003), the validity of this research also needs to be more improved since general purposive sampling used in this study does not necessarily embrace the whole number of population which means further methods should be added for ensuring validity and reliability so that results can be generalized (Bryman, 2016).

Prior to developing thematic analysis, six categories influencing students decision making when they choose a city developed by Brandt and De Mortanges (2011) were applied for coding data since those categories are closer to the topic of this study than those of any other prior literature. As mentioned earlier, their categorization is more focused on the university city's attributes influencing student's belief, whereas the topic of this study is about students' perception towards Helsingborg as a city in a more general context. Moreover, since it fully covered other categories addressed from other literature regarding city branding attributes, the researcher assumed Brandt and De Mortanges (2011)'s six categories could be adopted in this study.

In the ensuing chapter, critical attributes and factors shaping place images of Helsingborg in students' minds will be portrayed and analyzed. Six categories of key attributes for city branding developed by Brandt and De Mortanges (2011) will be used as a conceptual framework in this study. Based on findings, implications on how practitioners can plan, design, execute, and control students' perception and experience for inducing positive city branding will be also suggested in the last chapter of this study.

Chapter 4. Empirical Findings and Analysis of Students' Perceptions towards Helsingborg City

In this chapter, empirical findings from focus groups and netnography will be presented and analyzed with six themes developed from previous research (Brandt & De Mortanges, 2011). The thematic approach with six categories will serve as a response to the first research question which is "what are the key factors influencing students' perceptions and shaping the brand image of Helsingborg?" following by the answer to the second research question, "how do domestic and international students perceive Helsingborg respectively?". The conclusion of this study with related discussion, reflection and limitation will be then presented in the last chapter 5.

4.1. Developing Thematic Categories: Analysis of Textual Data

Brandt and De Mortanges (2011)'s six categories contain "activities & facilities", "physical environment", "people", "accessibility", "economy", "brand & recognition". According to Brandt and De Mortanges (2011), "activities & facilities" refer to overall cultural and entertaining events, educational and sports activities, festival, technologies such as Wi-Fi, accommodations, shopping places, public spaces, and other supporting facilities. "Physical environment" includes nature, parks, safety, and cleanliness. "People" is defined as population and students who live in the town, but in this study, the general meaning of residents and neighbors were also included. "Accessibility" includes public transport, transport, and infrastructures such as parking lots.

They also took consideration of "Economy" including cheap public & private service, reasonable price, university's partnership with business, successful companies, and entrepreneurial environment. "Brand & reputation" refers to favorable brand image, recognition, English proficiency, globalization, and the international reputation of both city and university. In this study, however, "brand & reputation" regarding the university was excluded since it is irrelevant to the topic of this research. Instead "Brand & reputation" is more focused on the city brand recognition itself. Adding to this, "national brand image and

reputation", so-called Swedishness, was newly added into this category. The Following section will display a thematic relationship between these six categories with analysis.

Activities & Facilities

As assumed, most students addressed socio-cultural activities and related facilities which seems one of the critical themes Helsingborg has. In focus groups, participants addressed tourist attractions such as "Gröningen" and "Sofiero". Private facilities related to cultural and entertaining events were also frequently mentioned during the discussions like "museum", "nightlife", and "Olympia (the rebuilt sports arena in Helsingborg)". Interestingly, these cultural events and facilities are often addressed combining with seasonal or geographical factors of Helsingborg. For example, D1 (FG2) mentioned "Gröningen is quite close to the seaside and popular for people in the summer" and D2 (FG2) also illustrated,

> "Helsingborg is a big city that gives opportunities to enjoy sports activities for
> everyone. I have seen that during the summer they have different sports events for the
> youth and young adults here making more people want to stay." (D2, FG2)

Similarly, D1 (FG1) also illustrated "Beachside" connecting it with seasonal factor, "Summer" by saying "a lovely place to enjoy during summer" and D3 (FG1) described Pixlapiren as "a cool place to hang out in summer".

Many students mentioned public facilities such as "Library" and "Public square", but among those, considerable international students address "Campus Helsingborg" or other education-related facilities such as "Helsingborgen". It can be assumed that international students tend to depend on educational facilities more than domestic students due to the lack of those facilities in Helsingborg as they discussed. They revealed they chose "Helsingborgen" as an alternative to the poor-conditioned campus facility because it provides networking events and

parties for newly arrived students and offers a place to study and mingle. Two discussants (D3 and D5) in FG2 confessed that they feel inconvenient and lost connection in Helsingborg due to a disappointing level of educational facilities including study space, library, and educational equipment in public library and campus Helsingborg.

Since most participants in focus groups in this study were students studying bachelor/master programs or SFI (Swedish Language Course for Immigrants) in Helsingborg, they all mentioned about educational facilities at least once. Even if they paid huge attention to such facilities like the campus and public library, their general impression regarding it seemed to be not positive. D2 (FG2) suggested "The student life here is not that exciting and big enough. It might be because of Lund having such a bigger, active student life."

Concerning the private facilities for cultural events/activities such as "Restaurants" and "Shops", there was a consensus when it comes to the narrow range of various options in Helsingborg. While D1, D3, and D4 agreed with "shortage of good quality restaurants" and "pretty small variety of well-priced restaurant", D2 argued "there are not many authentic foreign restaurants, like real Chinese or Korean cuisines, even if lots of immigrants live here" (FG2). Regarding the "Shops", D3 and D5 also mentioned that they always need to go to Väla (A big shopping mall located in suburb area) or they do online shopping as there are not so many shops targeting them (FG2).

Similar results were found in the netnography. Through word frequency query by NVivo12, it was shown that the most frequently mentioned keyword was "acted" and "activity" related words. "Acted" relevant words were counted total 2,212 times which was the highest ranked, followed by "activity" related words which were counted 2,179 times. Educational and recreational activities related words such as "dance" and "education" were common. Job fairs, job searching related words like "internship" and "employment" were also frequently shown.

Socializing activities relevant keywords such as "event" (1,625 times, for example, "association", "events", and "mingling") and "communication" (1,398 times, such as "mentor" and "network") were also significantly ranked as the higher group. "Periodic" related words involving seasonal events and activities were counted 1,194 times like "Christmas" and "summer". The words indicating facilities such as "organization" and "company" were counted 1,190 times.

These findings are aligned with prior research indicating that "activities & facilities" and "history, heritage & culture" were the most salient attributes affecting the perception formation, which are exactly the same findings as those of this research (Hankinson, 2004; Merrilees et al., 2009). Hankinson (2004) interpreted that relationship between commercial and socio-cultural attributes are intertwined since "history, heritage & culture" as the second highest attribute, were the main source for generating socio-cultural events and activities even if they were mostly associated with physical and tangible attributes. Adding to this, Hanna and Rowley (2011) suggested that tangible and functional attributes such as "landscape & infrastructure strategies" influence intangible and experiential attributes like "culture and service" (p. 463). Similar to prior research, empirical findings of this study indicated that "activities & facilities" are the most critical attributes shaping students' perceptions and they are highly influenced and formed by commercial factors which are another axis of city brand image attribute.

Physical environment

- ## Nature & Park

Keywords indicating greenness and nature such as "water" and "seaside" were also addressed. There were apparent differences between international and domestic students' perceptions. Only a few domestic students addressed "nature" as key attributes of

Helsingborg and even for those who mentioned did not rank it highly. They also tended to perceive it in the private/individual context such as "having time with family in nature". On the contrary, international students put more importance on "nature" and "public place" which can be assumed that foreign students prioritize the interaction with public and natural resources of the city. It was similarly shown in the online content analysis as below.

> "Helsingborg is surrounded by beautiful nature and amazing views. These pictures show you what the Swedish landscape looks like right now. It is so great to find some peace in nature after a period of studying! Today I went to Kullaberg, which is a national park. A little bit closer by Helsingborg you can visit beautiful Sofiero or go for a walk along the coast." (Katja)

> "My name is Anna and I am originally from Poland, Warsaw but have now lived in Sweden, Helsingborg for soon 15 years. I really enjoy studying at Lund University with people from different countries and I am very grateful for their stories and the time we spent together. As a mother of two, wife and student, my life is busy but it is actually some of my classmates, who told me how much they appreciate Swedish nature, how beautiful it is here and by telling me these obvious things, they made me to appreciate the nature more and to stop just to look at the beautiful sky… is something obvious to me but others have not encountered it before." (Anna)

Presumably, cultural proximity caused this perceptual difference as for those who are closer to the destination tend to know better the country than those who are from outside the country hence, domestic students might not perceive the nature of Helsingborg interesting that much (Kastenholz, 2010). Regarding this, Trope and Liberman (2010) suggested that people tend to perceive a certain object in the construal level depending on psychological distance, For example, residents living in geographically or culturally close place, tend to perceive specific concepts by using concrete and self-related words whilst tourists construe the object and express it with abstract concept and languages. Applying it to this study, it can be assumed that domestic students perceived "nature" in higher construal level by giving self-oriented

presentation such as "family time in nature" while international students with different cultural backgrounds considered it as more exotic and unusual due to their psychological distance.

• Safety & Cleanness

"Safety" in Helsingborg was one of the most frequently mentioned themes regardless of nationality and ethnicity of both FG1 and FG2. D3 (FG1) argued "The security can be improved better for the residents who live here" and D2 (FG1) strongly emphasized like below;

> "The reason why I did not move to here was that I have heard that some areas (in Helsingborg) are where you do not want to be during nighttime. I hear and see, every now and then, about the crime rate here which also does not motivate me to be here in my free time." (D2, FG1)

Students indicated the specific district and facility such as "Söder" (the Southern area of the Helsingborg where is well known for the high proportion of crime) and "Knutpunkten" (a transport hub of Helsingborg connecting the train, ferry, and bus stations). D3 (FG2) mentioned "Söder is a bit trashy area and I feel unsafe there" and "Knutpunkten is a disgusting place where I do not want to be, bus stations are terrible and the train station is too old, it should be renewed". D4 also addressed "Junkies with addiction or mental illness issues tend to gather around the Knutpunkten". D5 highly criticized safety condition of the district saying, "I do not feel safe living in Söder, there were a few guns shootings happened just near where I am living".

Interestingly, even if students took security into consideration significantly during the discussions, they did not rank security and cleanness at the higher level. In prior research, domestic students considered insecurity and dirtiness attributes as more directly connecting to

the city brand image than foreign students did (Brandt & De Mortanges, 2011). On the contrary, both domestic and international students in this study, did not perceive them as the core attribute affecting the city brand image. It was clear that students regarded that safety and cleanness issues should be improved but they did not perceive them as key factors crucially influencing the city brand. Similarly, Brandt and De Mortanges (2011) stressed safety and cleanness issues were not shown to be core associations linking directly to the city brand. Meanwhile, it was difficult to find any content regarding safety and cleanness of Helsingborg for the netnography. The researcher assumed that it might be due to the characteristic of Instagram filled with advertisement and promotional contents with marketing purpose, hence contents from Instagram tend to contain positive images rather than negative contents (Chu, Allem, Cruz, & Unger, 2017).

People

Concerning the theme "People" in Helsingborg, a positive impression was predominant between the students. They regarded their neighbors and residents as "polite people" (D1, FG2). It was notable to see the predominant difference between responses depending on the ethnic and cultural backgrounds students have. For example, D1 (FG2) mentioned that "I think people here are very polite and I am really impressed by seeing how much they respect each other, especially when driving vehicles." Similarly, D3 (FG1) with the origin of Middle Eastern country repeatedly addressed "Diversity" and "Respect" almost in every sentence when he mentioned about people living in Helsingborg. D3 mentioned,

> "A lot of people who live here have diverse nationalities and people are open-minded with a good attitude. There are many options to explore different cultures and always respect among people here." (D3, FG1)

In the same vein, in previous research, socializing with the local was significantly emphasized as a critical travel motivation, and it directly influences the city's overall brand image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Hankinson, 2004). Not only characteristics of "People" attribute such as "youth-oriented" and "mixed demographics" (Hankinson, 2004, p. 9), but also feelings of receptiveness from residents, social interaction, social bonding were also shown to be most frequently mentioned attributes from prior studies (Gallarza et al., 2002; Merrilees et al., 2009).

As expected, considerable students regarded that Helsingborg has a population with diverse cultural and ethnical background and interestingly, it was predominant between the discussants who have non-Swedish ethnic backgrounds. D6 (FG1), who came from an Asian country, addressed "many immigrants from the Middle East lives in Helsingborg, so I can experience Middle Eastern food culture, but at the same time many local Swedish restaurants and souvenir shops disappeared because of that."

The same tendency was significantly found in the responses of international students. Most international students regarded themselves as immigrants, they confessed the multicultural population in Helsingborg served positively for them to thrive in an unfamiliar environment. For example, D2 (FG2) said that "As I am a migrant, such multicultural, tolerant and positive environment towards migrants is important." D1 (FG2) and D6 (FG2) also addressed,

"I think Helsingborg is a multinational city. I have made very close friendships with three ladies at SFI school here. They came from China, India, and Pakistan. I met them in 2017 and even if we do not go to SFI now anymore, we are still like sisters and somehow meet at least once a month to share ours like one another. My heart fills with love when I think of them. I never expected to have such friends here." (D1, FG2)

"I was surprised when I came to Helsingborg for the first time. Since there were many different ethnicities such as Arabic and Asian. Söder seems like an Arabic area for me. At

some point, I do like it since there is a Muslim community and it is easy for me to find halal food. Similarly as an Asian, with many Asian stores in Helsingborg, I can find Asian ingredients easily." (D6, FG2)

Based on findings, those responses from international students who said they were willing to live in Sweden after their study reinforced assumption of this study that students' group should be re-considered as a segment with the potential of long-term residents, rather than short-term travelers. Also, the importance of this attribute "People" seems to be increased further in the future as the city branding is a dualistic process embracing different actors and the city's role of integrating diverse stakeholders has been paid attention (Marine-Roig, 2015; Papson, 1981; Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

Accessibility

One of the most interesting findings was that a lot of students pointed out the geographical merits and fantastic connectivity that Helsingborg has. As D1 (FD1) addressed like below;

> "This city has a big port which is the second biggest in Sweden. The connection between Helsingborg and the rest of Southern Sweden through roads and train also makes it easy to connect to the other parts of Sweden. Additionally, the connection to our neighbor country with boats between Knutpunkten and Helsingör is also notable." (D1, FD1)

During the students' discussion, these geographical characteristics and accessibility were often related to transportation and infrastructures. Interestingly, these words such as "roads" and "logistics", D1 (FG1) explained, "Helsingborg is a city with many logistic companies and a big port". Some students emphasized accessibility as the most critical attribute by saying "It

is easy for me to travel between Lund and Helsingborg which is one of the main reasons why I study here."

However, convenient accessibility connected with public transport was facing negative impressions with regards to "Construction". Many discussants mentioned delayed transport service, inconvenience, annoying feeling, and environmental pollution which are caused by construction work. D1 (FG2) mentioned,

> "We experience traffic jams close to the city centre due to road construction work that seems to be continuing for a long time and takes a very long time to go to the central area. Only two bus rides per hours between Ödakra and Helsingborg centrum, which is fairly inadequate, especially during office hours." (D1, FG2)

Even though prior studies also emphasized transportation and accessibility (Brandt & De Mortanges, 2011; Gallarza et al., 2002; Hankinson, 2004; Merrilees et al., 2009), "Accessibility" attribute of this study seems to be quite salient compared to previous research since most students ranked this attribute at the higher level, and especially international students voted "Accessibility" as the first critical attributes shaping Helsingborg's city brand image. It probably seems to be derived from well-connected geographical advantages and it can be uniqueness differentiating Helsingborg from other competitive cities as seen from the findings that students frequently emphasized keywords such as "Good location", "Ferry", "Scandline", and "Forsea" (The name of the ferry company). However, this accessibility seemed to serve as one of the catalysts triggering students to drain to competitive cities outside Helsingborg. As addressed previously, this issue seems to be derived from a lack of various options and excitements in Helsingborg. For example, D2 (FG2) suggested,

> "It is close to Malmo and Copenhagen where lots of opportunities to work and for entertainment and there is extensive public transport in and around the city. So, if is way too boring and plain here in Helsingborg and there is no real student life (not

existing outdoor activities or student parties), I move to Lund or Copenhagen to attend events or buy cheap beers." (D2, FG2)

Similarly, "construction" was counted 1,155 times in netnography. It was also found that transportation-related words such as "changed" (counted 2,025 times) and "move" (1,478 times) were also highly ranked and those were connected to the city's construction and expanding works (for example, "build" and "expand"), "infrastructure (for example, "institution" and "organization"), and transportation and connectivity (for example, "ferry" and "train"). Other comments stating transport were also observed in Instagram as below.

> "Helsingborg is close to Helsingör in Denmark, and a common tourist destination is to "ride" between the cities by ferry. By train, it takes about 30 minutes to Lund, with many commuting many students in both directions." (Daniela)

> "Campus Helsingborg is beautifully situated within walking distance of Helsingborg Central Station and the Ferry Terminal. Helsingborg is a city committed to promoting sustainable mobility, that is safe and accessible for everyone through an efficient and environmental-friendly public transport service." (Fei)

Economy

Economic expansion and employment opportunities related themes were also frequently stated between students. These findings are aligned with previous research stressing prestige, reasonable cost and price, economic activities and related public/private service, the existence of prosperous companies, partnership with business (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Brandt & De Mortanges, 2011; Gallarza et al., 2002; Hankinson, 2004). While construction work was regarded as the negative factor causing environmental pollution, traffic jam, inconvenience as addressed before, some students perceived it as a sign for expansion and development. For

instance, D1 (FG1) mentioned "A lot of roads are rebuilt during the last year and are still in progress. I have feelings about the city is getting bigger and bigger" and D4 agreed with it by saying "Helsingborg is expanding, Söder is becoming a center and new (newly established) Söder City is also getting nice."

Regarding employment opportunity, most discussants voted the keyword "Jobs" in the highest rank. However, there was a gap between international and domestic students' perception concerning job opportunities. Domestic students regarded there are many good positions and chances to be employed. For example, D2 (FG1) mentioned "there are many job opportunities for us students here which is good, and they are flexible with hours because they (employers) adjust to our studies" and D3 (FG1) also stated "It seems to be clear many job opportunities here" which was shown differences from the perspective of the international student illustrated in the ensuing paragraph.

On the contrary, international students' cognitions were not identical as D1 argued;

> "It is so difficult to find a job in Helsingborg. As I have been a career woman for 16 years, I am really frustrated to find a job suitable for me. It is important for me to get a right job and sometimes I feel that I lose my self-respect and self-fulfillment by being economically dependent to my husband, so I ranked "Jobs" in the third highest stage." (D1, FG2)

Concerning the living cost, "expensive living cost (food and clothes)", "housing shortages", "expensive price for cultural events" were addressed. D1 argued, "cultural/entertainment opportunities are limited and difficult to afford because the price of tickets is very high, but I participated Sofiero just because I got a free ticket" which was similarly found in domestic students' discussion.

Brand & Reputation

• General Brand Images of Helsingborg

The theme of brand and reputation also appeared predominantly, especially in the international student's group. Even though most students went to the consensus that "Helsingborg is metropolis", they found the city compact but peaceful place. For example, D2 (FD2) described Helsingborg as "a small but chill and calm place, having reserved and laid-back atmosphere". In addition, D1 (FD2) frequently addressed keywords such as "Peaceful", Lagom", "Chill", "Calm" and "Quality of the environment" and ranked those keywords in the highest level (see *Table 6*) by saying as below, which was significantly different from the result of voting done by the domestic students.

> "The quality of the environment is at the highest level with fresh air and there is no or minimum degree of air pollution. I found Helsingborg is a very peaceful city to live and ranked peacefulness and environmental quality as the most important aspects as I am a calm and quiet person and a nature lover." (D1, FD2)

Despite the small size of the city, most students perceived Helsingborg as an "international city" (D5, FG2) with well-organized facilities and multicultural atmosphere that is favorable for foreigners to thrive. Those concerns, in turn, was often connected to the city's image of integration and social cohesion. For example, D1 mentioned as below;

> "Helsingborg is a multicultural city. I have made very close friendships with three ladies from different countries. My favorite place in Helsingborg is the library, which is a huge resource to citizens, it has a diverse collection of books and a very peaceful environment. I think people here are very polite. These days, I have started wondering Helsingborg may have a public square similar to Stortorget in Malmo. Although

people can enjoy the beachside and the park close to the library as open public spaces, a torg like that will be better in promoting city life and social cohesion." (D1, FG2)

Interestingly, a keyword "tolerant" was highly emphasized several times which means it can be a highly important attribute for foreign students who are willing to settle down in Helsingborg. Saying "It has tolerant and accepting environment towards migrants", D2 (FG2) repeated keywords "immigrants", "migrants", "Arab" or "people from the Middle Eastern" and clearly appreciated "because I am also an immigrant, that is important for me. I ranked (a keyword) "Peaceful" in a top as that is the foundation of a good and balanced life". Additionally, D4 (FG2) who ranked "Multicultural" at the highest level, also suggested, "it is clear to see and listen to people from different cultures and speaking their own languages in this city."

However, contrary to the findings from focus groups, affectional expression was not predominantly addressed on Instagram, rather a few simplified keywords were shown in the text such as "fun", "laughter" or "boring". Negative feelings or recognitions towards Helsingborg brand images were barely revealed from any Instagram accounts, which can be assumed to be derived from the characteristics of Instagram that tends to more focus on images and making them richer, instead simplifies and compresses texts and hashtags (Hu et al., 2014). In addition, most posts were created with promotional purpose even if they were generated by students, and it was reported that Instagram users are likely to express positive feelings in their posts rather than negative feelings since "Instagram may trigger assumptions that these photos are indicative of how the people in them actually live" (Lup, Trub, & Rosenthal, 2015, p. 248).

- **Swedish National Brand Image: Swedishness**

It was notable that many students, especially from foreign countries, emphasized Swedish national brand images when they were talking about their experience and perception about Helsingborg city. For example, addressing keywords indicating Swedish value and custom such as "Fika" and "Lagom", One international student (D5, FG2) described "Helsingborg is a typical Swedish city. The living prize in Helsingborg is Lagom". It was found from both results of the focus groups and netnography as below. On the contrary, domestic students seldom mentioned about Swedish national brand images during the research.

> "Last post from me before I log off: BLISS. The sea was so peaceful today. Absolutely stunning. Who cares about the cold when the view is this beautiful and the sun is shining? Ps. It was -2 degrees and people were barbequing on the beach. The Swedish spirit is amazing." (Jenny)

> "I still a little bit awkward calling the professor by their first name on the campus, because back home we must address with for example Sir. It is a good thing I guess to have less distance with the teacher and give more opportunity to communicate… It gives me a chance to meet a diverse group of people from all over the world. Eventually, all good things always have to come to an end to welcome another journey that is waiting for me. But I am happy anyway." (Marlo)

Although prior studies also broadly mentioned about these affective values such as peacefulness, sincerity, and ambiance (Aaker, 1997; Ahmad et al., 2013; Brandt & De Mortanges, 2011; Hankinson, 2004), national brand image was rarely addressed from previous research as the attribute shaping city brand image, which was newly found in this study. Aaker (1997) stressed sincerity is the most dominant dimension shaping the brand personality among five dimensions and it covered honest, genuine, and domestic traits. Compared to Aaker (1997)'s analysis, Ahmad et al. (2013) narrowed down this sincerity dimension into peacefulness, and he suggested peacefulness took a grave role in giving a positive effect on the formation of city brand personality. However, those prior research on "brand and reputation" neglected "national brand image" attribute and they attempted to

explain only intangible and non-physical aspects of city brand image attributes by elaborating personality dimension which in turn, did not clarify the relationship with functional and socio-cultural attributes.

4.2. Developing Thematic Categories: Analysis of Visual Data

It has been reported that visual data plays a grave role in forming place images since the destination image consists of impressions with regards to a certain place (Crompton, 1979; Kotler & Andreasen, 1991). To analyze visual data from pictures of Instagram, 100 sample photos were randomly selected out of 1,000 posts gathered for netnography. 10 photos each were extracted from 10 different Instagram accounts for coding. Eliminating memes, selfies, or other textual image files, only pictures created by students were selected. The researcher interpreted semiotic characteristics of each image and according to that process, images were coded (Silverman, 2013). Clarifying objects (What is it?), actions (What actions are they doing?), events (Where does it happen and what kind of events do they have?), and meaning (What do they intend to do?) of each photo (Eagar & Dann, 2016) Then images were interpreted and then clustered into only one relevant category by the researcher so that it serves to one representative attribute each . Hence a table of all photos clustered according to six categories of Brandt and De Mortanges (2011) was developed (see *Table 3,* p. 54).

Similar to the findings gained from focus groups and the word frequency query, the theme "Activities and Facilities" related images were most commonly found. Pictures mainly contained images of food (dishes and drinks in restaurants and pubs), educational facilities and cultural activities (university campus, library, clubbing, festival, DJ-activity, students' communities and its related activities), Study related images (exam papers, books, thesis, and coffee break), tourist attractions (Sofiero, Kärnan, Råå, Gröningen).

It was interesting that there were lots of food-related images in terms of Indian, Moroccan, Middle Eastern, or Asian dishes which reflects that students regard Helsingborg as a multinational environment. Considering city branding is underpinned by visitors' image perceptions (Mihalis Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005) and especially image-oriented city branding is effective for aiming target group from outside the town (Meffert & Burmann, 2002), these international city image of Helsingborg might be more suitable for targeting international students or domestic students flowed from outside the city.

Regarding Helsingborg city's "Brand & reputation", it was difficult to grab relevant images in Instagram except multicultural food images addressed above. Only two students defined that Helsingborg is a colorful city by posting pictures of the city's wall painting, decorated buildings, and bright trees with lightbulbs. On the contrary, however, "Swedish national brand image" related images were easily found. Most images were relevant to Swedish custom, traditional food, and Swedish values. For example, semla (a bread having during Swedish traditional season, Fat Tuesday), coffee and cookies were presented in the pictures addressing Fika culture and Lagom. Holding coffee cups with friends was a typical image and often captions explaining Swedish culture like "Swedes are the 6th biggest coffee drinks in the world with 8.2kg per person a year" (Gwenny) were added. It explicitly revealed that visual materials related to national brand images can serve as a facilitator of students' travel motivations, given that destination images are one of the most critical catalysts triggering visitors to make a decision (Chung & Chen, 2018; Gartner, 1994; Gunn, 1972; Marine-Roig, 2015; Sirakaya et al., 2001; Tan, 2017; Zhang et al., 2014).

In particular, the "Accessibility" theme related images represent a lot of meaningful implication in relation to students' perception of Helsingborg. Through many images regarding the ferry, harbor, cycles, bus station, train station and other transport infrastructures, they clearly perceived that Helsingborg has superior connectivity compared to neighboring cities. Combining accessibility of Helsingborg, pictures taken in Helsingör, Lund, Småland were often shown. In the theme of "Physical environment", nature related pictures were predominantly shown. Especially beachside, sky, bench, trees, greenness, sea, ducks,

sunshine, lake, and park area were portrayed in many images and watching horizontal line with friends holding drinks was a typical picture shown in students' Instagram. In pictures, students walk the street or enjoy cycling and hiking. Seaside and sunshine images were most frequently observed. Both "Accessibility" and "Physical environment" themes are functional and physical aspects, but they appeared to affect and even form positive affections and impressions, which was described by prior research that cognitive and affective attributes are intertwined and influence one another (Crompton, 1979).

Regarding themes of "people", images represented students mingling, networking, having free time with their friends, other students, or colleagues in the campus or cafes, restaurants, parks. In general, there were people shown in some pictures whilst other pictures contained images of food or drinks with tags of accompaniers' Instagram users' names which allow contents to be shared if the tag is clicked. Interestingly, in "People" theme, it was common to find many pictures taken usually in the seaside, harbor, beach with sunset or sunlight which can be interpreted that students perceive Helsingborg as a certain place of the sun shining seaside with friendly people. It can be assumed that their impression toward the city is relaxing, calm, peaceful, and chill-out atmosphere which is similar to the results gained from focus groups. In fact, lots of students posted images with captions explaining that they uploaded contents after the semester or finishing exams.

Commercial aspects of the attribute were also stressed in the theme of "Economy" theme. The images represented job fair, job searching related events, discussion with entrepreneurs in related industry, breakfast seminar arranged by students supporting communities such as Campusvänner, were often found. Some mingling events or seminar with companies organized by students' communities were frequently portrayed. In the pictures, students as well as entrepreneurs attended the seminar, gave a speech and listen to the seminar. Pictures about the lectures hosted in the Mindpark (the co-working space located nearby Helsingborg campus) were also posted on the Instagram accounts which refers that students regard partnership with business and entrepreneurs is not unusual in Helsingborg. It aligned with other studies mentioned that word "town" was coined from the marketplace and with that

regard, every city aims to differentiate itself by expanding, investing, and attracting more people (Michalis Kavaratzis, 2004; Mihalis Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Melović et al., 2017).

During the image analysis, there was a gap between the image perception of the Swedish and international students. International students tended to create contents proactively whilst finding images regarding Helsingborg created by domestic students was not easy. In the ensuing chapter, overall contents will be summarized, and the conclusion will be presented based on these empirical findings. Followed by theoretical and managerial implications, the researcher's reflection, limitation of this study and suggestion on the future study will be also presented in the last chapter.

Themes & Attributes	Exemplary Photos
Activities and Facilities	
Physical environment (Nature, parks, safety, cleanliness)	
People	
Accessibility (Infrastructure, transportation, ferry, train, bus, connectiveness to Helsingør, Lund, Malmö or other cities)	
Economy (Partnership with university, employment, company, business opportunity)	
Brand and reputation (City image and recognition)	

Table 3. Photo Examples of Six Categories in Instagram.

Chapter 5. Concluding Research on Students' Perception towards Helsingborg City

In this chapter, the conclusion is summarized and portrayed based on the prior analysis, which will serve to give responses to the two research questions of this study. With theoretical and managerial contributions, the discussion is then presented. Lastly, followed by reflection on the research and limitation, the implications for future research are initiated.

5.1. Statement of Fulfilling Answers to Research Questions

The aim of this study was to provide deepen understanding of how students perceive and experience Helsingborg city. With that intention, this research also aimed to attain insight on critical factors and attributes forming perception and image towards Helsingborg from the perspective of domestic and international students, which was the first research question. To conclude findings gained from the prior chapter of this study, students perceived and experienced Helsingborg in accordance with six attributes; "activities and facilities", "physical environment", "people", "accessibility", "economy", "brand and reputation" (Brandt & De Mortanges, 2011). Every perception and experience collected from focus groups and netnography could be categorized into those six attributes except "Swedish national brand image" perceived by students, which was newly added into the categories of "brand and reputation" by the researcher.

In the findings, key attributes that both domestic and international students significantly perceived in common were "activities & facilities" and "accessibility". Domestic and international students acknowledged various educational and socio-cultural activities and facilities are critical factors shaping the city image of Helsingborg compared to other attributes, and similar findings were shown from the result of the online contents analysis. Students addressed a wide range of tourist attractions, cultural and entertaining activities

which means they are major factors forming Helsingborg's city image. Various activities were often mentioned linking to supportive facilities, organizations, and communities in Helsingborg. The word frequency query also revealed that activity or event related words extracted from students' contents in Instagram were the most frequently counted, and the findings from images analysis also enabled to assure the same conclusions.

The findings also indicated that both domestic and international student significantly took accessibility of Helsingborg into consideration. Considerable students admitted that connectivity is the critical asset for Helsingborg that influences the city's image, which was shown from both focus groups and netnography. Almost all students in focus groups mentioned Helsingborg's excellent connectivity and gave voting this attribute as a critical factor and a lot of texts and images regarding it also underpinned these findings. Even though this attribute of "accessibility" gained favorable reputations from students, however, it has been revealed that it also contributes to the outflow of students towards other neighboring cities due to the lack of fun and entertaining events, activities and facilities Helsingborg has. Hence, to overcome the negative impact of "accessibility", the findings pointed out that the city's activities and facilities should be reinforced and customized in accordance with students' perception and preference to prevent students from draining to neighboring cities and to attract more potential students from other, so that Helsingborg can optimize its positive brand images and attain competitiveness to thrive in the market (Ahmad et al., 2013; Mihalis Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Marine-Roig, 2015; Martínez & Alvarez, 2010; Melović et al., 2017).

Interestingly, a gap between domestic and international students' perception was frequently found with regard to the "brand and reputation" attribute, which can be an answer to the second research question of this study. The empirical findings revealed that international students more proactively addressed about "brand and reputation" attributes than domestic students did, which can be assumed that domestic students less feel exotic about Helsingborg's multicultural environment, the city's reputation and Swedish national brand image (Kastenholz, 2010). It was underpinned by the findings that some domestic students

with different ethnic or cultural backgrounds also mentioned the city's multinational "brand and reputation" and friendly "people". On the contrary, domestic students more often addressed "economy" in terms of employment opportunity and partnership with business whilst international students rarely did. These findings indicate that student target needs to be more segmentalized in detail depending on their ethnicity, nationality or other demographical characteristics, to be able to provide them with more customized brand images of Helsingborg city (Michalis Kavaratzis, 2004).

5.2. Discussion on Conclusions with Theoretical and Managerial Contributions

The findings indicated that both physical/cognitive and non-physical/affective attributes were critical for Helsingborg to influence students' perceptions and experiences, which was aligned with prior research (Hanna & Rowley, 2011; Lehto et al., 2014; Sirakaya et al., 2001). Reaching to the same direction with previous studies, the finding of this study also revealed that physical attributes such as "activities and facilities", "accessibility", "physical environment", "people" and "economy" were critical factors for students to choose a certain city to live, study, travel, work (after study) or to relocate to other cities if their needs were not fulfilled. Hence, it can be assumed that these physical attributes are necessities to form the city's representative images that are influential for students' motivation and decision-making process (Chung & Chen, 2018; Gartner, 1994; Marine-Roig, 2015; Zhang et al., 2014).

On the other hand, existing research also emphasized the role of socio-cultural and phycological attributes when it comes to shaping the city's brand image (Aaker, 1997; Ahmad et al., 2013; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Chung & Chen, 2018; Gallarza et al., 2002; Merrilees et al., 2009; Sevin, 2014). While prior research categorized socio-cultural and affective attributes as "quality of experience", brand intention", and "social bonding"

(Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gallarza et al., 2002; Hankinson, 2004), this study covered all those factors into the cluster of "brand and reputation" by applying the six categories developed by Brandt and De Mortanges (2011).

For those non-physical/affective attributes, findings of this study were also in the same vein with the prior research. Especially international students perceived "brand and reputation" as a critical attribute shaping Helsingborg's brand image. In addition, even domestic students with diverse cultural backgrounds considered it as important factors. In this study, it was revealed that "Brand and reputation" attribute included both positive and negative perception of students towards Helsingborg. Students regarded Helsingborg as a peaceful, multinational and international city with diversity, whilst often mentioned their negative perception and images, for example, in relation to boring and plain society's atmosphere, crime, and safety issues. Based on these findings, for enhancing the city brand image from the perspective of destination marketers or city municipalities, Helsingborg's "reputation and brand" attribute, as a non-physical/affective attribute, seems to be more analyzed and classified specifically so that city images could be more associated with positive attributes and detached with deteriorated and negative attributes (Marine-Roig, 2015; Martínez & Alvarez, 2010).

Despite its significance, there seemed to be still less attention to delve into these non-physical and affective attributes as prior research (Chapleo, 2011; Chung & Chen, 2018) pointed out. For example, only a few research pointed out that image attributes of a particular city are often connected to the country's national brand image (Chung & Chen, 2018). In the same vein, the finding of this study indicated that "Swedishness", which were categorized into the "brand and reputation" attribute, was a critical attribute especially for international students since many students perceived Helsingborg as a "peaceful", "calm", "tolerant" and "balanced" city by linking these images to the unique Swedish own virtue and culture such as "Lagom" and "Fika". From the prior research, however, it was hard to find such city image attribute related to the national brand image, thereby it seemed to be newly found in this study which can be a theoretical contribution to the field of service management.

Based on these findings, it can be suggested that both physical and socio-cultural attributes need to be considered and they should be integrated for branding Helsingborg. In addition, key attributes should be more customized and personalized according to students' nationalities, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, psychological and cultural proximity which will enhance the positive city brand image of Helsingborg. Also, applying this finding to the practice with managerial implications, it can be stated that Helsingborg municipality and private service providers need to consider the Swedish national brand image putting it in the same line of Helsingborg's brand image to generate coherent and positive city brand images for attracting student segment. In addition, marketers could consider students' cultural proximity as well as demographic characteristic for providing them with customized city's attributes and evaluating how the same attribute can affect diverse sub-segments of students in a different way. For instance, in this study, International students were more interested in "brand & reputation" than domestic students were. This finding is on the same line with prior research suggesting that cultural and psychological proximity results in different perception between those who lived in culturally closer places and those lived far away (Kastenholz, 2010; Trope & Liberman, 2010), which is required to be taken into consideration for the managerial development of the city branding.

Given that both domestic and international students perceived Helsingborg as a multinational city in common, those socio-cultural attributes need to be more meaningfully considered and scrutinized further not only for attaining potential students segment but also for integrating existing diverse residents and preventing related social issues that possibly could occur (Gallarza et al., 2002; Michalis Kavaratzis, 2004; Merrilees et al., 2009). Also, as Michalis Kavaratzis (2004) suggested that city branding needs to be conducted on a personalized level enough to embrace the whole different residents and integrate them with solid social bonding, the approach balancing both physical and socio-cultural image attributes seems to be essential for enhancing Helsingborg city's brand image in the future.

5.3. Limitation of this Research and Implication on the Future Study

Based on the findings of prior studies (Chapleo, 2011; Jørgensen, 2016; Mihalis Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Melović et al., 2017), it was found in common that most practitioners emphasized that city branding is indispensable and inevitable to survive in the globalized competition, and the attempt to differentiate a city for defeating other cities is also required. To attain competitive advantage, cities around the world have realized the importance of their own cities' unique values and characteristics and constantly developed them to optimize its strength and attractiveness (Melović et al., 2017). Based on these theoretical claims, to achieve those goals, this study aimed to offer a profound understanding of critical attributes for making Helsingborg's city brand image competitive and attracting more students segment. Thereby, the researcher hopes the findings from this study could provide a deeper understanding of how both Swedish domestic and International students perceive and experience values in terms of Helsingborg city, which would be broadened insight for academia and practitioners.

To differentiate itself and develop its uniqueness and competitiveness for Helsingborg city, so that it can attain the critical factors to survive in the globalized competition with other cities (Jørgensen, 2016; Mihalis Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Melović et al., 2017), the findings of this study offer a contribution in terms of both theoretical and managerial implication. More researches inquiring key attributes of making city brand prosperous seem to be required to collect meaningful data which could verify findings. Municipalities could collaborate for this common interest, for example, Jørgensen (2016) insisted to establish the platform that forces each municipality to gather data and funds and share them together for managing brand strategy collaboratively.

Although this study has contributed to providing an in-depth understanding of city image attributes shaping students' perception and experience on Helsingborg, still there are limitations to be improved. In the case of this study, there seem to be limitations regarding the source of data in netnography of this study. As promotional contents with a marketing purpose are dominant in Instagram, selected texts and images seemed to be biased to positive

perceptions and impressions towards Helsingborg and adding to this, there was a tendency that Instagram users seldom share negative feelings in public as it is indicative of how they actually live (Lup et al., 2015) which could distort the results of the online contents analysis.

Adding to this, more researches examining the perspective of service operators seem to be required to develop complete place-making process as Hultman, Yeboah-Banin, and Formaniuk (2016) argued that empirical findings on both perceptions of supply and demand sides should be scrutinized to attain the holistic and balanced brand vision. In other words, since this study is conducted only from students' point of view, further research could be delved into from the perspective of service providers to understand a mutual process of image formation between different stakeholders (Marine-Roig, 2015; Papson, 1981; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Further researches using other analysis tools or quantitative approaches with a larger number of sample size also, seem to be required to ensure the reliability and validity of the empirical findings of this study. In the same vein, Sotiriadou et al. (2014) pointed out the weakness of NVivo 12 that using this software causes the researcher's subjective interpretation and mislead coding which means it can affect the validity and reliability of the data findings negatively.

Given that Mihalis Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) criticized that public's recognition to protect city branding from competitor cities is not yet matured nor developed surprisingly, practical endeavors to protect the city brand as an asset for example, by legitimating relate laws of copyright, seems to be necessary for the future. If it is applied to our study, it can be stated that city marketers of Helsingborg should be prepared to conserve key attributes of the city brand for defending exclusive rights to use them rather than just remaining to develop attributes and differentiate the city. This is laid in the same line of the opinion of Chapleo (2011) that practitioners empathized in common the necessity of long-term branding strategy rather than simply short-term commercial approach or marketing tricks. Researches on the assessment tools measuring this city brand's efficiency also have to be further developed in future studies. Chapleo (2011) also pointed out that the result and effectiveness are not clearly

visible and expensive to measure although most marketers agreed branding works are necessary.

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Appendix 1: Focus Group Guide

Thank you for participating in brainwriting focus group. The aim of this interview is to examine experience and perception of students who have lived/studied/traveled/worked in Helsingborg, Sweden.

1 **Demographic Data** (your personal information will be kept in anonymous ways and only used for the purpose of this research)

- Name:
- Age:
- Educational Level:
- How many years have you lived/studied/traveled/worked (please circle among those) in Helsingborg?

2 **Please write down freely whatever popping up in your mind when you remind your experience in Helsingborg**. It might be keywords or short sentences indicating values, experiences, pros & cons about Helsingborg. Please write **at least 15 keywords** and add the reasons **with 1~2 sentences each**. (Note: Pease write them silently, no discussion is allowed during this stage)

Ex) (Museum)
: I can access to lots of cultural events and exhibitions, art museums and galleries such as Dunker House.

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3   Discussion Session: Participants explain about their thoughts and the researcher lists up all ideas in the whiteboard categorizing some of them and gives questions for clarifying meaning of words or sentences.

4   Voting Session: Among those ideas listed in the whiteboard, please **select 10** that you find **the most important** and **rank** them. Pease write them silently. No discussion is allowed during this stage.

 (Note: number 1 is for the most important while 10 is for the less important)

```
1  (            ) – Most Important
2  (            )
3  (            )
4  (            )
5  (            )
6  (            )
7  (            )
8  (            )
9  (            )
10 (            ) – Less Important
```

5   The researcher ranks the highest ten ideas and shows them to participants.

6   Discussion Session: Participants explain about their thoughts and reflect themselves. The researcher gives questions for example,

 Why do you think #1 (or other high-ranked values) is the most important for you than anything else?

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Appendix 2: The Consent Form of Focus Group Interview

CONSENT FORM – FOCUS GROUP

Topic: Students' perception and experience in Helsingborg

Researcher: Hyunah Kim

Master Student, Service Management
Lund University, Campus Helsingborg

I .... hereby confirm that I agree to join this study voluntarily as a participant and I am allowed to withdraw this at any time.

I agree that every conversation is audio-recorded, transcribed and noted. Also, I agree that my answers to questions can be quoted in this thesis and all information can be gathered and used for research purpose.

I do understand that all information that I discussed here will be kept confidentially and my identity will also remain anonymous.

By signing the consent form, I agree to participate in this study.

Date _____

Signature _____

Appendix 3: Word Cloud Developed by NVivo12

Figure 1. Word Cloud developed by NVivo12.
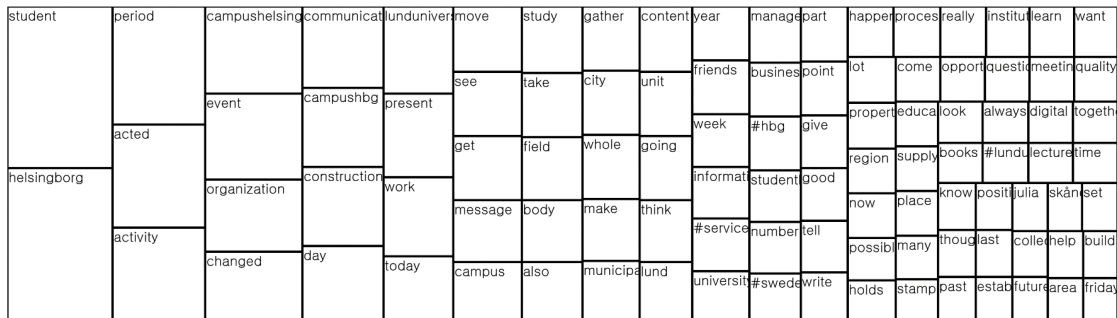
Appendix 4: Tree Map Developed by NVivo12

Figure 2. Tree Map developed by NVivo12.

Appendix 5: List of Table

Keywords	Frequency	Similar Words
acted	2212	Acted, activity, assist, attention, campaign, career, class, collaboration, contact, course, dance, education, employment, entertainment, exercise, essay, game, joke, leading, pause, plan, play, prepare, purchase, recreation recruitment, release, rest, run, support, visit, walk, work, writing
activity	2179	Activities, art, assignment, association, bathing, boring, bowling, business, busy, celebration, crime, dancing, entertainment, essay, examination, exercise, festival, fun, game, gather, graduation, hangover, internship, job, joke, labor, laughter, listening, look, music, project, photography, picnic, play, research, running, seminar, service, show, singing, song, support, test, trade, training, transport, walk, work, workshop
changed	2025	Become, beginning, boost, break, build, changed, combine, commuting, connection, culture, development, difference, exchange, expand, experience, gray, grow, institution, integrate, market, organization, socialize, start, stay, transformed, transport, travel, visit, walk, water, weather
event	1625	Event, agency, association, bar, business, ceremony, collaboration, competition, cooperation, course, education, election employment, exchange, exercise, event, fun, game, government, interaction, involvement, job, management, market, meeting, mingling, motivation, music, operation, organization, pause, play, practice, production, purchase, recreation, release, service, trade, training,
move	1478	Approach, assist, begin, boost, break, bus, center, check, close, coming, communicate, company, conduct, connect, control, create, dance, develop, engage, ferry, hiking, invite, joint, journey, leave, manage, participate, play, race, running, saw, see, sell, socialize, train, transport, travel, traveling, trip, try, venture, walk, walking, work
communicatio	1398	Communication, nation, advise, apply, ask, author, begin, blog, book, call, channel, chat, communicators,

n		communities, community, contact, debate, describe, discuss, email, explain, guest, hamlet, interview, introduce, invite, hoke, learn, lecture, London, mentor, message, network, phone, question, quiz, read, singer, smile, sound, speak, stage, talk, tell, theater, traffic, train, voice
period	1194	Advent, afternoon, annual, April, august, autumn, Christmas, daily, dark, date, day, December, eve, evening, fall, February, festival, Halloween, holiday, hours, January, July, June, life, march, maturity, may, minutes, moment, month, morning, night, November, October, past, period, phase, quarter, season, semester, September, spring, summer, term, time, vacation, week, weekend, winter, wintertime, year, years
organization	1190	Engineer, organization, academy, adult, agency, arranged, association, band, business, choir, church, class, club, college, combination, committee, community, company, conference, corporate, country, ensemble, establishment, family, female, firm, form, foundation, friendly, game, governance, government, heart, home, hospital, house, industry, institution, land, law, male, management, member, nation, office, organization, palace, person, plan, school, service, society, staff, structure, system, team, trust, union, unit, university
construction	1155	Academy, accommodation, apartment, architecture, area, arena, attraction, balcony, bar, bathroom, brewery, bridge, building, café, cafeteria, camp, castle, center, church, cinema, circus, club, college, construction, courtyard, establishment, floor, fortress, hall, harbor, home, hospital, hotel, housing, institution, kitchen, library, marina, mill, office, park, pub, refuge, restaurant, room, school, spa, toilet, unit, university, villa, ways
work	1108	Study, studies, studying, work, assignment, bathing, break, busy, care, collaborate, drive, employment, examination, exercise, help, intern, job, lab, labor, make, operation, picnic, play, research, run, serve, service, solve, survey, tell, work, workout, workplace, works, workshop

Table 2. Most Frequently Addressed Top 10 Keywords in Instagram

FG1	D1: M26	D2: M23	D3: M24	D4: M21	D5: F31	D6: F30
Factor1	Port	Nightlife	Restaurant	Decent city size	University	Ceramic factory
Factor2	Campus	Museum	Nature	Ocean	Labor market	Fredriksdal
Factor3	Conection	Sports	Diversity in people	Family	Library	Beach
Factor4	Denmark	Summer activities	Education	Metopolis	Public transport	Harbour
Factor5	Park	Student life	Malls/Shopping	Expanding	Park/public space	Dunker house
Factor6	Karnan	Transport	People		Shopping	Vala center
Factor7	Road	Living	Sports		Restaurant/cafes	Campus HB
Factor8	Logistics	Job	Infrastructure		Amusement/ Entertainment	Market place in Gustav adolf
Factor9	HIF	Crime	Culture			Many immigrants
Factor10	Growth		Respect			Old and bad transportation
Factor11	Theater		Jobs			
Factor12	Consert house		Security			
Factor13	Olympia					
Factor14	Groninger					
Factor15	Springtime					

Table 4. Helsingborg City Brand Images Factors Listed by Domestic Students Focus Group (FG1).

FG2	D1: F48	D2: M28	D3: M27	D4: M32	D5: M25	D6: M30
Factor1	Peaceful	Calm	Campus	Råå	Transport	Pokemon Community
Factor2	Quality of environment	Developing	Helsingborgen	Marina	Food	Multicultural
Factor3	Vehicle traffic	Well connected	Gröningen	Forsea	Café	Boring
Factor4	Inadequate bus runs	Chill	Sofiero	Tura	Safety	Easy access to Denmark
Factor5	Expensive living	Good location	Söder	Gröningen	Weather	No convenience place to study
Factor6	Housing shortage	Multicultural	Scandlines	Helsingborgen	Shops	Free wifi
Factor7	Cultural/Entertaining events	Plain	Olympia	Söder	Parks	Gloomy weather
Factor8	Library	Expensive	Shops	Stress	International	Nice beach
Factor9	Restaurants	Tolerant	Restaurants	Connection	Cleanness	Somebody hit me
Factor10	SFI	Boring	Public transport	Fika	Public service	Santa Lucia at Karnan stairs
Factor11	Multicultural	Campus HBG	Nightlife	Kärnan	Lagom	Road construction
Factor12	Polite people	Ferry	Sauna	Sofiero	Travel attraction	
Factor13	Beachside	Road construction	Sport facilities	Bakhaus	Friendlyness	
Factor14	Jobs	Arab	Knutpunkten	Knutpunkten	School	

Factor15	Public square	Pixlapiren	Junkies	Exhibition/activities

Table 5. Helsingborg City Brand Images Factors Listed by International Students Focus Group (FG2).

	FG1	FG2
No.1	Tourist Attraction (**Activities & Facilities**, 8 words)	Transport (**Accessibility**, 13 words)
No.2	Cultural events/Shopping/ Café/ Restaurant/night life (**Activities & Facilities**, 7 words)	Cultural events/Shopping/Café/ Restaurant/night life (**Activities & Facilities**, 11 words)
No.3	Campus/Education (**Activities & Facilities**, 6 words)	Campus/Education (**Activities & Facilities**, 6 words)
No.4	Transport/Connection (**Accessibility**, 6 words)	Multicultral/international (**Brand & Reputation**, 5 words)
No.5	Nature (**Physical environment**, 4 words)	Söder/Safety (**Brand & Reputation**, 5 words)
No.6	Infrastructure (**Accessibility**, 3 words)	Peaceful/Tolerant/Lagom/Balance (**Brand & Reputation**, 4 words)
No.7	Safety/Crime (**Brand & Reputation**, 3 words)	Nature/Weather (**Physical environment**, 4 words)
No.8	Jobs/Labor market (**Economy**, 3 words)	Boring/Plain (**Brand & Reputation**, 3 words)
No.9	Diversity/immigrants (**Brand & Reputation**, 3 words)	Tourist Attraction (**Activities & Facilities**, 1 words)
No.10	Respect/People (**People**, 2 words)	Jobs (**Economy**, 1 words)

Table 6. Helsingborg City Brand Images Factors Ranked by Both FG1 and FG2.