



SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

Sports Clubs' Role in City Branding *- What do they actually do?*

BY

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Abstract

In today's city branding field, a gap exists between research and practice. A gap made more evident since the field has moved to prefer a participative approach, where stakeholders are more acknowledged as an important part of the city branding process, illustrating the little knowledge of stakeholders' own practices. This study undertakes a mission of moving forward in the research field by shedding light on how stakeholders take an active part in city branding, with a focus on the brand creation process. In the study, sports clubs were chosen to be studied from a stakeholder perspective. To study sports clubs' role in city branding a framework on the best available knowledge was developed. The framework was then used to discern practices and motives by sports clubs through semi-structured interviews. Previous research suggested four components to be suitable for a framework, from this study the components were supported, but improvements were also identified. As a result, three motives and six practices were identified for why and how sports clubs partake in city branding. The insights generated in this study contribute to moving the research field forward and practical implications for how sports clubs can work with city branding and what motivates them to do so.

Keywords: City branding, Participative approach, Stakeholders, Brand Creation, Sports Clubs

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

As late as 1990 Dubai was nothing more than a few paved roads with seemingly misplaced buildings in the middle of the desert. Fast forward 30 years and Dubai is today synonymous with extreme luxury. Beginning in the 1970s, Dubai started to make expansions based on a city brand of luxury. For instance, in line with the city brand, they decided to diversify its economy from gas and oil to finance, information technology, and real estate. Through successful city branding the city of Dubai is today one of the wealthiest cities on earth, that attracts extreme wealth from all over the world, whether it is from tourism, innovation or property. City branding can thus be an important tool for a city, and its brand, to be revived or improved. Benefiting both residents, businesses, and tourism. Dubai's city brand is today known for being innovative, luxurious and forward-thinking, representing a city that is constantly evolving and pushing boundaries (Winkler, 2018).

A city brand is something that is owned, created, and managed by multiple groups that have a stake in a city. The brand is very complex due to the diverse interests that shape it, which makes it very different from other types of brands (Green, Grace & Perkins, 2016). Working actively with a city brand is the act of city branding. It is an increasingly popular practice in European cities (Braun, 2012), which can be traced back to the popularity of corporate branding (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). In more practical terms, city branding is the management and communication of a brand image for a city (Kavaratzis, 2004), through brand identity and brand positioning. This decides how the brand should be perceived and how you communicate the value to the right groups (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). A well-managed brand can “promote and reinforce a city's unique image in the minds of present and/or potential stakeholders such as residents, tourists, merchants and businesses” (Gilboa & Jaffe, 2021, p.1). However, the statement that a single brand image can do this is questioned since there is such a diverse set of stakeholders (Zenker & Braun, 2017; Gilboa & Jaffe, 2021).

It has been argued that stakeholders should be viewed as active cooperating participants in the marketing and branding of a city (Kavaratzis, 2012; Rainisto, 2003; Braun, Kavaratzis & Zenker,

2013; Warnaby & Medway, 2013). As both the city and its stakeholders can benefit from working together in creating a positive city image, creating a mutually beneficial situation (Rainisto, 2003), it gives support for why stakeholders would want to be active in the process of city branding. Green, Grace and Perkins (2016) argue that there is a need to engage multiple stakeholders, which proves difficult when they have inevitable differences. Furthermore, they also discuss how there is a disconnect between research and practice, for instance, how city brand management can implement inclusive participatory and collaborative approaches. Hospers (2019) also notes how there exists a gap between the research and the practice of city branding. Supporting that there exists a need for further research on how city branding is actually practised.

One of the most essential stakeholder groups in city branding is identified as the residents, as a city's residents are diverse it becomes difficult creating one city brand that all can identify with (Gilboa & Jaffe, 2021). Illustrating that even within stakeholder groups differences exist and go in different directions in experiencing a city brand. Gilboa and Jaffe (2021) contend that a city's residents can be segmented based on different needs and characteristics, and thus different city branding efforts should be shaped by these segmentations. One such segmentation is proposed as sports activities. Sports clubs have the ability to meet residents, within their segmentation, in a manner the city is unable to. Additionally, a sports club can also attract tourists, investments, and new businesses to a city (Hautbois, 2016).

For a city brand, sports organisations are suggested to be an asset, as well as impactful in the branding process (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2014). Taking it a step further, Hautbois (2016) argues that a sports club should be used in city branding. For branding initiatives by the city, it is important to have stakeholder approval when building the brand (Kemp, Childers & Williams, 2012). All considered, it can be deduced that sports clubs should be invited to state their opinion of the city brand that is to be developed. However, Henninger, Foster, Alevizou and Frohlich (2016) found that sports clubs had more of a passive part in the city branding process. Nevertheless, their study did not study professional sports clubs, which implies that the engagement a sports club, as a stakeholder, can have in city branding is affected by their status and success.

1.2 Problem Statement

Based on the literature presented, there is a need to breach the gap between research and practice, and a participative approach should be the basis of this quest considering the current argumentation for engaging stakeholders. The literature argues for stakeholders' active collaboration in creating and managing brands (Kavaratzis, 2012; Braun, Kavaratzis & Zenker, 2013; Warnaby & Medway, 2013) and how they will benefit from being a part of it (Rainisto, 2003). Continuing, as there is a disconnect between research and practice, research does not bring up how stakeholders actively can participate in city branding. In other words, stakeholders' actual practices that shape and create the city brand are not made known. By not knowing how practitioners actually practise city branding, it becomes difficult to move forward in the research field. Thus, studying how and why city branding is being practised by practitioners is the first step in moving forward in the research field.

Difficulties with having multiple stakeholders that are implored to be included in city branding (Green, Grace & Perkins, 2016) might lead to challenges in determining practices and benefits. Thus, looking at a smaller sample of stakeholders could open up for finding utilised practises by stakeholder practitioners, as well as understanding the underlying motivation for partaking in these practices. Building on top of the idea that sports clubs in city branding have a unique position to meet segments of stakeholder groups, they appear as an interesting and worthwhile study subject, to begin with in studying how and why city branding is practised.

As presented, based on the literature, it is suggested that the popularity of the sport and the level of professionalism might impact the importance of the club for city branding. Thus, popular sports and professional sports clubs are implied to be more influential within the stakeholder group of sports clubs. And thus, this particular group within the stakeholder group might have more experience and resources to partake in co-branding the city.

In the late 2000s, Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008) called for the expansion of the field of city branding to be expanded beyond the use of just tourism development. On a similar note, Gertner (2011b) also noted the fragmentation in the research field of city branding and thus argued for the need to move forward and develop frameworks. Following, and considering the disconnect in the field, taking the first step of describing a stakeholder's own experience of being a practitioner

in city branding is duly needed. Following this line of thought, this study calls for a further look at the sports clubs' perspective of their role in city branding and the need for a framework to accomplish this. This study will contribute to the field by adding to a mostly unexplored perspective, and hopefully shed insight on how a stakeholder can take an active role in city branding. To look at sports clubs as an active party in city branding, the focus will be on the brand creation process of city branding.

1.3 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to develop a framework for the brand creation process of city branding and use it to describe and analyse city branding practices by professional sports clubs. The purpose can be divided into three sub-purposes:

- Describe city branding practises a professional sports club can do.
- Develop a framework that encompasses city branding practices, from the perspective of the brand creation process.
- Analyse motives for why professional sports clubs practise city branding.

The research questions that the study aims to answer are:

1. What motives do professional sports clubs perceive from practising city branding?
2. What city branding practices do professional sports clubs do?
3. What are suitable components of a framework for city branding practices, with a focus on the brand creation process?

1.4 Disposition of Thesis

This paper has started with an introductory chapter that offers a brief view of the background as well as an explanation of the need for the paper. Following is Chapter 2, which presents the literature review of the best available knowledge. Chapter 2 explains city branding more in-depth, by discussing city branding's history and the current approach that is in trend. The literature chapter also discusses the intersection of city branding and sports clubs, reviewing studies that have been conducted in this particular area. Lastly, a framework is developed based on the literature reviewed.

Chapter 3 presents the study's research methodology, explaining how the research was designed and conducted through an interview study to answer the research questions. In the same chapter, this study's limitations and reflections are presented. In Chapter 4 findings from the interview study are presented, structured after the framework built in Chapter 2. Afterwards, in Chapter 5 the findings are analysed in relation to the research questions and the literature review.

Lastly, an attempt is made to answer the study's purpose along with its sub-purposes in chapter 6, the conclusion. In this chapter implications, the study's trustworthiness, and future research are discussed.

1.6 Delimitations

This thesis will study city branding from a stakeholder perspective, focusing on professional sports clubs specifically as a stakeholder. Besides the reasonably unexplored field of sports clubs' perspective, professional sports clubs are an interesting stakeholder group since it involves both sports and corporate operations. Moreover, as this study aims to describe possible ways to work, rather than the right ways to work, the study uses a convenience sampling of a few sports clubs in the same region. This also implies a delimitation of the geographical scope, the scope is narrowed to the southernmost region in Sweden. Furthermore, the study will not look at all possible city branding practices, instead practises revolving around the brand creation process will be looked at based on the framework developed from the literature.

2 Literature Review

The literature presented in this chapter will be used to introduce city branding as a phenomenon and the approach of city branding adopted in this thesis. Further on, studies on city branding in relation to sports clubs will be presented in order to illustrate the current knowledge on the topic and the need for more research on it. Finally, a framework will be introduced based on concepts and models introduced, selected in regards to their connection to the brand creation process, this framework will be developed in pursuance of describing and analysing city branding practices.

2.1 Evolution of City Branding

City branding is within the field of place marketing, more specifically the branding of place is a distinctive, focused part of place marketing (Kavaratzis, 2007). Gertner (2011a) appeals that different types of places should not be marketed or branded in the same way. This suggests the need to be clear on what is being studied, for example, city, region, or nation. This study will focus on the study of cities, and not look at other locations such as nations or neighbourhoods. Still, research on place branding, place marketing, and city marketing will be reviewed together with city branding research, as city branding has been shaped by these concepts.

City marketing strategies, such as branding, have risen in popularity with increased globalisation, and most likely as a result of the increasing competitiveness of cities (Warnaby & Medway, 2013; Gilboa & Jaffe, 2021; Zenker & Braun, 2017; Hospers, 2004; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008). Green, Grace, and Perkins (2016) have in their review of city branding noted that city branding has in the twenty-first century moved from adapting mainstream branding methods, such as corporate branding. Cities are now arguing for needed distinctiveness in how city branding is applied to the need for participatory approaches and acknowledgement of multiple stakeholders such as businesses, residents and local government. Both Green, Grace, and Perkins (2016) and Kavaratzis (2012) argue that the nature of city branding demands a more participatory approach that involves stakeholders in the process of creating and managing city brands.

City branding is very complex due to the many forces shaping and influencing the city brand (Zenker & Braun, 2017). Merrilees, Miller and Herington's (2011) study provided evidence that multiple stakeholders have manifold city brand meanings and that the multiple meanings are an optimal state. Gilboa and Jaffe's (2021) study agreed that one city brand is not ideal. Furthermore, Merrilees, Miller and Herington's (2011) study acknowledges and considers that stakeholders can belong to multiple stakeholder groups, for instance, a resident can also be a business owner. Similarly, Zenker and Braun (2017) also acknowledged the overlap between targeted groups in the branding process. Thus, in city branding, there should still be a common meaning that is shared across stakeholders, as well as similar elements (Merrilees, Miller & Herington, 2011). Zenker and Braun (2017) suggested that there are different sub-brands that are communicated to different target groups, but then there is also an umbrella brand that unities the different sub-brands. Altogether, in city branding, the city brand is complex and formative, its meaning is different from person to person. Nonetheless, there should exist a clear common vision, for the stakeholders to still feel a sense of belonging to their city and for it to be able to convey a recognisable message.

In city branding internal stakeholders such as the residents, local businesses, and local government are essential for succeeding with the branding effort (Kemp, Childers & Williams, 2012). The local government is a stakeholder that clearly uses or works with a city brand, they also have the power to support or damage the brand through their responsibilities in the city (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2014). Zenker and Braun (2017) noted that city branding has risen in popularity as a strategy for local governments, at the same time they acknowledged the complexity of managing the process due to the diverse stakeholders involved in shaping the city brand. In relation to this, Sarabia-Sanchez and Cerda-Bertomeu (2018) mentioned that the leadership role in city branding can be performed either by the local government in a political project or by shared leadership with co-creators. Sarabia-Sanchez and Cerda-Bertomeu's (2018) study illustrated that in city branding there are different ways to interpret the local government's involvement in city branding. As it is suggested, the local government does not need to be the sole owner of the city branding process, at the same time, the local government does have the power to influence the city brand.

As mentioned, today's city branding is focused on stakeholders, and having them involved in co-branding the city. This makes the nature of city branding challenging since coordinating and achieving wide cooperation is not an easy task (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008). Furthermore, an issue is also who to invite as a stakeholder (Kavaratzis, 2007). Green, Grace, and Perkins (2016) appeal for an ethical participative approach, meaning working against socially excluding stakeholder groups in city branding. Still, even if all stakeholder groups are invited and involved some stakeholder groups will likely have more influence and resources. There is a need to consider whose interests are being served (Kavaratzis, 2007) to better be able to evaluate how participative the city branding actually is. Henninger, Foster, Alevizou, and Frohlich's (2016) study, found that stakeholders with more influence could be seen as involving stakeholders with less influence. The stakeholders with less influence would therefore have contact with one influential stakeholder that engaged them but would not be engaged by all influential stakeholders. Proposing that stakeholders with more influence could be a key part of achieving a more ethical city branding approach, through them engaging with less influential players.

To summarise, city branding in this study is perceived as an approach to building a city's image in order to make it appear attractive to residents, businesses, and tourism. It is a participative approach, which means it is dependent on multiple stakeholders in shaping and creating the city brand. At the same time, as there are multiple stakeholders there will be different outlooks on what the city brand is and signifies. Therefore, ideally, in a city with successful city branding, there would be an umbrella city brand, encompassing sub-brands shaped by its different stakeholders. A city could for instance have a great tourism brand and also have an appealing business environment and resident image creating very attractive sub-brands within the city brand. As a city brand is a social construct, there is no way to circumvent the fact that multiple stakeholders will play a role in shaping how the brand is perceived. Highlighting the need for taking a participative approach in city branding to better handle the complexities of navigating a process influenced by multiple stakeholders.

2.2 Participative Approach in City Branding

Gertner (2011b) says it is time to start testing theories and models for the research field to develop as an academic discipline. However, as research is moving toward a focus on multiple

stakeholder involvement, what these different stakeholder groups actually can do needs to be explored. Otherwise, the theories and models developed are at risk to be one-dimensional, not rightfully taking into consideration the role the diverse set of stakeholder groups can play in co-branding. To study the practical role the stakeholder group sports clubs play in the co-branding of a city, this study builds on top of components presented by Hanna and Rowley (2011) and other previous research.

Hanna and Rowley (2011) established a conceptual model for strategic place brand management (see Figure 1) by using earlier research that aimed to provide a more holistic approach. The model was designed to support managers, but they also argue that the model can help stakeholders understand their role in the branding process. Whilst the model is not useful to answer the research questions proposed in this study, the components can be used to establish crucial parts of the branding process. Hanna and Rowley (2011) suggest that to gain more in-depth knowledge of city branding one could focus on a specific brand component in a cross-case comparison, which relates to this study's nature. Two components in the model revolve around the brand creation process, these are infrastructure and stakeholder engagement, because of this connection they are deemed vital (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). These two components will be studied in this study to help gain insight into how city branding is practised, as they are related to the brand creation process.

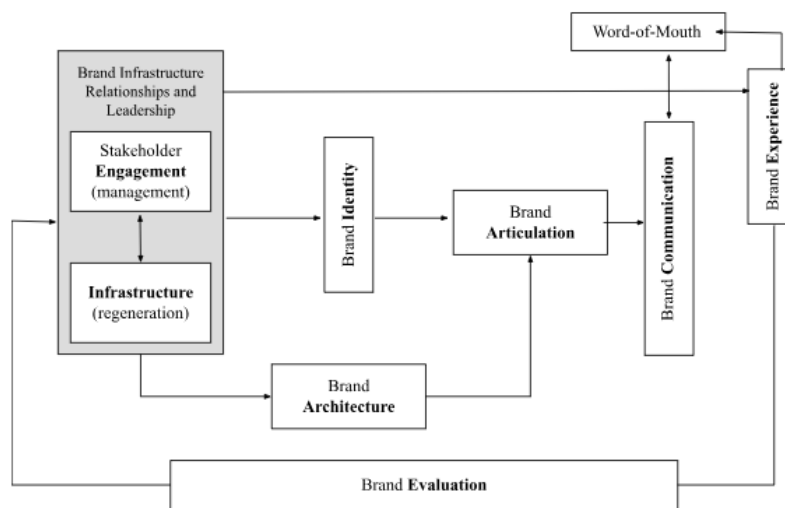


Figure 1 - The Strategic Place Brand-Management Model (Hanna & Rowley, 2011)

The seven components not chosen from the model are still important and might be touched upon in the study indirectly, as the components in the model are interrelated, which can be seen in Figure 1. The reason behind them not being studied lies in a limitation of resources and time, and not in them being irrelevant to the scope of this study. Rather, the components of infrastructure and stakeholder engagement have been chosen since they are so relevant to the city branding process in that they make up the arena where brand identity is constructed (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). To summarise, infrastructure and stakeholder engagement are a part of the brand creation process and thus are relevant components based on the study's purpose.

2.2.1 Infrastructure

The component of infrastructure is made up of tangible and intangible place attributes, which means that it involves the functional aspects of a place as well as the experiential. It is very dependent on financial investments and in the end, stakeholders, to have the ability to deliver the brand experience through improving and creating the place's characteristics (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Highlighting the relationship between infrastructure and stakeholder engagement. Hanna and Rowley (2011) discuss how infrastructure can involve improvement, through renovation or regeneration. But also how it can be about creating characteristics that can be utilised by a city. Taking into consideration how infrastructure is described by Hanna and Rowley (2011), this study will look at infrastructure from the outlook of it being about creating and improving functional and experiential place attributes.

Infrastructure is stated as one of the success factors in Rainisto's (2003) conceptual framework on place marketing, albeit he uses local development as the word for it. He describes a connection between local development and the need for economic resources, which aligns with Hanna and Rowley's (2011) assertion that financial investments are necessary for well-functioning infrastructure. In Rainisto's (2003) study it is noted that there is a decreasing trend in the financial resources that are allocated for city development, which in turn, impacts how local developments are navigated. Although the study was made 20 years ago, it should still ring true that the amount of financial resources will impact how the infrastructure is managed.

How to navigate a limited amount of financial resources was examined in Fjertorp, Mattisson and Thomasson's (2013) study. Their study about municipalities' development strategies

highlighted how the use of private stakeholders' resources can be procured through the shaping of vision, granted that the vision is within the stakeholder's interest and abilities. Fjertorp, Mattisson and Thomasson's (2013) study is not focused on city branding but gives suggestions relevant to city branding on how resources can be allocated by involving stakeholders. Involving vision in city branding is also supported by Kavaratzis (2009) in his review of city branding frameworks, where he noted vision as an important component in city branding. Furthermore, on vision, Hankinson's (2004) study determined that a shared vision by stakeholders is needed for successful branding, a study that Hanna and Rowley (2011) used to build their model.

To summarise, infrastructure is about creating and improving functional and experiential place attributes. At the same time, it involves managing resources and vision. It is also made clear that infrastructure goes hand in hand with working together with stakeholders. Not surprising then is that there is also noted a connection between stakeholder engagement and resources as well as vision. In that stakeholders can contribute with more resources and a shared vision can help allocate the resources. Figure 2 illustrates a visual representation of the interconnections between components.

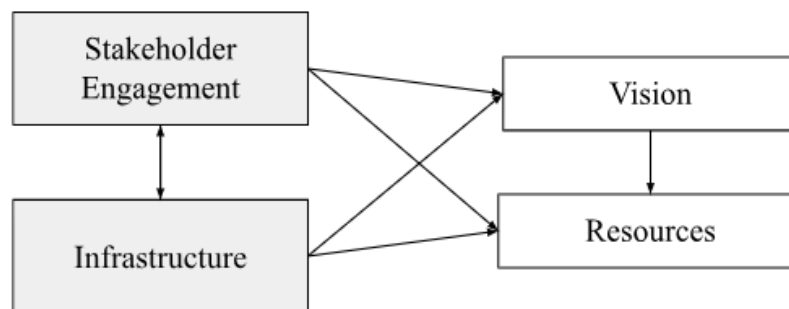


Figure 2 - Interrelationship between components

2.2.2 Stakeholder Engagement

The component of stakeholder engagement is described as a pivotal component in shaping place brand attributes (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). In other words, a city brand is created by the city's stakeholders. According to Hanna and Rowley (2011), the act of stakeholder engagement includes the actual process where stakeholders are identified and their interests are recognised, as

well as stakeholder interactions. Kavartzis (2009) in his framework on how to develop and manage city brands also includes stakeholders' engagement, however, from two components called local communities and synergies. When talking about synergies, balanced participation from a diverse set of stakeholders is described as an integral part. This relates to Green, Grace, and Perkins' (2016) point of involving stakeholders in city branding, in other words, not to exclude certain groups. The argument for inviting diverse stakeholders can be connected back to Hanna and Rowley's (2011) assertion that for support and deliverance of a city brand, stakeholders need to feel that they are a part of the creation of the city brand. Possibly a shared vision might provide stakeholders with a sense of partnership, as mentioned already Hankison (2004) argued that successful city branding is dependent on a shared vision by stakeholders.

Another framework that was developed in the field of tourism, is that of Gopalan and Narayan (2010) which focuses on stakeholder collaboration. Although it does not refer to stakeholder engagement, we argue that collaboration can be seen as a part of engagement since it is an act of stakeholder interaction. The idea that Gopalan and Narayan (2010) presents is that different stakeholders affect different environmental variables, that in turn affect customer experience. For instance, simplified, one stakeholder might affect a physical variable while another affects an experiential variable. Following it is implied that the use of a stakeholder forum for collaboration and allocating of resources can be helpful to improve the aligning and coordinating of the different variables stakeholders affect (Gopalan & Narayan, 2010).

In short, this study took Hanna and Rowley's (2011) component of stakeholder engagement and further developed it together with other frameworks and research that have looked at stakeholder engagement. When reviewing current research it is clear that there is a need to specify what the component stakeholder engagement will stand for in this study, as it has been viewed in multiple ways. Stakeholder engagement in this study will be considered as the active relationship between stakeholders, where they acknowledge each other and one's interests.

2.3 Sports Clubs and City Branding

The studying of city branding and sports is not a new phenomenon, still, it is a relatively unexplored field. Hautbois (2016) commented that the little research that has been done is surprising since many cities are recognised for the professional clubs located in their city. When

conducting a review of research that incorporates the perspective of sports and stakeholders in city branding, four studies that met the criteria were looked at. Not one of them ventured into how sports clubs as stakeholders in practical terms do city branding. In the following chapter, the studies will be analysed in relation to the components of infrastructure and stakeholder engagement. This way the study will look at the intersection between research on sports clubs and city branding, however, with a focused lens on the components of infrastructure and stakeholder engagement, as the study focuses on the brand creation process of city branding.

2.3.1 Infrastructure

Both Ahonen, Lämsä, Mero and Karimäki (2016) and Hautbois found professional sports clubs valuable in the branding process of a city. Meanwhile, Hemmonsby and Knott's (2016) study confirmed that sports, such as sports clubs, can act as a competitive differentiator for a city brand. But for a sports club to have a positive effect on the city branding media exposure has emerged as important for the branding process. It was indicated that the media needs to showcase the association the clubs have with its host city for the aforementioned positive benefits. Consequently, this suggests that a media presence is a strategy that both a city and a club can apply in city branding (Hautbois, 2016). In summary, sports clubs can beneficially be used in city branding strategies, but for this to take place showcasing the association between the city and sports clubs is important.

2.3.2 Stakeholder Engagement

Hemmonsby and Knott's (2016) study, with a basis in sports, implied that a strong collaboration between stakeholders and the activity of these stakeholders is essential for city branding to be efficient. Their study acknowledged the complexity of incorporating diverse stakeholders, but at the same time, it was argued to be a great advantage in city branding. Similarly, Ahonen, Lämsä, Mero and Karimäki's (2016) study signified that city branding by multiple stakeholders benefits from the stakeholders being diverse and representing different sub-brands. For example, a sports club could collaborate with an educational institution to attract students that play a sport, through the educational institution offering good education while the sports club offers a satisfactory arena to play. Looking back at Gopalan and Narayan's (2010) framework on stakeholder collaboration, it would be said that sports clubs affect different aspects of the environment in

comparison to other stakeholders. But by the sports club collaborating with other stakeholders, they can together coordinate their resources and sub-brands to benefit the umbrella city brand.

In contrast to Hemmonsby and Knott (2016) and Ahonen, Lämsä, Mero and Karimäki's (2016) findings that a participative city branding approach is suitable for involving sports clubs as stakeholders, Henninger, Foster, Alevizou, and Frohlich's (2016) study suggests that they have little impact in co-creating the city brand with other stakeholders. Instead, they are described as a more passive part of the city branding process that might make attempts to get involved. A reason behind the discrepancy might be due to the fact that the latter study did not study professional sports clubs. Inferring that the level of stakeholder engagement for a sports club might be stimulated by the level of success, in other words, being seen as a professional sports club. Meanwhile, Hautbois (2016) did look at professional sports clubs, but he did it with the outlook that they are objects to use in one's city branding strategy and not as stakeholders to actively take partnership in the process. Looking at professional sports clubs as objects suggests that there might be resistance to seeing sports clubs as a stakeholder to contribute to the city brand, which might also explain Henninger, Foster, Alevizou, and Frohlich's (2016) result.

To summarise, collaboration is very important when sports clubs practise city branding with other stakeholders, in order to coordinate resources and for the city brands. Studies have supported sports clubs as suitable stakeholders to involve, however, there is reason to believe this regards professional sports clubs and not all sports clubs.

2.4 Research Framework

Altogether, this study will consider the components of infrastructure and stakeholder engagement, taken from the strategic place brand-management model (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). These components compose the backbone of the proposed framework, seen in Figure 3 since they are an integral part of the brand creation process in city branding. The study will also consider the components of resources and vision, as they are both connected to infrastructure and stakeholder engagement. The four interconnected components make up the framework that will then be used as a focus lens in order to explore city branding practices through interviews. The four components can be viewed as collective nouns that group themes of practice together. The collective nouns for resources and vision can be seen as both collective nouns in themselves and

specific parts of infrastructure and stakeholder engagement. All things considered, the framework describes the general nature of city branding practices, based on theory. As there is a divide between research and practice, there is now a need to test the framework in relation to how it corresponds with practitioners of city branding.

Main Component	Description of Practise	Resources	Vision
Infrastructure	Creating and improving functional and experiential place attributes (Hanna & Rowley, 2011)	Financial resources is vital for managing the infrastructure (Rainisto, 2003)	Through use of vision one can procure resources to enable well-functioning infrastructure (Fjertorp, Mattisson and Thomasson, 2013)
Stakeholder Engagement	Engaging in an active relationship to stakeholders, where they acknowledge each other and one's interests (Hanna & Rowley, 2011)	Through stakeholders it is possible to procure resources (Fjertorp, Mattisson and Thomasson, 2013)	Stakeholders having a shared vision is important for the city branding to be successful (Hankinson, 2004)

Figure 3 - Framework

3 Research Methodology

This chapter will give insight into the methodology of the study and the overall approach used to explore the research questions and fulfil the research purpose. The methodology includes the research design, collection of literature, collection of empirical data, data analysis, and reflections on methodological choices.

3.1 Research Design

With the purpose to develop a framework for the brand creation process of city branding, and use it to describe and analyse practices by professional sports clubs, a challenge was that theory had not been developed from the stakeholders' perspective or in relation to practitioners of city branding. Developing a framework based solely on literature would therefore not have been sufficient in describing city branding practices, as the phenomenon demanded to be described through the experiences of practitioners. The nature of this study was not to do statistical analysis or find numerically comparable data between sports clubs. Instead, it was looking for subjective experiences from sports clubs' participants. According to Alvehus (2023), a qualitative study is more interested in meaning and implication rather than statistically verifiable connections. Based on this, a qualitative approach was best suited for answering this study's research questions. The study used semi-structured interviews as a method to collect data. The data collected was then used to evaluate the developed framework and explore possible improvements based on practitioners' experiences, as well as to determine city branding practices and motives by professional sports clubs.

Interviews were accepted as a satisfactory method to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of city branding through sports clubs. And as the nature of the study looked toward a phenomenon rather than comparing practices the interviews were held with sports clubs' representatives from a range of sports and sizes. By choosing to look at a range of sports clubs the study could generalise beyond one case or actor. To conclude, the interviews were not conducted to find optimal practices. Instead, the interviews were conducted to encompass multiple perspectives in order to develop a framework that can be used to describe and analyse city branding practices by professional sports clubs from different sports.

3.2 Collection of Literature

Literature on city branding was explored to better understand where the field is and how it has developed. Despite the field taking a favourable stance toward a participative approach, the existing theory within the field focuses mostly on the practices of city governments and how they can engage stakeholders, as stated in the literature review. In other words, there existed a need to explore the stakeholders' perspective in order to embrace the participative approach. Furthermore, city branding together with sports clubs was reviewed to determine how far the research has gathered, in regards to this point of view, and thus the starting point of this study. Additionally, the best available knowledge was used for the development of a framework. Therefore, it was especially important to fully understand and explore the existing knowledge.

Research on existing literature on city branding, and city branding together with sports clubs was obtained from using two main databases. The databases used were Google Scholar and LUBsearch, which is a shared resource through Lund University Libraries. To obtain relevant literature for the aim of the study keywords such as city marketing, city branding, place marketing, place branding, stakeholders, and sports clubs were used. The search process included a snowball effect where new keywords were identified from existing literature. Moreover, when finding literature that was deemed relevant to the study, an important step was to consider how reliable the material was. To do so, the authors considered peer-reviewed articles, the method used, and the connection between purpose and conclusion, as well as how reasonable the conclusion appeared.

3.3 Collection of Empirical Data

This study adopted interviews as a method to collect empirical data, in particular semi-structured interviews. This means that the interviews consisted of a few open-ended questions which were then complemented by follow-up questions. The questions were defined based on the framework developed using existing literature. Using semi-structured interviews allowed us, the interviewers, to guide the discussion but also for participants to bring their own perspectives on the questions and give nuanced answers. It also added an inductive element to the study opening up for topics relevant to the study that have not been included in the framework. Which was important in order to determine suitable components for the framework. Lastly, the interviews

were between 40 and 75 minutes long and recorded over Zoom with the participants' approval. Holding the interviews over Zoom implied the risk of technical issues, for some interviews, there was a need to ask for the answers again due to disturbance. On the other hand, holding interviews over Zoom allowed for interviews with sports clubs from further distances than were practical to travel.

According to Alvehus (2023), interviews are considered the flagship of qualitative studies and are a great way to find out how people think, feel, and act. Meanwhile, a questionnaire would not have the same ability to explore the thoughts, subjective actions, and practises of the sports clubs in-depth as an interview would, therefore this was not chosen. A focus group, on the other hand, with all participants discussing the questions concurrently was discussed as a potential additional method to collect data. However, it was deemed too impractical to schedule and the authors reasoned that using a focus group could lead to a focus on shared experiences rather than subjective experiences. The study aimed to gain a broader understanding of the phenomenon and therefore considered subjective experiences important to gain a multi-layered perspective.

The interview guide (see Appendix A) was made to be followed in a flexible manner. The questions were asked in Swedish and structured in a way that individuals without previous knowledge of the term city branding could still describe the phenomenon. The guide was divided into an introduction and four categories of questions. The introduction focused on gathering general information about the participant and their role in the organisation. By doing so, answers could be better put in the context of the participant's perspective, for instance, understanding what they work with. After establishing a portrayal of the participant, questions on general information about the club such as size, age and history followed, again to provide context for coming answers.

The four categories were based on the four components established in the developed literature framework. The questions for the categories aimed to give insight into practices and motives and the answers could also be used to analyse the framework and determine possible improvements on the framework. Also, at the end of every interview, the participants were asked if there was anything they would like to develop upon or add. By doing this the authors opened up for topics

that might be deemed important by the participants but missing from the framework. The interviews therefore were able to collect data on practices, and motives, as well as generate data that could be used to examine the framework that was to be developed. In other words, the data was adequate to answer the research questions.

3.3.1 Sampling and Selection

The sports organisations chosen to participate in the study fulfilled certain criteria, meaning there was an initial strategic selection. They were all clubs with a professional elite team in either men's or women's sport, or both, playing in a national division. The reason for looking at professional sports clubs was based on the literature reviewed. Swedish sports clubs were contacted mainly in the region of Skåne. This study looked at three out of the four largest team sports in Sweden, ranked by active members (idrottsstatistik.se, 2021a), football, ice hockey, and handball. There was a conscious choice to include both larger and smaller sports clubs ranging from one or two full-time employees (Höör H65) to 60 full-time employees (Malmö FF). The same applied to cities where sports clubs originate from cities with 10 000 people (Höör) to more than 300 000 (Malmö). By choosing three sports the selection become more heterogeneous, providing broader and more nuanced insights into the phenomenon (Alvehus, 2023).

Emails were sent to representatives of 12 sports clubs asking if they were interested in participating in a study of sports clubs and their cities. In an ideal world, all contacted organisations would participate. In reality, more handball clubs participated than football and ice hockey clubs, creating an imbalance in the selection process. In total 6 sports clubs were interviewed, whereas for one of the sports clubs (Malmö FF), two representatives participated in separate interviews. Interviewing two representatives from the same sports club was a decision based on opportunity. Moreover, the representative for each sports club was a person with close relations to outside stakeholders, for instance, a board member, marketing director, or business director. Lastly, the sample size of 6 sports clubs was deemed large enough to answer the research questions and fulfil the purpose of the study. Since it included three different sports from four different cities of varied characteristics, and could therefore offer a diverse set of participants to describe the phenomenon.

The opportunity also arose to interview a representative from Malmö city’s marketing and attraction department. Including a city representative in the study was not a part of the original research method or design, however, it was deemed to bring a valuable perspective to counter the viewpoints of the sports clubs. The answers from a city representative could either confirm or question the data gathered from sports clubs and perhaps add previously overlooked areas of city branding.

Participants	Participant’s role	Elite sports	City	Size of city	City Characteristics
Malmö FF (1)	Marketing	Football (M)	Malmö	360 000	Multicultural city
Malmö FF (2)	CSR	Football (M)			
FC Rosengård	General management	Football (W)			
Malmö Redhawks	CSR	Ice Hockey (M)			
Malmö city	Branding	No sport			
Ystad IF	General management	Handball (M)	Ystad	30 000	Tourist city
LUGI	Board Role	Handball (M/W)	Lund	130 000	University city
Höör H65	Development	Handball (W)	Höör	10 000	Commuter city

3.4 Data Analysis

The first step in the data analysis was to transcribe the recordings. According to Bailey (2008) transcribing inevitably leads to a reduction of information. This was the first step in the reduction of the material gathered and set the foundation for how much information was available for interpretation in the later stages. The transcribing was made using the free AI software Descript and Scriptme. Today there are several AI tools available for transcribing recordings but they might miss intonation and nonverbal features such as body language. This study looked mostly at verbal communication but notes were also taken by hand to catch any emphasis or out-of-the-ordinary nonverbal communication. The AI transcripts needed varying degrees of human correction, depending on the quality of recording and software used, to become readable.

This study structured its analysis based on the work of Alvehus (2023) and Lacey and Luff (2009). Alvehus (2023) describes the interpretation of qualitative data by the researchers as an unpacking of the empirical material. The unpacking is the first step in the analysis process of sorting, reducing, and argumenting. According to Lacey and Luff (2009), qualitative data goes through organisation and indexing or coding of data for retrieval and identification before anonymising if there is any sensitive data. This is followed by the identification of themes and then the development of categories. The categories and themes are then structured based on how they relate to the research questions.

Following these recommendations on qualitative data analysis, a spreadsheet was used to sort answers from each interview. It was structured with each of the framework components in a column. The interpreted and summarised answers to the questions were put into the corresponding column together with any additional information such as background information or motivation. When all interviews were structured this way they were then themed by each framework component. Answers from every sports club were categorised into either stakeholder engagement, infrastructure, resources, or vision. This allowed for a side-by-side comparison of all sports clubs in each category, meaning that stakeholder engagement, infrastructure, resources, and vision had a spreadsheet each where answers from all sports clubs were structured in one column per club.

The next step was a more detailed division of the answers. What was deemed as the most important themes were used as headlines to further categorise the answers in a text document. The answers were again interpreted and summarised to fit each headline. The result of this was a document of the practises and motivations for each club listing how they work with each headline and why. When reading the list of practises and motivations it was possible to interpret themes which are presented in the findings section.

According to Lacey and Luff (2009), the theoretical knowledge and the researcher's understanding of the subject are of great importance in this stage since the thematization is interpreted individually. With more than one researcher it is possible to discuss similarities and

differences in the interpretation. When reducing the material the selection of presented material the reduction is driven by the research question and the purpose of the study. Some themes are described in more general terms and others more interesting to the research questions are described in more detail. Seers (2011) states that qualitative data is rooted in the interaction between researcher and participant, this will be further discussed in the section reflecting on ensuring trustworthiness.

3.5 Reflection of Methodological Choices

3.5.1 Data Handling and Ethical Considerations

In this qualitative study, ethical considerations were addressed to make sure that the study was conducted in a responsible and ethically correct manner. According to Resnik (2020), ethical research considerations are important both for accountability for researchers as well as responsibility toward the participants. Participation in the study has been voluntary both from the organisation and the participant. The participants of the study have agreed to be recorded and have their information used in the study. Participants also have the right to read the thesis paper before publishing to withdraw certain quotes or statements. The participants have been notified about their rights and the use of interviews in writing (see Appendix B). After the publication of this study, the recorded material will be deleted. No private information about the participants was collected and the recordings and transcripts will not be shared with anyone outside of the research duo.

3.5.2 Ensuring Trustworthiness

First and foremost it must be clearly stated what this study aims to contribute to the research field to know that it has answered the questions set at the beginning of the research. It must also be reliable, relevant and academically valid. The relevance of this study for the reader comes from the inspiration and insights into city branding practices sports clubs can do, and to understand the motives behind doing so. This can be useful for sports clubs and others working with city branding, in exploring the potential for exercising city branding. The framework will be a tool for future researchers in describing and analysing city branding practices in terms of the brand creation process.

The reliability of the study should be discussed from the empirical data. By looking at the subjective answers from the sports clubs themselves there can be an element of interpretation and bias from the researchers as well as from the sports clubs that the reader will have to take into consideration. According to Grimm (2010), there exists a social desirability bias in research where participants choose answers that are considered socially desirable over less desirable answers. This is especially true when collecting data through interviews where the respondent is identifiable. In this study, the names of the participants are not revealed, however, the sports clubs' names still are. Therefore, there is a need to recognise that participants could exaggerate the benefits and impacts of their practices to improve the image of the club. Likewise, negative and non-desirable results or practices would be excluded to avoid negative exposure. Furthermore, in this study demand effects should be considered. Demand effects are existent when the participants want to please the researchers by trying to guess the answers the researchers want to hear and therefore state something that is not true (Grimm, 2010). This can be mitigated and Grimm (2010) states that a careful design of interview questions which avoids leading questions is preferable. Therefore, to combat this bias this study has designed the questions to be open-ended to not lead the participants to a certain conclusion or answer. Still, as the study used semi-structured interviews the researchers can possibly have shown the participants clues for interest when asking follow-up questions.

The reliability of this study can be considered high in the sense that there was no chance, luck or particular circumstances that influenced participants' answers as could be the case of observations. There is a good chance the participants will answer similarly to the same questions again. However, the exact replicability is low due to the fact that the participants will most likely not answer the questions exactly the same way again. The validity of the study can be discussed from three different criteria (Alvehus, 2023). The first criterion is good research practice, this study has been based on methodic work with data collection and analysis, by continuously reviewing analysis and collected data the validity of the reasoning increases. The communicative validity is ensured by the response from the research society at Lund University School of Economics and Management (LUSEM). The study's relevance and reliability will be questioned and examined by peers and supervisors. The pragmatic validity of the study refers to if the

knowledge becomes available to affect society and for whom it is relevant. Most of the participants in the study have asked to have the report sent to them when finished, which is a strong argument that there is an interest from the participants and their organisations to use the knowledge to affect their practises in the future.

3.5.3 Limitations and Reflections of the Study

Limitations of the study included but are not limited to time, and resources. The study is conducted from Lund, Sweden but with the help of online communication, it is possible to contact organisations outside the area to which it is reasonable to travel. As previously mentioned there exists an imbalance in the number of participants from each sport. More handball clubs participated in this study than ice hockey or football clubs, which are both larger sports in Sweden when comparing league turnover and numbers of members (idrottsstatistik.se, 2021b). With better connections into the organisations and a longer time span to collect more interviews and analyse these, this imbalance could have been avoided. There are several AI tools existing today that immediately convert recordings to text, they are, however, not free to use. With no money for this service, the free software had to be used, taking a lot more time to transcribe each interview. This time could instead have been used for more interviews.

This study was designed to focus solely on the perspectives of sports clubs, as it had not been done before, and to lift the voice of stakeholders in the form of sports clubs. Still, the study ventured into other perspectives, but mostly through the medium of sports clubs. For instance, when discussing stakeholder engagement, the study only took into account one perspective of a relationship. A relationship that was not one-sided. Based on the one-sided perspective it is important for the reader to understand that the study is grounded in the perceptions of sports clubs' representatives, with one exception of one city government representative. The accounts of the relationships between stakeholders thus illustrate the sports clubs' experience of the relationship and can give a new frame of reference for how the sports clubs see themselves working with stakeholders. Still, it is important to acknowledge that the study does not establish how other stakeholders, besides the city government representative, view their relationship with sports clubs.

When assessing this study it is essential to revisit who the authors are, their point of view and motives for doing the research. The study is conducted as a master's thesis, with a connection to management. The authors, therefore, have a personal inclination to consider city branding in management terms, for example, how actors can use city branding to elevate a city brand. At the same time, sports is a common interest the authors share, which is a reason for the authors conducting a study that looks at sports clubs in connection to city branding. Considering this shared interest it must be said that the authors conducted the study with a positive opinion of sports clubs. The authors were aware of the interest, therefore, during the process they considered how their actions might be affected in order to diminish possible effects. Still, it is unavoidable that the interpretations of the material will be made. Consequently, the authors encourage the reader to think critically when reading the coming chapter, since it is material that incorporates interpretations made by the authors.

4 Findings

4.1 City Brand

In order to understand the motives the sports clubs perceive from city branding, the sports clubs were asked to reflect on the importance of an attractive city brand. The result showed that the sports clubs saw benefits with their host city being perceived as an attractive place to live, visit and work in. Ystad IF and Malmö FF both brought up tourism as a reason, relating to them playing internationally and having international teams coming to play. When they have home games it is beneficial if the away team's supporters come to the game, the city brand can elevate the chance for this. Höör H65 and Malmö Redhawks mentioned that more residents settling in the city is valuable since there then exist more people that might become active in the club. They also mentioned, similarly to Ystad IF and LUGI, that an attractive city brand can be advantageous in the recruitment process for players, both elite players and children. For instance, LUGI argued that they can attract players with other offers than money since Lund is an attractive university town. Moreover, Malmö FF maintained that the city brand also attracts businesses that then can be recruited to their network, which they deemed important. As one Malmö FF representative said: *“It has a great effect that Malmö in itself has a good reputation”* (*“Det har en stor påverkan att Malmö i sig själv har ett gott rykte”*).

When interviewing a representative from Malmö city the representative had noted that because of the reputation of the city, a sports club had trouble recruiting an international player. The city brand did not convey safety to this particular stakeholder's parents (potential international residents), hindering the sports club from successfully recruiting a new athlete. At the same time, through surveys, the city had found that residents feel safe living there. Illustrating that city brands can differ between different stakeholder groups, and thus the need to manage the brand in regard to different stakeholder groups. The interview with the representative from the city government mirrors the sentiment within the sports clubs about how the city brand can affect the work of the sports clubs.

4.2 Theme 1 - Infrastructure

The sports clubs interviewed in this study all provide the city and its residents with sports events, such as home games. These games offer residents a place to go and be part of a community as well as entertainment. All of the sports clubs interviewed also run their own sub-division for children and young adults, offering the young generation an arena to socialise, activate, and learn. As a result, they act as a place parents can leave their children and feel secure that they are being cared for. From talking with a representative from Malmö city it was conveyed that they believe the association life (in Swedish, “föreningsliv”) to be important since it gives children and youth a place of belonging, but also because it helps diminish the risk of them being recruited to criminal networks. As the representative put it, “*The time spent doing shit must be replaced with something else*” (“*Tiden de lägger på att göra skit måste ersättas med med något annat*”). Furthermore, a rich association life was also deemed important to attract visitors, new residents, and businesses, since it helps create a liveable city. Implying that from a city government perspective, the sports clubs are valued stakeholders.

Besides the pure sports operation and its effect on the city’s infrastructure, all sports clubs partake in projects that can be characterised as goodwill. Some of these projects are similar, but there is an evident variation of projects that sports clubs partake in. Still, the projects are related in nature in that they target the intangible attributes of a place rather than the tangible. While we use the word goodwill projects here, not all sports clubs would note them as such themselves. For instance, Malmö Redhawks was very clear that they use the word programs instead of projects since programs signify something more durable than projects. Showcasing a drive for long-lasting social work for the community's benefit.

Analysing the different types of projects some similarities were evident. Two sports clubs, Malmö FF and FC Rosengård, had an ongoing project for getting job seekers out on the market, targeting specifically the ones furthest ‘away’, while another club, LUGI, had a similar project but had to stop it due to financing issues. To find jobs the sports clubs used their own networks of partners to set up recruitment opportunities. At the same time, a fourth club, Malmö Redhawks, had a project related in essence, where they train the youth for entering the labour

market. Malmö FF and FC Rosengård both mentioned that the projects have originated from seeing a great need for it in the city, by looking at the high unemployment rate in Malmö. Illustrating how sports clubs care for their host city and the residents that live there.

Moving forward another project theme identified was health, Höör H65, Malmö Redhawks and FC Rosengård, all had multiple projects where they targeted the youth and encouraged them to activate themselves physically. Even though the projects have similar end goals they were designed differently. For Höör H65 one project is fairly new and invites children from ages 10-15 to come to the sports arena as after-school care (in Swedish, “Fritids”). Thus offering them a place to activate themselves among other things such as help with homework. Their second project to encourage movement is not their own, instead, it is a national project Höör H65 has taken part in. Displaying how sports clubs can make use of others’ projects and adapt them to their own operations.

Similar to Höör H65 inviting children to their sports arena, Malmö Redhawks invite students to their gym to exercise. Then they also have a project that aims to make it easier for younger children to play hockey, with the aim for them to be more active. They also work to raise awareness of physical activity with this project. Furthermore, FC Rosengård has spontaneous football practices at schools to promote movement and activate children. Within this theme of health, it was made clear the vast variation of projects that targets similar goals but in different ways. Indicating how there are many ways to tackle one issue, as shown within sports clubs respectively and comparatively. The sports club that did multiple projects that were aimed at health issues did not express that one way was better than the other.

Another project theme, that also targets the youth, is that of creating forums to bring up social issues, such as racism and integration. Three sports clubs, Malmö FF, FC Rosengård and Malmö Redhawks, do this. All three sports clubs are located in the same city, showing how aware they are of their surroundings and the need to talk about these issues with the next generation. As their city is very segregated they want to do their part in helping with integration. Malmö FF and FC Rosengård also have projects that aim to help children in school either through helping them develop their reading skills or helping teenagers be accepted to high school. The Rosengård

representative stated that *“We see the curve for literacy and reading comprehension among children is pointing steeply downwards, and therefore we want to do something”* (*“Vi ser att kurvan för läsförståelse och läskunnighet bland barn och sjunker drastiskt, och därför vi vill göra något”*). As previously mentioned, Höör H65 also has a project that helps children with homework. For Malmö FF’s project with teenagers, collaboration with an educational institution was needed as the aim of the project required resources beyond the sports club’s own capacity. Depicting how different stakeholder groups worked together to reach a common goal.

Finally, four sports clubs, Ystad IF, LUGI, Höör H65 and Malmö Redhawks, discussed how there is a direct financial aspect to some of their projects. By having projects, for example, events that might not directly involve the sport they can still raise money for the club. At the same time, both LUGI and Malmö Redhawks hold tournaments that generate money for their sports clubs. For LUGI it was noted that the tournament was important for the sports club’s economy. While projects might generate a direct financial return, it was also identified that some sports clubs, Höör H65 and Malmö Redhawks, split the return between their operations and charity. Ystad IF also had a charity event but then they did not describe any financial return to their own operation.

The reason why the sports clubs do these goodwill projects varies from club to club. The reasons were nuanced and multilayered, in other words, many reasons factor into why a sports club engages in projects that improve the intangible attributes of a place. The reasons presented are those that were interpreted as the main reasons. One reason presented rang true for all sports clubs, the positive impact on the sports clubs’ economies from the projects. For instance, Malmö Redhawks charity game for the cause *“Min stora dag”* (in English, *“My big day”*), offers free entrance for visitors, where the chosen sponsors offer to pay a certain amount per visitor for the charity fund. There is no direct financial profit for Malmö Redhawks, but the event attracts people that might not go to games otherwise. This lays a foundation for recruiting new supporters and shows potential investors the value in being associated with Malmö Redhawks, opening up for future economic profit.

Another reason identified for doing goodwill projects was that they helped shape the sports clubs' own brands (Malmö FF, Höör H65 & Malmö Redhawks). While a third one was that they wanted to have a positive impact on the community (LUGI, Malmö FF, Ystad IF & FC Rosengård). Lastly, by doing goodwill projects sports clubs (FC Rosengård, Malmö Redhawks, Ystad IF & LUGI) argued that they can attract partners that support the club financially. The soft values that the sports clubs then provide were described as a possible sales argument.

4.3 Theme 2 - Stakeholders

Interviewing the sports clubs it was made clear that they work with a lot of different stakeholders, for example, members, parents, children, schools, sponsors, and the city government. Since they meet and work with many different stakeholders, the relationships and approaches vary. When talking about how they work with stakeholders all sports clubs naturally venture into describing how they work with corporations, in other words, sponsors. This type of relationship was distinguished by an exchange of money for something in return. All sports clubs mentioned that they could provide exposure in return, but four sports clubs (Ystad IF, LUGI, Malmö Redhawks & FC Rosengård) did also mention that sponsors might also do it as a part of their CSR work or employer branding. In other words, they wanted to be a part of the goodwill projects the sports clubs do. Ystad IF explained that the association was used to make employees proud of working for a company that supports the values the local club represents in their work. Soft values that the sports clubs embodied could in that way be used to gain sponsors.

Five out of six sports clubs (Malmö FF, Ystad IF, Malmö Redhawks, Höör H65 & FC Rosengård) talked about partnerships with corporations. The idea is that together they can do more than alone. Corporations can contribute with money so that the sports clubs can finance projects both related to sports but also outside of sports, where they provide other resources such as their manpower and knowledge. Malmö FF and Höör H65 described how they strive for active partnerships but that corporations are sometimes with the mindset to be passive sponsors, making an active partnership harder to achieve. Out of the six sports clubs, only three (Höör H65, LUGI & Ystad IF) sports clubs stress having mostly local sponsors. Still, it is implied by all sports clubs that for active partnership, local partners are advantageous as they then can better together work on projects and it gives the sports clubs a better sales point for why the sponsors should

engage with the sports club. Another sales point is the sports clubs' networks made up of corporations. For the sports clubs' networks to be prosperous, it is deduced that active local partners are important for the quality of the networks.

All sports clubs discussed how long-term collaborations are strived for. Malmö Redhawks meant that for projects to be sustainable long-term collaborations were important, while LUGI instead noted that it can provide the club with a sense of security from an economical standpoint. For the sports clubs Malmö FF, Ystad IF and LUGI, they all noted that they often initiate contact and collaborations with partners, and do it based on their needs. Both Höör H65 and Malmö Redhawks also initiate most of their collaborations with corporations, while FC Rosengård notes that the initiatives stem from both their side and other stakeholders. When it is from FC Rosengård's side they do it based on their needs, similarly expressed by Malmö FF, Ystad IF and LUGI. Three of the sports clubs (Malmö FF, LUGI & Malmö Redhawks) explicitly express that they have to consider their resources when collaborating with others, they are bound by time and money. LUGI also conveys that for their network it is important to find a balance and thus take care of who is invited. Illustrating that sports clubs are deliberate with which stakeholders they interact actively with.

When talking about the relationship with the city, Malmö Redhawks made it abundantly clear that they see a difference between the city government and the city residents. *"You have to separate the municipality of Malmö and the residents of Malmö...It's the people of Malmö we want to represent"* (*"Man måste skilja på Malmö stad och malmöborna...Det är malmöborna som vi vill representera"*) were the words used by the Redhawks representative. When their work benefits the city they look for how it benefits the people living and working in the city, not specifically the city government. The interpretation from the interview was that the relationship with the city government was not strong or a focus for this particular sports club.

From the interviews with Höör H65, Ystad IF and LUGI there also was noted some friction with the city government, however, all of these sports clubs described how they are working on the relationship and want it to be good. A common theme for the friction was that the sports clubs felt that they provide the city with exposure through their sports operations, which is not

acknowledged enough. Besides acknowledging the support they received from the city government was experienced as disproportionate to the value and work the sports clubs felt they provided. In comparison, Malmö FF did not express any friction between the city government, they argued instead that it was important to have a good relationship with the city for their operations.

From the interview with a Malmö city representative, it was said that professional sports clubs are a great advertisement for the city when they are playing on the international stage like the Champions League. They are ambassadors for the city when they are away playing, and then by bringing the audience back to the city for home games, they help in attracting visitors that might not have travelled to the city otherwise. Sports clubs, and association life in general, were seen to be underestimated as a force in making the city attractive, something that can connect back to the friction found in the sports clubs interviewed. The representative from Malmö city only works with sports clubs indirectly through the network “destinationssamverkan”, but meant that the sports clubs communicate and collaborate with other departments in the city government. The city government can be an advisor and help connect organisations that might benefit from each other’s competencies. At the same time, as the city government is politically governed they have to be careful in their work in not benefiting a single actor over others.

The sports clubs mentioned different reasons why they collaborate with stakeholders. The answers can be divided into two themes when it comes to collaboration with stakeholders categorised as corporations. Theme one is money, especially LUGI and Höör H65 described financial stability as their main reason. Theme two is that the sports clubs are stronger together with stakeholders. Malmö FF, Ystad IF and Malmö Redhawks all explained that together with others they can do more, achieve more and benefit more. Both Malmö FF and Ystad IF also meant that stakeholders were needed when venturing into something new, where they were less knowledgeable and equipped for the venture. As mentioned, sports clubs collaborate with more stakeholders than their partners and sponsors. All sports clubs, except Malmö FF, are dependent on volunteers to be able to run their operations, implying a great need to collaborate and engage with stakeholders to be able to have the human capital needed to run their business. A need for human capital can be confirmed indirectly by Malmö FF naming their human capital as their

greatest asset; *“The human capital is the most important thing that you have regardless if you are a football player, football coach or work in the supporter shop” (“Humankapitalet är det viktigaste man har oavsett om man är fotbollsspelare, fotbollstränare eller jobbar i supportershopen”)*.

Nevertheless, the interviews made clear that the sports clubs are not affluent in money and are thus in need of working with others to be able to run their operations and develop in the direction of their vision.

4.4 Theme 3 - Resources

The interviews with the sports clubs highlighted that all sports clubs have their own networks, which act as an important resource for the sports clubs. The different networks vary in size, design and level of development. Still, it was made abundantly clear that they saw a lot of potential in their networks, it was not only a source of finances but also a potential collaborator for projects. Some projects might only need financial support, other times an active role was more useful. For instance, Malmö FF used their own network as a source for finding job opportunities for city residents struggling to get into the job market. The sports clubs also partook in other networks than their own. Malmö Redhawks and Malmö FF in particular discussed being part of networks that revolved around social impact. For Malmö Redhawks, they partook in a network (EPOS) that works toward the goal of more female coaches. While Malmö FF partook in two different networks where one discussed sustainability and the other focused on social initiatives and experience amongst football clubs working with it. To conclude, the sports clubs’ own networks were more active relationships with more tangible transactions, while the networks they partook in provided the sports clubs with new insights on how to work.

For the sports clubs’ own networks, their home games are important events. While these events are an important source of revenue from supporters, visitors, and advertisements, they are also a meeting point for the network. At the home games, the network is invited to come and enjoy the game and company. For the sports clubs, it is important that these events hold value for their partners in order for them to continue the contracts and relationships. For instance, Ystad IF explained how they could seat some partners next to each other in order to facilitate a business

agreement being made between partners. As a result, the corporations in the network would look at the membership in the network as an important part of their business, making them want to stay within the network. On another note, the home games could also bring an opportunity for the partners to invite their own potential investors or clients.

As mentioned, Malmö city also runs a network called “Destinationssamverkan”. Similarly to the sports clubs, this is a network that connects organisations, however, this network aims for organisations to work together, in order to enhance the city and as a result tourism. In this network, and in their general operations, Malmö city provides competence and connections. However, similarly to sports clubs, they do not find their strength in monetary resources. In this sense, the sports clubs and the city governments networks operate similarly, however, they have different end goals and target groups. Furthermore, the use of networks implies that there is a desire to facilitate collaboration between many parties, indicating that a participatory approach is highly relevant.

Looking at the resources that the sports clubs dispose of, human capital is a common denominator. As mentioned, all sports clubs apart from Malmö FF depend on their volunteers for managing operations in some form. It can be for operations around home games or for coaches in the youth divisions. LUGI and Ystad IF both mentioned that one of their strengths is being able to engage volunteers. Often these volunteers were senior citizens or parents of players. For instance, LUGI stated that when it comes to coaches the club offers an experience that overshadows the economic loss and time consumption volunteering actually amounts to. Meanwhile, Ystad IF focuses a lot on acknowledging and appreciating their volunteers in order to maintain the relationship. Ystad IF also argued that city and club culture was important to attract volunteers since it laid the foundation for intrinsic loyalty and pride among the residents to volunteer for the club. Volunteers from Ystad IF engage in a program to patrol Ystad city to make sure the city is safe and secure during summer nights, this also displays the value of human capital and how the use of the sports club's resources can benefit not only the club but the city and its residents as well. However, both Ystad IF and LUGI mentioned that attracting new volunteers is becoming a more difficult task as people are not as generous with their time today, hinting at the need for finding new ways to recruit volunteers.

All the sports clubs interviewed had elite teams in either men's or women's sports. The value of having an elite team was described as considerable. On one hand, players act as role models for the young players in the club. For instance, Höör H65 implied that many girls play in their club because they have a successful women's elite team. On the other hand, the elite team also is a source of exposure and advertising for the sports club as well as the city. Not only acting as a source to recruit up-and-coming players but also the city as a place to visit, work and live in. For instance, Malmö FF and Ystad IF mentioned that they contribute to tourism by having played home games against international teams. On another note, Höör H65 pointed out that they are advertising their city as a place to live in, by playing nationally. Another source of contributing to tourism can be hosting a bigger tournament, LUGI for instance, hosts an annual multinational youth handball tournament, Lundaspelen, that attracts thousands of people to Lund.

By having a well-known and recognisable brand, known for actively working with goodwill and integration, FC Rosengård has become an attractive partner to be associated with. Their brand has become impactful, with a well-known vision and value base, leading to corporations reaching out to them for potential partnerships. FC Rosengård explained that their foundation as a club is based on certain values that have in turn shaped the club into working with sports and social work to the same degree. As they have the history and thus knowledge, they can now offer partners social sustainability reports on their partners' organisations. Furthermore, Malmö FF and Höör H65 also mentioned their brand as a resource, as it for example can create engagement.

Two of the sports clubs (Malmö FF & Malmö Redhawks) have designated employees working with social responsibility, while FC Rosengård employees were divided into working with either social work or sports. As mentioned all sports clubs were involved in goodwill projects, but it was also made clear that half of them had taken it a step further having employees assigned specifically towards working with social topics and thus indirectly goodwill. Indicating that these types of projects are important for the sports clubs, both from the sense that they correspond with the sports clubs' values, but also as previously noted are the goodwill projects important for the relationships with stakeholders. Ystad IF argued that as a sports club, they are deemed trustworthy by the public, FC Rosengård also stated that their trust capital is high in the eyes of

the public, which is a resource in their social work. Implied was that the social work sports clubs do for the city is seen as more genuine than the social work that corporations and the city government might do on their own.

4.5 Theme 4 - Vision

Discussing vision with sports clubs gave a varying picture of what vision is to them. For a lot of the sports clubs, the vision is the core values of the sports club. For other sports clubs, the vision is the performance of the teams and for some, it is a combination of the two. Two of the sports clubs, Höör H65 and Ystad IF are currently building the vision to better fit the sports club while having their core values remain the same during the forming phase. Malmö FF has taken a vision that includes both sports and social values. Similarly, FC Rosengård clearly states that the vision of the club stands on two legs. One is the performance on the field, and the other is promoting equality and social responsibility outside of the field. It is evident that all clubs participating in this study have a vision or are working to develop a vision. However, the vision's significance differs between sports clubs.

Ystad IF is a sports club currently reworking its vision as the sports club's management saw the vision as too unclear and undefined. In the process of redefining their vision, they take inspiration from the corporate world. Ystad IF describes how it is important to divide the work of the vision into smaller and measurable components, and therefore they work with SMART goals. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound and by fulfilling these criteria the goals are clearly defined and reachable. When the goals are set, then it is important to communicate and motivate the actions taken by members to gain a shared understanding of the vision and goals within the organisation. The Ystad IF representative said: *“I usually say it's like a train, if all the carriages are breaking it doesn't matter how strong the locomotive is because you won't get anywhere. You have to get everyone onboard, it's not possible otherwise”* (“Jag brukar säga det är som ett tåg, om alla tågagnar har bromsen på så spelar det ingen roll hur starkt loket är för man kommer ingenstans. Man måste få med allihopa”).

Another example of working with vision is how Malmö Redhawks re-evaluates its vision every season, in order to use it for communication and sales arguments to partners. By communicating their values, ambitions, and course of action it is a powerful tool to attract commercial and noncommercial partners for the coming year. Then they present their measurable results from last year and show the vision for next year for partners and members to communicate what the club aims for. The examples of Redhawks and Ystad IF show how the vision is used to show the future path of the club to both members and partners, but the ability to present measurable results is important both as investment arguments towards partners, but also for alignment and shared views within the organisations.

Many clubs work actively with their vision internally in the youth teams in the form of education. The vision of the organisation is set by the managing directors of the club after that it is then up to team leaders and coaches to work actively to interpret the vision when educating the children. Malmö FF, Ystad IF and LUGI specifically mention how they aim not only to produce good adult sports players but also to foster good individuals outside of sports. Both, Malmö FF and LUGI, have visions to have a certain number of their own academy players in the first team and then coaches and sports directors must work to fulfil this vision by giving young players opportunities to play. From the staff perspective, they must first buy into the vision of the club in order to convey it onwards. Ystad IF stated the members of the club must embody the values of the club in order for it to spread. There are many ways to implement the vision internally within the clubs, oftentimes they are implemented by the work the club does with its youth players or with the first team or a combination of both.

Getting all members onboard and striving for common goals is stated as vital by several clubs when working with vision. LUGI states that the culture must match the strategy in order to reach the vision. The culture is a habit of doing things a certain way and if the actions of coaches, players, and members don't match the strategy of the management then it will be impossible to reach the set vision. Malmö FF also mentions how important it is that the whole organisation pulls the same way and names communication as the most important factor. Malmö Redhawks state that the vision of the club includes all departments, they have a vision to improve on all levels. For instance, the elite team's results are one of them, but also improving equality with

more female coaches and more resources for women's hockey. Every department such as sales, social responsibility, and ticket office has its own part to play in the vision of the club and therefore alignment toward the vision must be considered a key component.

The communication of the vision to outside parties and the public is perhaps where the biggest difference is found within the organisations. Malmö FF mentioned their program 'Team for Everyone' as an example of where the club works to engage with citizens in all areas of Malmö and tell more about their values and what they stand for. LUGI on the other hand says that communication is an area that they are working to improve as it has previously not been prioritised. FC Rosengård, Höör H65 and Ystad IF aim for their members to represent the values of the club outside of the sports field, and in that way communicate the vision and values of the club. Malmö Redhawks say their main ambition has been to communicate the vision to partners and have not focused on the public to the same extent. Altogether, communication is handled differently, where some sports clubs work more actively with the communication and others more indirectly.

Both Höör H65 and Malmö FF state how they work with the UN's global goals for 2030. The reason behind this is not for immediate success on the sports field but rather to take responsibility as a member of society. Malmö FF especially mentions global goal number 17 of partnerships. Malmö city also works toward the UN's global goals and uses these values in the city development. However, Malmö city also states that they have no vision for the city, instead they have an unspoken aim of being a healthy, welcoming city that is attractive to people and businesses. The Malmö city representative on why Malmö has no vision: *"The world is changing so quickly, almost no one is making plans anymore because so much is happening so quickly. You won't have time to make a two-year plan because the conditions are changing so much. ("Världen förändras så himla snabbt, att göra planer är nästan ingen som gör längre, det händer så mycket så snabbt. Man hinner inte med om man gör en tvåårsplan, förutsättningarna ändras så himla mycket")*.

When it comes to the vision of their partners and sponsors, Malmö Redhawks and FC Rosengård use their own vision as an asset to attract new partners. For this to work it is implied that the

partners' vision is similar or aligns with the vision of the sports clubs, for their vision to be able to attract partners. Another sports club (Malmö FF) considered the vision of the potential partners as they have a wide target audience. Malmö FF together with Ystad IF explained that they are very clear with their vision and value base, and if it does not correspond with the partner's own organisation the partner will most likely leave or not start a relationship from the beginning. Höör H65 mentioned that they will say no to a partnership if it goes outside their policy, rather than taking a stance based on vision. LUGI mentioned that they share a common vision about the city's importance with their most long-term and loyal partners. At the same time they also have partners in the form of sponsors that do not care for the vision of the club, but instead care for the exposure the sports club can provide. In conclusion, how the vision is used in relation to stakeholders differs. The vision was used actively or considered to be a more passive part of the relationship.

4.6 Synthesis of the Findings

The sports clubs interviewed expressed that they saw value in their host city having an attractive city brand. The underlying reasons for the given answer were tourism, more possible supporters and members in the form of residents, and advantages in the recruitment process. Only one sports club, Malmö FF, specifically mentioned attracting businesses as a reason, still, all clubs are dependent on corporate sponsorships, and for many, these are local corporations.

In relation to infrastructure, the sports clubs' sports operations provided the residents with experiential place attributes in the form of entertainment. Another aspect is that they practised city branding through goodwill projects. The themes of these goodwill projects ranged from targeting the unemployed, health, social issues, and education. The goodwill projects had a financial element, being able to generate money for the sports clubs, for example, by bringing in sponsors. Creating soft values that were valuable for the residents, also benefited the sports clubs.

The sports clubs engaged with a lot of different stakeholders, but in the interviews, the sports clubs naturally gravitated to discussing their relations with corporations that made up their partners and sponsors. Reported was that the sports clubs provide exposure or/and soft values in

exchange for money. Some also discussed how partners could provide the sports clubs with knowledge and experience. Active and long-term partnerships were sought, but who initiated the relationship differed, in general needs and resources were considered before entering a partnership. Lastly, human capital was also discussed as an important stakeholder. For the sports clubs that depended on volunteers, it was important for them to consider the volunteer's interests and reasons for being there.

The sports clubs' own network of corporations was described as a great resource for the sports clubs. Since it was a source of financial support, knowledge and experience, and collaborators for projects. Other networks, outside their own organisation, were also a source of knowledge to develop one's own operations. The home games of the elite teams were important events the sports club held since they provided a natural meeting place for their own networks. Furthermore, on their elite teams, the teams provided the youth with role models but also exposure for the club and city nationally and potentially internationally. As already stated, the goodwill projects could be seen as a resource since they can be used to attract partners.

Through the interviews, it was shown that vision can be used to attract new partners. At the same time, vision could also be considered a more passive part of the relationship, showcasing that not all sports clubs actively use their vision for managing their relationship with stakeholders. Still, it was made clear that sports clubs consider their potential partners' vision or/and values they stand for, before entering a relationship. On the other hand, through talking to a city government representative it was made clear that not everyone uses vision, instead universal goals like the UN's global goals could be adapted. Altogether, the use and importance of vision differed between the sports clubs.

Lastly, from talking with a representative from the city government, Malmö city, it was made clear that they do see the importance of sports clubs, in that they create a community for children and youth to gather around, and in that, they also help them stay out of trouble. On the other hand, they also see the sports club contributing to improving the city brand, through helping create a liveable city that is attractive to residents, businesses and visitors. When it comes to exposure, Malmö city saw the sports clubs' ability to be a great advertisement for the city. The

representative also acknowledged that they were underestimated in their ability to advertise a city. The sports clubs were described as having to work with different departments of the local government, hinting at the complexity for sports clubs in having to maintain relationships with many from the same organisation. Moreover, Malmö City had their own network that functioned similarly to the sports clubs, however, their network had a different end goal and target groups. Finally, Malmö City works with the UN's global goals for 2030 and bases its work on these rather than a vision. It was also noted that some sports clubs have chosen their own UN global goals to work toward in their operations. This hinted that the UN's global goals might be the value base sports clubs can use to facilitate relationships with stakeholders, such as the local government.

5 Discussion

The discussion section will discuss the research questions and the interpreted answers and relate these to the literature review. It will then evaluate the framework used in the study.

5.1 Research Question 1 - What motives do professional sports clubs perceive from practising city branding?

From the findings, there have been noted multiple reasons that motivate sports clubs to partake in city branding practices. In this section, these motives will be discussed and reflected upon.

5.1.1 Economic Incentives

When it comes to both infrastructure and stakeholder engagement, money is a common denominator. Sports clubs are in need of financial resources to maintain and improve their activities, all sports clubs therefore have sponsors and partners that support them financially. Sponsors and partners were thus important for the sports clubs to have. But they were also desired based on the fact that more can be done together than alone and that the partners might have knowledge and experience that the sports club can use for their development. Furthermore, the goodwill projects could be used to attract partners as a sales argument. From another perspective, the project could help generate money and attain more supporters through exposure from the projects. This is again an example of stakeholder collaboration as mentioned by Gopalan and Narayan (2010) but also the relocation of resources mentioned by Fjertorp, Mattisson and Thomasson (2013). Through stakeholder engagement and collaboration, resources are transferred from corporations to sports clubs in exchange for partaking in the club's social projects or/and exposure on the field. In contrast, to Fjertorp, Mattisson and Thomasson's (2013) argument that vision can be used to allocate finances, for sports clubs values could also be used.

5.1.2 A Sense of Responsibility

Much of the work that the sports clubs do has its foundation in giving back to society. For instance, working toward the UN's global goals is not an immediate benefit for sports clubs economically or sportswise, but a sign that sports clubs acknowledge their place as active

members of society. Hankinson's (2004) study determined that a shared vision is needed by the stakeholders for successful city branding. In the case of Malmö city where there is no stated vision, working towards the UN's global goals can potentially act as a stand-in vision for clubs and city governments. By sharing the same responsibilities and values the sports clubs and city government can find common ground in order to facilitate collaboration. Raising money for charities and encouraging children to read is also not done with the performance of the sports club in mind. For most sports clubs and especially the smaller sports clubs, there is no expectation or demand from outside stakeholders that the sports club should engage in these kinds of activities. Instead, the motivation for the sports clubs to engage in these projects is simply because they can, and therefore that they should. No sports club can do everything they would like to do, so they have to prioritise based on the values of the sports club and what resources they have available. One such example is the night patrolling from the volunteers in Ystad IF, they felt it was within their responsibility to contribute to the safety and security of the city. They looked at the resources they had available and contributed in the way they could.

5.1.3 What Benefits the City, Benefits the Club

When asked to go into more detail about how an attractive city brand benefits the club the answers can be divided into four themes, with an overall theme that they saw it valuable for the city to be perceived as an attractive place to live, visit and work in. The four themes identified are tourism, residencies, recruitment, and businesses.

When it comes to tourism it is important for sports clubs that they can attract an audience to their home games. The crowd is not only home supporters but also supporters of the visiting team. For visitors to be interested to come and view games in another city, it was expressed by the sports clubs that it is valuable if the city is an attractive place to visit. For cities, sports events can be a part of the cultural stage as well and be an attraction for tourists visiting the city. As stated by Hemmonsbey and Knott (2016) the sports team can even be a competitive differentiator meaning that the sports club can be a decisive factor when deciding where to visit, proving there is interplay between the city and sports club in attracting tourists.

Another theme noted was how important it was for the sports clubs that their city is deemed liveable by residents and potential future residents. Being located in an attractive city means more people live in the area, more people lead to better potential for engagement in the sports club all the way from children's activities and coaches, to elite players and volunteers. Having a larger selection of youth players increases the chances that a few players pass the eye of the needle and make it to the elite team. Fostering a player from youth to the elite is potentially less straining economically and enables the sports club to create a local connection between fans and players. In the best case, sales of local talent can contribute a lot of income to the club and show other interested parties the quality of the youth programs. Moreover, having a large youth section is also a potential profit from the membership fees even if no players reach the elite team.

The elite teams were important for the sports clubs, and for elite teams to succeed, attracting players is a must. From a recruitment standpoint, it is a competitive advantage for the sports clubs if the city is attractive to live in. It can be seen as an added value to live in a fun and engaging city and players might therefore be willing to accept a lower wage than otherwise. The opposite is also true, if the city has a bad reputation it can be an obstacle in recruiting players, as mentioned by the Malmö city representative. As a result, sports clubs could have to offer to pay more to attract the same level of talent.

No professional teams can operate without their business partners, therefore having a city attractive to corporations is vital for the financial aspect of the club. If the city can offer the corporations an environment that caters to their needs this will attract investments and people to this area. By offering business networks, entertainment, and physical activities for employees at companies, sports clubs do what they can to help the city brand. In turn, corporations see value in being in a business network and the value of association with the sports club and decide to sponsor the club.

In all four cases, the motive for the city branding practices comes from a win-win situation where an attractive city brings values that also can benefit the sports club.

5.2 Research Question 2 - What city branding practices do professional sports clubs do?

The findings illustrated various city branding practices made by professional sports clubs. In this section, these findings will be discussed and reflected upon.

5.2.1 Offering Physical Activities and Entertainment

Studies presented in the literature chapter argued that sports clubs are valuable for a city brand (Ahonen, Lämsä, Mero & Karimäki, 2016; Hautbois, 2016; Hemmonsbey & Knott, 2016). The findings of the study showed that sports clubs from the perspective of their sports operation could offer residents a place for children and youth to be active and socialise, and adults with an experience of coaching and a community.

For adults, such as parents, the clubs offer entertainment in the form of elite team games but most clubs also offer the opportunity to become involved as a coach or representative. Clubs like LUGI and Ystad depend on volunteers and often parents coaching up until a certain age. This could be seen as a pastime of entertainment and offer a fun activity outside of work. Younger children might not be as concerned by the performance or level of the elite teams but rather by their own involvement in the sport. The entertainment comes from playing their own games. The youth teams may not be the greatest source to bring in fans or sponsors, but they offer children to have fun physical activities that they look forward to. Both LUGI and Ystad IF are large handball clubs in smaller cities and through their large youth organisations have become known in Sweden as handball cities, adding the sport to the brand and the culture of the city offerings.

Sports clubs' sports operations can be seen as a city branding practice since it is a form of entertainment that brings value to the city. Sports clubs add to the city's offerings of entertainment and events to visit, for instance, by organising elite team home games. As it can be argued that the residents are one of the most essential stakeholder groups in city branding (Gilboa & Jaffe, 2021), sports clubs can play an active role in helping create a brand of health and activities perceived by residents by offering physical activities. The findings showed that sports clubs worked actively to motivate and engage children to move. At the same time being

active in a sports team was deemed important for other reasons, for instance, the city government saw positive benefits in children playing sports and thus staying away from harmful activities.

5.2.2 Creating a Sense of Community

While stating that most of the sports clubs are dependent on their human capital in the form of volunteers, it is also true that a lot of residents want to volunteer and be a part of the community sports clubs provide. There are also supporters that seek a community by supporting a sports club. In this sense, sports clubs create a community for residents to be a part of and create a sense of inclusion. At the same time, many professional sports clubs would not function without the participation of residents since residents also take the role of supporters, volunteers and youth players. The sports clubs can contribute to the feeling of belonging and pride for the local community who shares the good and bad times with their team. As Ystad IF stated, residents took pride in representing and volunteering for their club. Sports clubs can bring people together from different ages and backgrounds allowing them to share and take part in experiences they would otherwise not have had in common.

The findings showed sports clubs considering societal issues such as integration and equality. For instance, Redhawks work with a focus to attract more girls and women to play and coach. In doing so they invite more stakeholders to be a part of their community. Meanwhile, working with societal issues such as segregation implies working to meet stakeholders that are generally less invited and engaged. In this way, sports clubs have the potential through working actively with these issues to take on a more ethical participative approach, as called for by Green, Grace, and Perkins (2016). Additionally, similarities in sports club practices can be seen in how Henninger, Foster, Alevizou, and Frohlich (2016) discussed influential stakeholders and how they tend to engage less influential stakeholders. This gives an additional perspective on how sports clubs can take on a more ethical participative approach in city branding, and help less influential stakeholders feel part of a community.

5.2.3 Providing Exposure

Another city branding practice found is the elite teams providing exposure for the city through competing both nationally and internationally. The sports club interviewed had a clear

association with their host city through their name. The sports clubs were described as advertising the city when on the road playing against other teams, putting the name on the map. Several times it was mentioned from the sports clubs that they did not receive enough appreciation from the city government for the marketing that the clubs do. This can be interpreted as the city government not seeing the sports clubs as an active stakeholder that adds to the city brand since they receive little appreciation for their work.

When sports clubs play against other teams at home, they attract supporters of the away team to come to the city to see their team play. Hautbois' (2016) study found that media exposure and association between a sports club and the city were important for the branding process. While the sports clubs did not expressly discuss their club's name and its association with their host city, every club has its host city's name except FC Rosengård and LUGI. Though nationally the association is known, Rosengård is a famous area in Malmö, and LUGI is an acronym where the 'L' stands for Lund.

Moreover, on exposure, some sports clubs played internationally and thus provided exposure on an international level, which could be argued as beneficial for international tourism. While playing nationally, in contrast, gave exposure that better reached potential residents, as well as national visitors. For both levels, the exposure was described as targeting an audience of sports-interested people. Another source of exposure could also come from the tournaments that the sports clubs host. Large and recurring tournaments attract people to visit, and potentially multiple times. As tournaments also can invite international teams, it also can provide the city with an increase in national and international tourists visiting the city.

5.2.4 Goodwill Projects

The study found that all sports clubs do more than pure sports operations. For example, all sports clubs reported having goodwill projects that targeted different local or societal problems. Ahonen, Lämsä, Mero and Karimäki's (2016) study brings up the importance of collaboration between diverse stakeholders, giving the example of educational institutions and sports clubs. In this study, we found that sports clubs often collaborate with schools for different goodwill projects. The three main categories of projects were health, education, and inclusion. Many times

using their own resources such as volunteers, players from the elite team, and their partners. There were projects to promote movements and physical activity, reading, and homework. There were also sports clubs engaging in personal education in order to become available on the job market and using contacts to put people to work. Integration and inclusivity projects focused on using sports as a platform for meeting and socialising that would not have been possible otherwise. These projects often fall far outside the core activities of the sports clubs but are deemed so important and integral to the members of the club that they are a part of every club's practices.

5.2.5 Networking

Stakeholder engagement as a city branding practice is about shaping the city brand together (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Sports clubs worked with many stakeholders, but a lot of focus was on their relationship with corporations. It was shown that corporations partnered up with sports clubs either for exposure or soft values, or both. The corporations there only for exposure might not be as interesting to consider in co-branding, as the ones there for the soft values. However, it should be acknowledged that they are helping create a sub-brand revolving around sports, by supporting a sports club financially to run its operations. Even if their reason behind the support is mainly for exposure.

Nevertheless, looking at the corporations supporting the sports clubs for how they work with soft values, the relationships took different forms in different sports clubs. It was observed that sports clubs could use their soft values and vision to attract new partners and sponsors. In other words, sports clubs involved other stakeholders through their work with soft values, which is in line with the argument for a balanced participation in city branding (Kavaratzis, 2009; Green, Grace, & Perkins, 2016). However, it was described that the sports clubs were driving and leading in their work, not asking for opinions and shared responsibility. On the other hand, for them to be able to attract partners based on their soft values, they need to be aware of the opinions and interests of the corporations they are interested in collaborating with.

One city branding practice that emerged through the study is the running of their own networks, which all sports clubs reported doing. For corporations, the networks create a place for them to

e.g. meet and do business with each other and to share and gain knowledge. The sports club's own networks thus become an attractive attribute for the city in the eyes of corporations, giving them an outlet to develop and make connections. The sports clubs can also use their own home games as an arena for the corporations to meet at networking events, but also as a place that their partners can bring, for example, their potential investors or clients, making the home games a tool of entertainment for corporations. On another note, the goodwill projects can through the networks e.g. get more exposure, be supported financially, and find suitable collaborators.

Sports clubs also reported being in other networks than their own. In these networks knowledge and experience were sought by the sports clubs interviewed. They were seen as a way to help develop as a sports club. There also were networks that aimed for a more societal impact, for instance, a network for increasing the number of women coaches and leaders. Sports clubs being part of networks, but also goodwill projects, that aim for a societal impact, e.g. equality or integration, can have an indirect effect on the city brand and how it is shaped by the different stakeholders. For instance, a sports club working with integration in their host city can help shape a city brand known for successful integration and multicultural environment, rather than a city battling segregation.

5.3 Research Question 3 - What are suitable components of a framework for city branding practices, with a focus on the brand creation process?

The framework (see Figure 3) was developed to provide a theoretical foundation and to guide the research design. This section will evaluate the designed framework and suggest improvements.

Main Component	Description of Practise	Resources	Vision
Infrastructure	Creating and improving functional and experiential place attributes (Hanna & Rowley, 2011)	Financial resources is vital for managing the infrastructure (Rainisto, 2003)	Through use of vision one can procure resources to enable well-functioning infrastructure (Fjertorp, Mattisson and Thomasson, 2013)
Stakeholder Engagement	Engaging in an active relationship to stakeholders, where they acknowledge each other and one's interests (Hanna & Rowley, 2011)	Through stakeholders it is possible to procure resources (Fjertorp, Mattisson and Thomasson, 2013)	Stakeholders having a shared vision is important for the city branding to be successful (Hankinson, 2004)

Figure 3 - Framework

5.3.1 Infrastructure

Analysing the practices of sports clubs from the component of infrastructure showed that sports clubs work in a narrow part of the component. A lot of focus is on the experiential place attributes, rather than on the functional place attributes alone. Therefore, it is suggested that the component of infrastructure would be composed with a pure focus on experiential attributes. An insight that differs from the component infrastructure proposed by Hanna and Rowley (2011). In more depth, this study suggests that the focus could be on entertainment and social work, based on the sports clubs' perspective. On the other hand, it is possible that work with the pure functional place attributes might have been overshadowed by the experiential place attributes. Thus future studies might take a more centred look into possible work sports clubs partake to create or improve more tangible characteristics of a city. For this study that looks at the practices of sports clubs, infrastructure as a component fulfils its purpose. While this single study suggests that the component could be designed to be more specific, this study proposes to do more studies on the topic, in order to make a well-informed decision before narrowing the component.

5.3.2 Stakeholder Engagement

This study showed that sports clubs do have active relationships with different stakeholders and that they do consider the other party's interests. How they work with the different stakeholders differs though. Sometimes a stakeholder's interest might have impacted how a sports club works, e.g. having a measurable vision to show results to stakeholders. Other times stakeholders were acknowledged and they were thought of, but the sports club did not change its operation to adhere to them, e.g. seeing their volunteers and their reason to volunteer. Still, both ways of working are encompassed by the component. However, it does bring up the question of how balanced stakeholder engagement is, something that was not a focus point in the current study but might be worthwhile looking into in future studies. For example, looking at how active the relationship is in relation to different stakeholder groups. At the same time, the study asked about the sports clubs' current stakeholders and who they did not collaborate with. Who they don't collaborate with was not ventured into in-depth, leaving room for potential new insights. As Perkins (2016) mentions the importance of not excluding any certain stakeholder group, it could be insightful to look into more detail the sub-groups of stakeholders sports clubs work with. For instance, regarding the residents, study if they are from a certain area of the city or from a specific income wage. By doing so, it would bring a wider understanding of which stakeholders the work of sports clubs impacts.

Besides sports clubs' relationships with the stakeholder group corporations, the stakeholder city government was also specifically examined in relation to the sports clubs. All sports clubs expect one expressed a desire to have a good relationship with the city government. Considering that the city government has a lot of power influencing the city brand (Sarabia-Sanchez & Cerda-Bertomeu, 2018), it might explain the desire for maintaining a good relationship with the city government from the perspective of sports clubs. Whilst the desire exists for a relationship, friction between sports clubs and the city government was observed in that they experienced being underestimated and not acknowledged for their contributions to the city. The city government representative also noted that sports clubs were underestimated, and then indirectly also acknowledged that sports clubs contribute to the city. However, as the city government is politically governed they can not favour specific sports clubs over others, indicating that it is delicate for the city government how to interact with sports clubs. Still, the city government may

take note of the need for acknowledging contributions from other stakeholders, as this may diminish frustrations. Showcasing that it is important that both stakeholders acknowledge each other, as suggested by Hanna and Rowley (2011).

5.3.3 Resources

One main discussion point together with the sports clubs has been their partnerships with stakeholders such as sponsors. Through the interviews, a clear image has been created of the procurement of financial resources through stakeholders, similar to what has been argued in previous research (Fjertorp, Mattisson & Thomasson, 2013). Financial resources have been stated as vital for managing the infrastructure, which aligns with the theory (Rainisto, 2003). However, this study identified that resources sports clubs are in need of, go further beyond financial resources for the management of infrastructure. In the framework resources, as a subject of infrastructure, could be expanded to include human capital and networks. Knowledge, experience and manpower are examples of what can be found in human capital and networks, which are essential for managing infrastructure. Illustrating that stakeholders do not only procure resources but also can act as a resource.

5.3.4 Vision

What vision signified differed from club to club, implying that a shared vision between stakeholders, as Hankinson (2004) discusses, might be harder to achieve. Some sports clubs discussed having a vision for their sports operations, which can be shared by some stakeholders such as supporters and members. Nonetheless, it is difficult to find common ground with other stakeholders such as corporations and city government. But sports clubs also described how you could have a vision that targets different areas than sports, like social values. Sports clubs could potentially build a vision based on e.g. social values that are shared with stakeholders, however, the study found that the sentiment of sharing a vision was not expressed by the sports clubs. Instead, the sports clubs rather talked about being aligned or akin to the stakeholders in their values, shared goals, and motivations. This suggests that the framework component of vision, in relation to stakeholder engagement, might be better composed as values. Where values encompass vision, but it also incorporates more and are not as narrow as the current framework is designed.

When it comes to vision in relation to infrastructure, the study found that vision could be used as an argument to procure resources, similar to what Fjertorp, Mattisson and Thomasson (2013) suggested in their research. The study discerned that vision could be used to engage stakeholders, such as corporations, and appeal to them to sponsor a sports club. A vision could be designed to be measurable and thus be used to show results to the stakeholders, giving them the satisfaction to see what their investment attributed to. Meanwhile, the vision was not always considered when working with stakeholders, in that vision was not the sole incentive for collaborations. Raising the question if the framework also here could benefit from using another collective noun that is more broad, but still encompasses vision. Furthermore, the communication of vision differed between sports clubs, where some focused on corporations, others on residents, and some on the internal organisation. Illustrating the need for a shared vision with diverse stakeholders, but that at the moment sports clubs are prioritising some stakeholders over others.

5.3.5 Improvements on Framework

This study developed a framework based on current theory, and then applied it to describe and analyse city branding practises and motives. Through applying it, the study also analyses the framework in itself, and how well it responds to the practitioners' work with city branding. The analysis of the framework identified possible improvements of the framework. At the same time, this is one study and thus more studies using the framework would be beneficial for testing the reliability of the framework. Taken together, the study identified possible improvements for the components of resources and vision. Through the study resources, as a component, were identified as more nuanced than depicted in the literature. Moreover, vision as a component was indicated as too narrow in the study. Instead values as a collective noun was introduced as a better word to describe the component. As the study identified that vision was used as described in theory, but as practised it was not only about vision. In Figure 4, the suggested improvements of the framework are introduced.

Main Component	Description of Practise	Resources	Values
Infrastructure	Creating and improving functional and experiential place attributes (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).	Financial resources is vital for managing the infrastructure (Rainisto, 2003), as well as human capital and networks.	Through use of vision one can procure resources to enable well-functioning infrastructure (Fjertorp, Mattisson and Thomasson, 2013), similarly values, goals and motivations can be used.
Stakeholder Engagement	Engaging in an active relationship to stakeholders, where they acknowledge each other and one's interests (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).	Through stakeholders it is possible to procure resources (Fjertorp, Mattisson and Thomasson, 2013), but a stakeholder can also be viewed as a resource.	Stakeholders having a shared vision is important for the city branding to be successful (Hankinson, 2004).

Figure 4 - Improved Framework

6 Conclusion

This study, in the field of city branding, aimed to develop a framework that can describe and analyse practices by professional sports clubs in the brand creation process. The framework was developed through the best available knowledge in the field of city branding and the particular angle of brand creation. The preliminary framework ended up being structured into four components, these were; Infrastructure, Stakeholder engagement, Resources, and Vision. Consequently, the framework was used to describe and analyse professional sports clubs' practises and motives through interviews. Six professional sports clubs were interviewed, which led to the identification of five themes for practices, and three themes of motives for the practices exercised. By doing this, the study has taken the first step in moving forward in the research field of city branding from a stakeholder approach, in bridging the gap between research and practice.

Through the analysis of the framework, some improvements on the framework were suggested, to better correspond to practice. These improvements were directed towards the components of resources and vision. For the components of resources, findings from the interviews with the sports clubs were added to the theory, giving the component more nuance. For the component of vision, a change to naming it 'values' was suggested. As vision was deemed very narrow in practice, a broader word, that still encompasses vision, was suggested to better correspond to practice. Lastly, through using the empirical data the study was able to present a developed framework that has its base in both theory and practice. Making the framework more robust when using it to describe and analyse city branding practices by professional sports clubs.

In seeking to answer the research questions, the findings conveyed that the motives sports clubs perceive from practising city branding were; (a) economic incentives, (b) a sense of responsibility toward the local community, and (c) attracting stakeholders. While practices professional sports clubs do were identified as; (A) organised physical activities and entertainment, (B) creation of a sense of community, (C) exposure, (D) goodwill projects, and (E) running networks. Although the study does not rank the different motives or practices identified, it was evident that the running of their own networks was an imperative practice for

all sports clubs. Due to the fact that networks are an important part of the motives of economic incentives, and attracting stakeholders.

6.1 Implications and Contributions

This study clarified possible practices that sports clubs can apply that help brand the city they operate within. A practical implication is then that sports clubs can use this study to find inspiration for practices to adapt to their own operations. At the same time, motives for the sports clubs to practise city branding was identified, implying to sports clubs how they can benefit from a city brand and thus city branding. Additionally, understanding the underlying motives for sports clubs can help in finding common ground for other stakeholder groups that want to collaborate with sports clubs. Altogether, a stakeholder, such as a city government, can use the findings of this study and use it as material for how to approach sports clubs, guide them in how they could work, and also motivate them to do the work. Academically, the developed framework can form the basis for new theory about the active role stakeholders can take in city branding. The study begins to bridge a gap between research and practice in the field of city branding, leading the way for further research on the topic.

6.2 Final Thoughts on Ensuring Trustworthiness

In this study, previous research has been a pillar for the study in terms of research aim and research questions. For instance, it was through exploring studies on city branding that the gap between practice and research was found as an inspiration for this study. Theory and models of city branding were also applied when developing a framework. Since this study has worked with the current research field to a great extent, it is important that the theory and models applied have been critically assessed. To be mindful of what material is used, the authors have looked for peer-reviewed articles, relevant recent studies, and have been diligent in reflecting on the articles used. Reflecting on the articles includes e.g. considering whether the conclusion sounds reasonable in relation to the research aim and method used.

The empirical data presented in this paper has been collected through the qualitative method of interviews. The interviews were designed to be able to gather data that was subjective experiences of the brand creation process in city branding. The data was able to answer the

research questions and in turn, fulfil the purpose since the data showed that the developed framework can be used to describe and analyse city branding practices. As the study sought subjective experiences it was important for the authors to be vigilant in the data collection process, to not project or lead the interviewees to give certain answers. The authors worked consciously to carry out interviews objectively, being open to exploring the interviewees' personal experiences. As this study tackles a divide between research and practice, it was important for the practitioner to express their opinion, in order to explore how to develop a framework that is robust both theoretically and in practice.

Using interviews as a method to answer the research questions had many benefits since the study sought subjective experiences of city branding. Other methods might be designed in ways that are advantageous, but for this study, it was deemed essential to hear in-depth sports clubs' experiences. Of course, as mentioned the authors in the interview have an impact on the answers that are given. Still, the interviews as a method, despite its potential flaws, were an ideal method to use for the study's research aim.

6.3 Recommendations for future research

For future studies, one recommendation is to include more stakeholder groups in order to include more perspectives in the study. The motives and practises as stated by the sports clubs may be interpreted and performed differently by other stakeholders in a city. Thus, this might bring forth other practices and motives that have not come to light in this study. One example could be to look at different cultural stages and their practices in creating the city brand.

Another aspect could be to continue with a more comparative study of which practices are more effective than others depending on the sports club, sport, city, and other stakeholders. This could be done as a quantitative study with measurable variables or as a qualitative study including a focus group of sports club representatives discussing the best practices. A quantitative study could choose to focus on variables relevant to city branding and sports clubs, such as the number of social projects, number of business partners, and happiness among residents to mention a few. These variables could then be used to compare clubs and cities to find which practices work best for city branding.

The scope of future studies of sports clubs could suggestively be to look at more clubs, or more types of sports to see if new practices are found. Another suggestion is to focus on only one sport but with a larger geographic area. This study looks at sports clubs in Sweden, which means that the findings are impacted by Swedish culture. In future studies, other sports cultures could be explored, for example, European or North American cultures, either to give a new perspective or to compare. Moreover, continuing in line with the topic of professional sports clubs, but from a different perspective, is the suggestion to look more closely at the relationship between the city government and the sports clubs. As the city government has a lot of influence in city branding (Sarabia-Sanchez & Cerda-Bertomeu, 2018) it would be beneficial to create a better understanding of the relationship between the two different groups, to aim for generating knowledge of how these two stakeholder groups can co-create a city brand optimally.

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Appendixes

Appendix A

INTERVIEW [n°]

Name of participant:

Date and time:

Interviewer:

Topic	Consent (Y/N)
Thank you / Present the research	N/A
Recording the session	
Possibility to receive the transcript	
Quotations / Code names	

DEMOGRAPHICS/INFO QUESTIONS

Person

- Which sports club do you work at?
- How long have you been working there?
- What is your role in your organisation?
 - What do you work with, in your role?
- How long have you been working in your role?

Club

- Can you tell me about your club's origin?
- What merits has your club achieved?
- What league is your club playing in, and how long have they played there?
- How is your club's organisation built?
- How is your club's operation built?

- What events does your club arrange?
- How does your club finance its operation and organisation?

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS (to be asked throughout the interview):

- Why?
- Could you explain it in more detail?
- Can you provide an example?

MAIN QUESTIONS

Vision

- How would you describe your club's vision?
- What would you say has shaped your club's vision?
- How would you describe your strategy to reach the vision?
- What would you say is necessary to reach the vision?
- How does your club work actively with the vision?
- How does your club communicate your vision to outsiders?

Stakeholder engagement

- Who does your club collaborate with?
- When does your club need to collaborate with others?
- How can the collaborations be organised, in terms of what you do for each other?
- How can the collaborations be organised, in terms of networks of collaborators?
- Why do you think others want to collaborate with your club?
- Those you collaborate with, in what ways do you have similar visions/interests?
- In what instances do you say no to collaborations?

Resource allocation

- What would you say that your organisation is good at?
- What value can your club add to the city that the city itself cannot?
- What do you think are your clubs most important asset/s?

Infrastructure

- What kind of project is and have your club been involved in?

- The projects your club is and has been involved in, how has the city been able to benefit from them?
- In what ways would you say your club benefits from being involved in projects that promote/benefit the city?

City brand

- According to you, what advantages are there for your club with having a city with a good brand/reputation?

Finally, Is there anything else you would like to add or develop on?

Appendix B

This form has been influenced by Cura Rodriguez & Dal Zovo's (2021) thesis, the last part (The research participant understands and confirms that:) is a citation from their thesis.

Interview Consent Form

Research project title

“Sports Clubs Role in Branding of Host City”

Research investigators

Hofvander, Måns

Olsson, Fanny

Research participant's name

.....

Description of the research

This research explores the role a sports club can exercise in city branding, by asking sports clubs about its practices. The interview will focus on the participant's (representatives from sports clubs) opinions and experience of city branding activities by their club. This research will take the first steps of describing how city branding can be practiced by the stakeholder group sports clubs, through interviews.

Estimated duration of the interview

Approximately 60 minutes.

The research participant understands and confirms that:

- Participation in this research is voluntary.
- The participant has the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.
- The researchers do not anticipate any risks associated with the participant's contribution.
- The participation does not entitle the participant to any financial compensation nor benefits.
- The interview will be held at site or through the platform Zoom, via a link provided by the researchers.
- The interview will be recorded and a transcript will be produced.
- The access to the interview material (e.g. recording, transcript) will be limited to the researchers and the relevant academic stakeholders (e.g. supervisor).

- The information gathered during the interview will remain confidential and will be stored securely.
- The interview recording will be kept until the submission of the research report, then destroyed.
- The research report may contain direct or indirect quotations of the participant.
- Any summary of interview content, or any direct quotations from the interview, that will appear on the research report will be anonymised so that the participant cannot be identified.
- Care will be taken to ensure that any type of information that could identify the participant is not revealed.
- The participant can request a copy of the interview transcript and make edits as they feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the agreements made about confidentiality.
- The participant is free to contact the researchers to ask any questions about the research.

By verbal consent, the participant agrees to the terms indicated above.