

**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

IPBA

IPBA 2025

9th International Place Branding Association Annual Conference

Manchester, 29-31 October 2025

Department of Marketing, International Business and Tourism
Manchester Metropolitan University



With the support of:



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Manchester**



We are a triple accredited Business School:



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Welcome

Chairman of the IPBA welcome:

Robert Govers, Chairman of the International Place Branding Association

It is with great pleasure and satisfaction that I welcome you to the 9th Annual Conference of the International Place Branding Association (IPBA) in the fantastic city of Manchester, no less.

This conference is one of the largest we have ever assisted in hosting and we are sincerely grateful for the fact that the Department of Marketing, International Business and Tourism, of the Manchester Metropolitan University Business School is hosting us. MMU doesn't just employ one, but two of our six IPBA board members, so it is most appropriate that we would end up organising the conference in Manchester at some stage. Now, 2025, we are here.

What is more, from the perspective of place branding, Manchester has often – and for many years – been analysed, debated and presented as a notable international city branding case study. The cliché is – of course – that it doesn't just have one, but two soccer teams with global appeal. Part of the trick of place branding is to organise imaginative on-brand initiatives that are relevant to external audiences. So, having two soccer teams that employ players from numerous countries – players who most likely also represent their respective countries at international tournaments and are celebrities back home – is of incalculable value for the city that these two soccer teams are named after. The city can count on massive but “gratis” public-facing ambassadorial representation.

Therefore, it is an honour to be here and I trust we will have a great conference.



“It is with great pleasure and satisfaction that I welcome you to the 9th Annual Conference of the International Place Branding Association (IPBA) in the fantastic city of Manchester, no less.”

Robert Govers

Chairman of the International Place Branding Association

Welcome by the Conference Chair and Co-Chairs:

Mihalis, Chloe and Nikos

Dear IPBA 2025 delegates,

Welcome to Manchester! It is a real honour and a great pleasure to act as hosts of the 9th IPBA conference and to the warm and friendly community of the IPBA.

Some of you find again here your old colleagues and friends, some of you join for the first time, but surely not for the last! As the 'Hotel IPBA' (the IPBA Anthem) lyrics say, once you find this lovely community, "you never want to leave".

As conference co-chairs, we did our best to plan an inclusive, engaging and fun conference that will remain in your memories for a long time and that will make the lyrics come true: those that come to Manchester for their first IPBA conference will become part of our community and stay with us for a long time.

We had great support in organising the conference by the IPBA Board and by our very own Manchester Metropolitan University, the Faculty of Business and Law, the Business School and the Department of Marketing, International Business and Tourism. We were particularly fortunate to count on the assistance of the Institute of Place Management and we were very happy to have the support of the city's Marketing Manchester office and its international airport.

This year, the conference received a record number of submissions of paper presentations, case studies, panel discussions, artworks for the IPBA Art Gallery, and presentations for the Doctoral Colloquium. We have accommodated in the programme as many as we could. We have also invited Keynote Speakers who – we are sure – will set the tone and stimulate discussion about all things place branding. Looking at the conference programme reveals the incredible array of topics and approaches that make place branding the fascinating field that it is and the IPBA (i.e. all of you) an amazing community.

We hope you will find the sessions of the conference stimulating, you will exchange ideas, experiences and future plans, you will have fun at the social events and you will enjoy each other's company, as well as the great city of Manchester.

Welcome again!

The conference co-chairs



Mihalis Kavaratzis
Conference Chair



Chloe Steadman
Conference Co-Chair



Nikos Ntounis
Conference Co-Chair

Welcome by the Head of Department, Marketing, International Business and Tourism:

Riccardo De Vita

Dear IPBA 2025 delegates,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the Department of Marketing, International Business and Tourism (MIBT) of Manchester Metropolitan University! It is a great honour for us to host the International Place Branding Association conference.

MIBT has a long history of contributing to the fascinating discipline of place branding through the work of several of its members, including two members of the IPBA Board. Our dedication to place based research is rooted in the purpose of our University: Transforming lives through the power of education and research. I am sure many of you are familiar with the work done by the Institute of Place Management, which is very strongly related to the marketing and branding of places. You will also be familiar with the Journal of Place Management and Development, which we are proud to host.

For these reasons, having you spending time with us makes us feel that this conference is also an opportunity to have many friends visiting our home; likewise, we hope that these days will feel like visiting friends. So let's enjoy those moments together, spend time with old friends and build new connections. We want to stay in touch and continue to hear from you all.

The conference organising committee worked hard in the last months to plan for you a fruitful and memorable conference. I hope you will enjoy the conference, our hospitality and the city of Manchester!

Riccardo De Vita



“The conference organising committee worked hard in the last months to plan for you a fruitful and memorable conference. I hope you will enjoy the conference, our hospitality and the city of Manchester!”

Riccardo De Vita

Head of Department, Marketing, International Business and Tourism

Support

We would like to thank the following for their support:



We are a triple accredited Business School:



Our keynote speakers



Dominic Medway

**Pro-Vice Chancellor of
Faculty of Business
and Law**



Gary Warnaby

**Professor of retailing
and Marketing**



Victoria Braddock

Marketing Manchester



Sebastian Zenker

**Copenhagen
Business School**



John Till

**Founding Director,
thinkingplace**



Therasa Garrod

**Tourism and Place
Manager, Dragonfly
Management (Bolsover)**

Get to know Manchester

Manchester is a compact, walkable city with excellent public transport links. The city centre is pedestrian-friendly and easy to explore on foot. Key attractions, shopping areas, and cultural sites are often just a short walk apart.

Manchester's tram system is fast, reliable, and connects the city centre with key destinations like Old Trafford, Etihad Campus, MediaCityUK, and The Trafford Centre. Trams run frequently, and contactless payment is available at all stops. An extensive bus network covers Greater Manchester. The Bee Network unifies many routes under one system. Within the city centre, free 'shuttle' buses run circular routes linking major train stations, shopping areas, and business districts.

The city is also served by several central stations: Manchester Piccadilly, Victoria, and Oxford Road, connecting you with the wider region and beyond. Bike lanes are expanding across the city. You can hire e-bikes and e-scooters via apps such as Bee Active or Lime for short, eco-friendly journeys. Black cabs are available at major hubs. App-based services like Uber and Bolt operate across the city.



The Manchester bee – emblem of industry, unity and resilience

As you visit the wonderful City of Manchester, you will see a huge presence of ‘The Manchester Bee’. So, to save you some browsing on the internet, here’s a little bit about the famous bee.

Origins & Industrial Identity

- The Manchester bee, specifically the worker bee, became a defining symbol in 1842 when the city adopted a coat of arms featuring seven bees around a globe, celebrating Manchester as a global industrial powerhouse
- As a “hive of activity,” the bee embodies the tireless work ethic and collective strength that powered Manchester’s rise during the Industrial Revolution, especially in cotton manufacturing

Citywide Iconography

- The bee motif is visible everywhere. From street furniture and bollards to the mosaic floor in Manchester Town Hall, Mills in Ancoats, and architecture like Spring Gardens, Hotel Gotham, and the Kimpton Clocktower
- Prestigious institutions, including the City Council, University of Manchester, and Manchester Metropolitan University, also display worker bees in their heraldry

Revival of Nature Community

- The city’s historic air pollution nearly drove bees away, but environmental restoration brought them back. Today, rooftop beehives flourish at key sites like the Cathedral, Printworks, Art Gallery, and conference centres, with honey even sold locally
- Bee-spotting is a charming way to explore the city, while growing bee-attracting flowers supports ongoing biodiversity efforts

Resilience Post-2017

Following the Manchester Arena bombing in May 2017, the bee became a powerful symbol of unity. It appeared in graffiti, protest banners, fundraising tattoo appeals, and the public art trail Bee in the City, featuring 50 decorated sculptures.

Ongoing legacy

- The Bee Network, launched in 2023, integrates buses, trams, cycling, and walking routes across Greater Manchester, using the bee’s yellow and black colours as branding
- In arts, culture, hospitality, and retail, the symbol continues to thrive and draw visitors

The Manchester bee tells a powerful story of a city built on industry and innovation, blossoming into a close-knit, environmentally aware, and resilient community. It reminds us that individual effort, united, creates something greater than the sum of its parts, just like workers in a hive.



Local places of interest

In addition to Manchester Metropolitan University's beautiful campus, why not visit some of the wonderful places Manchester has to offer?

**20.
STORIES**
|

**CHINA TOWN
MANCHESTER**

LOWRY

**Manchester
Art Gallery**

MEDIA CITY

**NORTHERN
QUARTER**

**SCIENCE+
INDUSTRY
MUSEUM**

SPINNINGFIELDS

A city immersed in history:

Abraham Lincoln Statue

A lesser-known landmark in Lincoln Square, gifted to Manchester for its stand against slavery during the American Civil War.

Stephenson's Rocket Replica

Found at the Science and Industry Museum, this tribute to Manchester's railway heritage celebrates the industrial past.

The Trafford Centre

One of the UK's largest shopping and leisure destinations, featuring over 200 stores, restaurants, a cinema, mini golf, and even a SEA LIFE aquarium.

National Football Museum

Located in the city centre, this museum explores the history and cultural impact of football in England, with interactive exhibits and iconic memorabilia.

Manchester Art Gallery

A free-entry gallery in the city centre, showcasing 19th-century masters, contemporary works, and pre-Raphaelite favourites.

Northern Quarter

A creative, independent district filled with street art, quirky cafés, record shops, bars, and vintage boutiques.

The Lowry

Located at Salford Quays, this cultural hub features theatres, galleries (including works by L.S. Lowry), and riverside dining.

MediaCityUK

Home to the BBC, ITV, and the University of Salford, offering studio tours, waterside dining, and a vibrant media and digital scene.

China Town

One of the largest in the UK, offering authentic East Asian cuisine, cultural landmarks, and annual celebrations, including the Chinese New Year.

Science and Industry Museum

Tells the story of Manchester's industrial and scientific achievements, perfect for families and history enthusiasts alike.

Spinningfields

A modern financial district with upscale restaurants, bars, and shops, also home to cultural venues like the People's History Museum.

Manchester Arndale

A large indoor shopping centre in the heart of the city with over 200 retailers and dining options.

Deansgate

One of Manchester's oldest and longest streets, home to bars, shops, and landmarks including the Beetham Tower and John Rylands Library.

A city obsessed with sporting excellence:

Old Trafford Football Stadium

Home to Manchester United, this legendary ground offers stadium tours, a museum, and matchday experiences for football fans.

Old Trafford Cricket Ground

The iconic home of Lancashire County Cricket Club and a major venue for international Test matches, offering a rich sporting atmosphere (and yes, it was named 'Old Trafford' before the Football Ground).

Etihad Stadium

Manchester City FC's state-of-the-art home, located in East Manchester. Tours include behind-the-scenes access to the dressing rooms and pitch side.

Manchester Aquatics Centre

Built for the 2002 Commonwealth Games, this elite swimming and diving venue is open to the public and used by top athletes.

National Taekwondo Centre

The official training base for GB Taekwondo, offering insights into elite martial arts performance and hosting competitions and community events.

National Cycling Centre

Includes the UK's first indoor velodrome, BMX arena, and mountain bike trails, home to British Cycling and Olympic champions.

AJ Bell Stadium

Located in Salford, this modern venue hosts both rugby league (Salford Red Devils) and rugby union (Sale Sharks) fixtures.



Halloween in the City:

Launched in 2016, Halloween in the City is produced by Manchester City Centre BID and supported by Manchester City Council, Visit Manchester and Manchester Accommodation BID.

MCR Monsters:

Halloween in the City is famous for its inflatable monsters that take over key city centre landmarks. They're great for photo opportunities, or just for having a mooch and trying to find them all! There's seventeen to search for from 25 – 31 October, and you can find their locations at the MCR Monster Map. After dark, they'll be lit up in an eerie green light.

Buildings Go Green for Halloween

This Halloween, Manchester's iconic buildings across the city will be illuminated in ghoulish green, transforming the skyline into a haunting spectacle. It's the perfect backdrop for spooky selfies and atmospheric evening strolls with a Halloween twist.

- Follow @HalloweenMCR on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [TikTok](#)
- Download the [MCR Monster Map and Visitor Guide](#)
- See the list of [Buildings Go Green for Halloween](#)



Hauntological atmospheres of the UK high street: Consuming Manchester's Halloween in the City

An academic paper, written by Nikos Ntounis

[Read article >](#)

Unique landmarks and monuments

John Rylands Library

A breathtaking neo-Gothic library with rare manuscripts and stained glass -free to enter and a local favourite.

The Whitworth & Whitworth Park

An award-winning art gallery connecting indoor exhibits with nature, south of the city centre.

Heaton Park

A vast green space with a boating lake, animal farm, gardens, and Manchester's highest viewpoint.

Castlefield Urban Heritage Park

Walk among Roman ruins, canals, and industrial-age bridges in this tranquil yet historic district.

Manchester Cathedral

A working medieval cathedral with modern touches and a beautiful riverside location.

AO Arena

Hosting global music, comedy, and sporting events, just steps from Victoria Station.

Manchester Museum

Home to T-Rex fossils, Egyptian mummies, and natural history exhibits, recently refurbished and family-friendly.

Vimto Monument

A whimsical sculpture honouring Manchester's own fruity soft drink, located near the University on Granby Row, featuring oversized fruit and a wooden bench.

Alan Turing Memorial (Sackville Gardens)

A tribute to the WWII codebreaker and father of modern computing, seated on a bench in a peaceful park near Canal Street.

Emmeline Pankhurst Statue

Celebrating the suffragette leader born in Manchester, this statue stands proudly in St. Peter's Square.

IPBA 2025 – Final programme

Day 0 – Wednesday 29 October

13:00 – 13:30	Business School (BS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrival and registration Address: MMU Business School, Oxford Road, Manchester, M15 6BH 	
13:30 – 13:45	BS 3.15	Doctoral Colloquium – Welcome and coffee	
13:45 – 14:15	BS 3.15	Doctoral Colloquium Keynote Speech – Gary Warnaby	
	BS 3.15 BS 3.16	Session A (BS 3.15) – Chair: Nigel Morgan <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Adapting city branding to the challenges of tourism sustainability: an analysis of audiovisual communication in the last decade – <i>Sara Góis</i> Co-Creating Egypt's Cultural Destination Brand Image: Tourist- Generated TikTok Content in Creative Tourism Contexts – <i>Sara Seifallah Abdelrahman Ibrahim</i> Barcelona's Public Spaces: A Model for Spontaneous Intergenerational Interactions through Urban Design – <i>Natalie Raben</i> Challenging innovation narratives: Stakeholder networks and local knowledge in wine tourism as drivers of place branding and regional development – <i>Afroditi Kazakou</i> 	Session B (BS 3.16) – Chair: Gary Warnaby <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Could image of a country in conflict be managed: Place branding as a tool for conflict reconstruction and reputational security – <i>Martina Kolská</i> AI-Enhanced Place Branding for Coastal Tourism: A Qualitative Study of St Annes – <i>Georgina Bearman</i> Branding Slovakia – <i>Zuzana Mikulasova</i> From promotion to governance: towards a comprehensive place branding policy ecosystem – <i>Mihails Potapovs</i>
16:15 – 16:30	BS 3.15	16:15 – 16:30 Doctoral Colloquium Closing	
16:45 – 18:30	Walking Tour	Starting at BS entrance (included but subject to participation and limited capacity)	
18:30 – 21:00	Welcome Reception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Alchemist (included) Address: 1 New York Street, Manchester, M1 4HD Serving a special 'IPBA 2025' Menu of Cocktails (and mocktails) Sponsored by: Manchester Metropolitan University Faculty of Business and Law 	

Day 1 – Thursday 30 October

08:00 – 09:00	Holiday Inn Manchester City Centre		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Arrival and Registration (Basement Lobby)Address: 25 Aytoun Street, Manchester, M1 3DT		
09:00 – 17:00	Holiday Inn Basement Lobby		Publishers Stands (Edward Elgar, Goodfellow, Routledge)		
09:00 – 09:15	Hacienda	Welcome	Mihalis Kavaratzis and Robert Govers (IPBA)		
09:15 – 09:35	Hacienda	Opening Speech	Dominic Medway – Manchester Metropolitan University		
09:35 – 10:20	Hacienda	Keynote Address 1	Victoria Braddock – Marketing Manchester		
10:20 – 10:50	Lobby	COFFEE BREAK			
10:50 – 12:10 PARALLEL 1		Hacienda 1	Hacienda 2	Wilson 1	Wilson 2
		Session 1a	Session 1b	Session 1c	Session 1d
		Heritage	Branding wild places	Nations on stage	Participatory case studies
		Chair: Sonya Hanna	Chair: Stella Kladou	Chair: Giannina Warren	Chair: Nikos Ntounis
		7. Destination Image Attributes with Repertory Grid: The Case of North Wales UNESCO World Heritage Sites – <i>Sonya Hanna, Sara Parry and Linda Osti</i>	34. Place making and branding based on wildlife conservation: the case of Costa Rica place branding harmonizing human well-being and biodiversity protection – <i>Norberto Muñiz-Martínez, Aroa Costa-Feito, Boris Cabezas Marín, Ana Lorena Vargas-Bolaños and Jorge Fallas-Cascante</i>	20. From destination to influence: How tourism shapes national Reputation and global appeal – <i>Aglae Perrin and Diva Shah</i>	56. Stakeholder Management: Necessity or Norm? – A Case Study of Eindhoven 365 – <i>Cuno Groenewoud</i>

Day 1 – Thursday 30 October

10:50 – 12:10 PARALLEL 1	Hacienda 1	Hacienda 2	Wilson 1	Wilson 2
	Session 1a	Session 1b	Session 1c	Session 1d
	Heritage	Branding wild places	Nations on stage	Participatory case studies
	Chair: Sonya Hanna	Chair: Stella Kladou	Chair: Giannina Warren	Chair: Nikos Ntounis
	112. City Anniversaries as Instruments of Place Branding – Irina Shafranskaia	92. Place branding and sustainable development in mountain destinations: the perspective of place management stakeholders – Elisenda Aguilera-Cora	88. Nation Branding for Sustainable Development: Leveraging Heritage to Connect the Past to The Future – Kofi Aning Jnr, Juliana Akushika Andoh and Kwabena Oppong-Nkrumah	59. Stanwell Speaks: A Data-Led Community Engagement Model for Place-Based Strategic Development – Iryna Mushtina and Solette Sheppardso
	115. Extensibility of place brand: A case study of rice selective breeding and rebranding in Japan – Tenta Okada	26. Does special interest tourism lead to sustainability? Place vs. destination branding breaking the myth in the case of Mount Olympus – Stella Kladou, Thomas Karagiorgos, Olga Polyakova, Gill Pomfret, Apostolia Ntovoli and Kostas Alexandris	104. Persona-Driven Public Diplomacy at Expo 2025: Ambassadors' Social Media Practices and Nation Branding in Japan – Junko Nishikawa	129. Community Development as a Strategic Tool for Place Branding – Marco Bevolo, Elena Fabris, Ilaria Rapaccini Bellini and Mattia Monacelli
12:10 – 13:00	Restaurant	LUNCH		

Day 1 – Thursday 30 October

13:00 – 14:40

PARALLEL 2

Hacienda 1	Hacienda 2	Wilson 1	Wilson 2
Session 2a	Session 2b	Session 2c	Session 2d
People and culture	Experiencing place brands	Nation branding	Branding tourist places
Chair: Marta Herezniak	Chair: Ilze Mertena	Chair: Viriya Taecharungroj	Chair: Assumpció Huertas
22. Place Brand Citizenship Behaviour: Expert Perspectives on a Multidisciplinary Conceptualization and Measurement – Marta Herezniak, Magdalena Florek and Laura Ripoll Gonzalez	12. From Desires to Destinations: An Appetite-Based Segmentation Model for Strategic Place Branding – John Story	1. The Non-Linear Impact of Soft Power and Nation Branding on Economic Performance – Viriya Taecharungroj and Ake Pattaratanakun	93. Should they stay or should they go? Media framing analysis of the tourism degrowth movement – Elisenda Aguilera-Cora, Roger Cuartielles and Laia Puig-Fontrodona
29. Local People Engagement in Adaptive Place Branding – Tuomas Pohjola, Johanna Aalto and Teemu Haukioja	15. Lived place brand experiences of foreign residents: A longitudinal study in Oulu, Finland – Mohsin Abdur Rehman, Mari Juntunen and Eeva-Liisa Oikarinen	57. “The Other” Narrative of Brand Image Communication of Chinese Cities from the Perspective of Interculturality: A Case Study of IShowSpeed’s “China Travel” live streams on YouTube – Lan Li and Xingyao Li	52. From Olympic Legacy to Sustainable Tourism: Innovative Branding Strategies for Chongli as a Ski Destination in the Post-Pandemic Era – Xiaoyun Gui and Jianxin Pan
35. Defining a new type of place consumer: Ancestral travelers and place branding – Stephanie Longo	69. From aisle to archive: Visualizing place through Zimbabwean wedding rituals – Erisher Woyo	116. The Nation as a Parent: Understanding the Effects of Anthropomorphism on Citizen Confidence, Brand Love and Psychological Ownership – Kofi Aning Jnr, Melissa Zulu, Juliana Akushika Andoh, Linda Narh and Godfred Kankam	83. Limitations of augmented reality in place branding of peripheral destinations – Irene Pinto and Assumpció Huertas

Day 1 – Thursday 30 October

13:00 – 14:40 PARALLEL 2	Hacienda 1	Hacienda 2	Wilson 1	Wilson 2
	Session 2a	Session 2b	Session 2c	Session 2d
	People and culture	Experiencing place brands	Nation branding	Branding tourist places
	Chair: Marta Herezniak	Chair: Ilze Mertena	Chair: Viriya Taecharungroj	Chair: Assumpció Huertas
	77. Exploring Geographical Indications (GIs) through socio-spatial lenses: the case of the Prosecco – Francesca Checchinato, Vladi Finotto, Andrea Lucarelli, Christine Mauracher and Chiara Rinaldi	67. Re-framing the role of community capital in regional branding and development – Shalini Bisani, Laura Reynolds and Amy Lewis	64. Nation branding research: themes, trends, and gaps – Mounia Rafai, Hicham Echattabi and Vincent Mabillard	123. Unlocking Capital Through Place Branding: Financing Tourism and Wellness in Thailand's New S-Curve Economy – Ake Pattaratatanakun and Nuttapol Assarut
	97. The National Football League's International Expansion: A Place Branding Perspective on Market Viability and Cultural Diplomacy in London, Mexico City, and Frankfurt – Lauren Jameson, Lori McKinnon and Jami Fullerton	78. Multisensory place brand experience and emotions: a theoretical framework for the affective dimension of place brand experience – Jasper Eshuis	103. The Global Soft Power Index 2025: The zero-sum game of soft power – Konrad Jagodzinski	
14:40 – 15:00	Lobby	COFFEE BREAK		

Day 1 – Thursday 30 October

15:00 – 16:20 PARALLEL 3	Hacienda 1	Hacienda 2	Wilson 1	Wilson 2
	Session 3a	Session 3b	Session 3c	Session 3d
	Storying places	Feeling place brands	Contested place brands	Urban case studies
	Chair: Jose Fernandez-Cavia	Chair: Chloe Steadman	Chair: Christopher Pokarier	Chair: Emma Björner
	4. Understanding Transmedia Tourism: A Definition and Future Research Directions – Silvia Casellas and José Fernandez-Cavia	14. Morally obliged to care: Rethinking inclusive place branding through feminist ethics – Cecilia Cassinger, Laura Ripoll González and Monica Porzionato	13. Puerto Rico as a Brand: A Contested Destination – Carlos Suárez Carrasquillo	89. A new place branding strategy for Amsterdam – what kind of city do we want to be and project? – Egbert Wolf
	49. Beyond Mascots: The Kumamon Strategy as an Evolutionary Model of Place Branding – Eiko Yamashita, Sayaka Toyokawa and Kiyoko Yanagida	47. The Emotional Infrastructure of Place Branding: Deep Acting, Relational Labour, and Social Capital in 24/7 Promotional Work – Giannina Warren	117. Securing the brand: How are the post-communist buffer states attempting to enforce their security by rebranding – Martina Kolská	108. “Stockport isn’t shit”: The inter-relationship between shaping the experience and image of towns and cities – Christopher Wade
	53. Innovative Applications of Staged Narratives in Large-Scale Sports Events: Transforming Audience Engagement and Media Storytelling in the 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games Media Tours – Xiaoyun Gui and Jianxin Pan	48. The powerful impact of emotions: A missing link in place brand management – Maria Psimouli, Kalipso Karantinou, Stella Kladou and Mihalís Kavaratzis	58. Politics against place branding in the current international education market – Christopher Pokarier	111. The long-term impact of city branding-The case of Athens – Eirini Vlassi, Nikolaos Georgios Karachalis and Andreas Papatheodorou

Day 1 – Thursday 30 October

15:00 – 16:20 PARALLEL 3		Hacienda 1	Hacienda 2	Wilson 1	Wilson 2
		Session 3a	Session 3b	Session 3c	Session 3d
		Storying places	Feeling place brands	Contested place brands	Urban case studies
		Chair: Jose Fernandez-Cavia	Chair: Chloe Steadman	Chair: Christopher Pokarier	Chair: Emma Björner
		91. Integrating Sense of Place and Co-created Storytelling in Place Branding: The Evolution of the Setouchi Triennale – <i>Linyuan Cui and Masato Shoji</i>	124. Branding from the Inside Out: The Role of Employee Wellbeing, Organizational culture, in Shaping place Identity and Destination Branding – <i>Maria Vrasida and Marilena Antoniadou</i>	18. Including Protest Voices in the Place Branding Process: Towards a Typology of Anti-Tourism Movements’ Communication in Recent Years – <i>Sara Góis and Cecilia Cassinger</i>	90. Reframing Talent Attraction through Place Branding: The Case of Gothenburg’s Future Workforce Strategy – <i>Emma Björner</i>
16:20 – 16:35	Break	Return to main room			
16:35 – 17:20	Hacienda	Keynote Address 2	Sebastian Zenker – Copenhagen Business School		
19:20 – 23:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Manchester Metropolitan University Business School Atrium – Gala Dinner (included)Join us for a delicious three-course meal, the Best Paper award ceremony, the announcement of IPBA 2026 and a few surprises...				

Day 2 – Friday 31 October

09:00 – 09:15	Holiday Inn Basement Lobby		Arrival and registration		
09:15 – 10:00	Hacienda	Keynote Address 3	John Till and Therasa Garrod – thinkingplace and Bolsover		
10:00 – 10:20	Lobby	COFFEE BREAK			
10:20 – 11:40 PARALLEL 4	Hacienda 1		Hacienda 2	Wilson 1	Wilson 2
	Session 4a		Session 4b	Session 4c	Session 4d
	Branding neglected places		Design and space	Engaging audiences	Green place branding
	Chair: Nicholas Karachalis		Chair: Martin de Jong	Chair: Massimo Giovanardi	Chair: Cecilia Pasquinelli
	44. Spatial context matters: A conceptual framework for urban and rural-peripheral place branding – <i>Olga Rauhut Kompaniets and Daniel Rauhut</i>		39. The interplay of design, architecture and city branding in shaping city diplomacy – <i>Victoria Avila Duque</i>	120. Teaching Place Branding in Japan: Towards a Framework for Undergraduate Engagement – <i>Adam Johns</i>	105. Towards green conation in travel and tourism: The role of green nation branding – <i>Tafadzwa Matiza and Elmarie Slabbert</i>
	46. Branding in spaces of contested place identity: Sweden’s vulnerable urban areas – <i>Cecilia Cassinger and Ola Thufvesson</i>		17. How public buildings preserve thick regional identities: Exploring place branding through architecture styles in six French border regions – <i>Martin de Jong and Haiyan Lu</i>	63. TOURResearch: Innovative Research Methodology capturing the real-time visitor experience insight and perception, leading to co-created, data-driven Place Branding Strategies – <i>Dimosthenis Broussalis</i>	85. From Waste to Place Brand: Brand building and stakeholder engagement in local waste management – <i>Cecilia Pasquinelli and Jukka Teras</i>

Day 2 – Friday 31 October

10:20 – 11:40 PARALLEL 4		Hacienda 1	Hacienda 2	Wilson 1	Wilson 2
		Session 4a	Session 4b	Session 4c	Session 4d
		Branding neglected places	Design and space	Engaging audiences	Green place branding
		Chair: Nicholas Karachalis	Chair: Martin de Jong	Chair: Massimo Giovanardi	Chair: Cecilia Pasquinelli
		61. Can islands become “places that matter” and how important is cultural activity for re-branding insularity? The case of the border islands in Greece – <i>Nicholas Karachalis</i>	66. Beyond the desk: Coworking spaces management strategies and the positioning of Barcelona as a nomadic destination – <i>José Ignacio Sánchez Vergara and Marko Orel</i>	119. Exploring the Role of Content Characteristics in Fostering Audience Engagement on Social Media – <i>Noora Al Siyabi, Jamie Marsden and Boshuo Guo</i>	30. Enabling the twin transition through urban social innovation: insights from Málaga (Spain) – <i>Olga Kolotouchkina and Paloma Piqueiras</i>
		125. From ‘heydays’ to ‘maydays’: Place revitalisation through entrepreneurial activity – <i>Robert Bowen</i>	101. Policy Making and Visual Identity in the Promotion of Territorial Units – <i>Anna Adamus-Matuszyńska and Piotr Dzik</i>	98. “Ten songs of Rimini”: reflecting on songwriting as a research platform for more-than-representational marketing inquiries – <i>Massimo Giovanardi</i>	
11:40 – 12:40	Lobby	IPBA Art Gallery Exhibition	Presentation and discussion of this year’s artworks by (alphabetically): Alex Deffner Hong Fan Magdalena Florek Massimo Giovanardi Nicholas Karachalis Kate Mclean Norberto Muñiz-Martínez & colleagues Laura Ripoll Gonzalez Laura Reynolds, Marcus Gomes & Felipe Risada Andrea Szentgyörgyi & Mihalis Kavaratzis Bianca Vaduva & Ioana Stoica		
12:40 – 13:30	Restaurant	LUNCH			

Day 2 – Friday 31 October

13:30 – 15:10

PARALLEL 5

Hacienda 1

Session 5a

Who belongs here?

Chair: Alia El Banna

10. Multispecies place branding – including non-humans in destination stewardship – **Jörgen Eksell, Maria Månsson and Marlène Wiggill**

16. Exploring the Solid and Jelly-Like Dimensions of Place: The Impact of Transformation on Place Identity, Branding, and Promotion – **Alia El Banna**

19. Communal Workouts and Digital Place Branding: Parkrun UK as a Catalyst for Inclusion and a Sense of Belonging – **Hassan Marrie and Ioana S. Stoica**

Hacienda 2

Session 5b

Governance and diplomacy

Chair: Eroze Sthapit

11. Connecting attractiveness and city branding governance: An institutional perspective – **Hicham Echattabi, Vincent Mabillard and Christophe Alaux**

70. Grassroots Activism and the Soft Power of Protests: When the Nation turns against the State – **Sameera Durrani and César Jiménez-Martínez**

79. Identifying the potential contribution of place branding and public diplomacy to the objectives of the African Union Agenda 2063 – **Stephen Little and Mammo Muchie**

Wilson 2

Session 5d

Multi-sensory approaches

Chair: Laura Ripoll Gonzalez

Panel 1 (Fishbowl Session)

Participants:

Zafeirenia Brokalaki, Jaser Eshuis, Mihalis Kavaratzis, Laura Ripoll Gonzalez, Chloe Steadman, Gary Warnaby

Day 2 – Friday 31 October

13:30 – 15:10 PARALLEL 5	Hacienda 1	Hacienda 2		Wilson 2
	Session 5a	Session 5b		Session 5d
	Who belongs here?	Governance and diplomacy		Multi-sensory approaches
	Chair: Alia El Banna	Chair: Eroze Sthapit		Chair: Laura Ripoll Gonzalez
	28. Place branding of dog-friendly leisure spaces: conflicts and opportunities – Maria Månsson			Panel 1 (Fishbowl Session) Participants: Zafeirenia Brokalaki, Jaser Eshuis, Mihalis Kavaratzis, Laura Ripoll Gonzalez, Chloe Steadman, Gary Warnaby
	106. The Role of Student-Athlete Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) Partnerships in Regional City Branding: An Experimental Approach – Kenneth Kim	122. When should the private sector step into a traditionally public sector role? Developing a place brand for an economic region in politically volatile times – Amy Lewis and Andrew Palmer		
15:10 – 15:30	Lobby	COFFEE BREAK		

Day 2 – Friday 31 October

15:30 – 16:50 PARALLEL 6	Hacienda 1		Wilson 1	Wilson 2
	Session 6a		Session 6c	Session 6d
	Co-creating place brands		Digital innovations	Teaching place branding
	Chair: Lisa Källström		Chair: Olga Rauhut Kompaniets	Chairs: Jami Fullerton and Lori McKinnon
	113. Co-creating the experiential value of a destination: The key role of front-line tourism employees – Kalipso Karantinou, Markos Marios Tsogas, Marina Kyriakou, Maria Psimouli, Athanasios Gkaintatzis, Paraskevi Ntzoumanika, Katerina Papakonstantinou, Polyxeni Sardi and Erifyli Benakopoulou		21. Are smart city brands inclusive? An empirical investigation of city branding in the digital transition – Laura Ripoll, Olga Kolotouchkina and Warda Belabas	Panel 2 Participants: Magdalena Florek, Jami Fullerton, Lori McKinnon, Giannina Warren
	23. Co-creation in Place Branding: Systematic Review of Concepts, Actors, and Practices – Xingyi Cao, Laura Ripoll González, Jasper Eshuis, Emma Björner and Martin de Jong		33. Leveraging AI Performance for Nation Branding: The Mediating Role of National Competitiveness – Geeho Jeon	

Day 2 – Friday 31 October

15:30 – 16:50 PARALLEL 6		Hacienda 1		Wilson 1	Wilson 2
		Session 6a		Session 6c	Session 6d
		Co-creating place brands		Digital innovations	Teaching place branding
		Chair: Lisa Källström		Chair: Olga Rauhut Kompaniets	Chairs: Jami Fullerton and Lori McKinnon
		130. Actors’ roles in place branding in the context of place brand co-creation – <i>Ioana Stoica and Mihalis Kavaratzis</i>		42. The Application of Artificial Intelligence in Place Branding Research: A Systematic Literature Review – <i>Sara Seifallah Abdelrahman Ibrahim and Sara Vinyals-Mirabent</i>	Panel 2 Participants: Magdalena Florek, Jami Fullerton, Lori McKinnon, Giannina Warren
25. Role-play in place: a study of public officials’ roles in place branding – <i>Lisa Källström, Laura Ripoll Gonzalez and Janina M. Schaumann</i>					
16:50 – 18:00	Hacienda	Closing Session	IPBA Board		
18:00 – 20:00	Lobby	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Holiday inn Lobby – Farewell Reception (included)To say “goodbye and see you next year”...Sponsored by: Manchester Metropolitan University Department of Marketing, International Business and Tourism			

Day 3 – Saturday 1 November

- Post-Conference tours: A number of interesting tours are offered on additional fee and subject to participation and limited capacity.
- Please see the website for details.

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Adapting city branding to the challenges of tourism sustainability: an analysis of audiovisual communication in the last decade

Sara Góis¹

1. Center for Geographical Studies, University of Lisbon

Aims: This project aims to analyse how tourism sustainability concerns – environmental and sociocultural concerns – have been incorporated into the city branding process, namely, in their audiovisual communication (promotional videos).

Theoretical framework: The promotion of places has traditionally been subordinated to marketing logics that favour the growth of tourism. However, the exponential growth of tourism in recent decades has produced negative externalities (Koçak, Ulucak and Ulucak, 2020). The phenomenon of overtourism, especially in cities, and the worsening climate crisis have increased the debate on the importance of promoting the sustainability of tourism (Aall and Koens, 2019; Holden, Jamal and Burini, 2022). However, it is unclear whether tourist destinations, particularly urban ones, are positioning themselves according to sustainability values. A real adaptation to these challenges not only implies changes in urban planning and management, but also in branding and communication.

Main research approach: This PhD project proposes to analyse the audiovisual communication of cities from a diachronic perspective. The corpus of analysis is the promotional videos of DMOs that have taken part in tourism film festivals since 2010. A visual content analysis will be conducted using the techniques of thematic analysis, semiotic analysis, and multimodal discourse analysis to examine the videos. In addition, interviews will be carried out with a sample of film producers and their clients (DMOs) to gain insight into the contextual conditions and strategic intentions underlying the production of these videos.

Key arguments/findings: This analysis will help determine whether city brands are incorporating sustainability concerns into their branding processes and explore how these sustainability aspects are understood and framed. This project will also encourage discussion on whether this sustainability communication represents a genuine shift in how cities approach tourism, or if it merely serves as green marketing aimed at attracting more visitors.

Conclusions: Urban destinations are the most affected by tourism negative impacts, namely, by overtourism and environmental degradation. As such, their adaptation to sustainability principles is more urgent than ever, especially in the context of meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the targets of the Paris Agreement. Meaningful adaptation requires not only changes in urban planning and management but also a shift in how cities brand and communicate themselves. This project addresses this gap by examining whether and how sustainability concerns have been integrated into city brand communication.

Practical implications: This PhD project aims to highlight and foster discussion on the various ways sustainability is being communicated by city brands.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism; City branding; Urban tourism; Audiovisual communication.

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Keywords: Sustainable tourism; City branding; Urban tourism; Audiovisual communication.

Co-Creating Egypt's Cultural Destination Brand Image: Tourist-Generated TikTok Content in Creative Tourism Contexts

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1. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; Department of Advertising, Public Relations, and Audiovisual Communication

With the ever-growing usage of social media by tourists in travel content creation, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) continue to face the challenge of tourist user-generated content (UGC) outperforming official communications in engagement levels. Thereby, this phenomenon leads to such UGC developing higher destination image influence online (Sarifiyono et al., 2024).

With this study aiming to enhance current destination marketing strategies by DMOs, the research explores the motivation of tourists for creating and sharing content at destination cultural sites in creative tourism contexts. With the goal of leveraging the existing creative tourist UGC superior destination image formation effectiveness, exploring the existing creative tourism content creation processes remain crucial. As destinations with strong cultural narratives have demonstrated superior digital performance, this suggests that cultural depth provides competitive advantage (Choi & Cai, 2022), hence the study focus.

As the evolution of Creative Tourism continues, encompassing 'co-creation' and 'digital' characteristics and 'local culture engagement and participatory' as 'Creative Tourism 4.0' core (Richards, 2021; UNESCO 2006), creative tourism destinations have shown strong connections between local creative capacities, visitor experiences, and digital marketing effectiveness (Dias et al., 2021). But, despite the evolution of creative tourism practices, significant gaps exist in creative tourism destination branding research, particularly the underrepresentation of Middle Eastern destinations (Govers & Go, 2009). With exceptional cultural heritage richness and described as an 'open air museum' (Abdelbary, 2018) due to its multidimensional 5,000-year cultural identity (Dinnie, 2015). This offers ideal conditions for examining how creative tourism experiences translate into digital engagement (Balbaaki, 2024).

Theoretical grounding of the study integrates the Destination Image Theory (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), Co-Creation Theory (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), and Creative Tourism Definition (UNESCO, 2006; Richards, 2021). The conceptual model uses Wei et al., (2023) Digital Co-Creation Ritualized Experience Model, serving as the main model for examining the tourist-content creation experience process. Methodologically, a mixed-method approach for the case study encompassing content analysis methods and qualitative participatory research with stakeholders in-depth interviews will take place.

The study bridges creative tourism with digital destination marketing co-creation and is expected to offer an actionable framework for cultural heritage destination DMOs to leverage 'creative tourist generated content' in their digital marketing strategies. Subsequently, integrating cultural assets & encouraging creative tourists' content creation as primary destination marketing 'assets' for destination image enhancement.

Keywords: Destination branding; Creative tourism; Tourist co-creation; User generated content; Cultural destination Branding; Brand image; Egypt.

Barcelona's Public Spaces: A Model for Spontaneous Intergenerational Interactions through Urban Design

Natalie Raben¹

1. Department of Marketing, International Business and Tourism, Manchester Metropolitan University

Barcelona is celebrated for its vibrant public life and exemplary public spaces (Haddad and Remesar, 2017), providing an ideal context to explore how urban design influences spontaneous intergenerational interactions. This research explores the intersection of public space and public life in Barcelona, focusing on design factors that facilitate intergenerational interactions in public spaces and the principles necessary to replicate these experiences.

Urban environments such as Barcelona possess various typologies of public spaces which include streets, sidewalks, promenades, parks and plazas (Jacobs, 1961). Humanist theory of public space design includes many frameworks and tools used to assess public space health, however, many of these do not account for different user types (Carr et al., 1993; Mehta, 2014; Hespanhol, 2018; Project for Public Spaces, no date). The Aim of this research is to critically analyse theories and frameworks related to public space design and their impacts on social interactions. As the research progresses, the Aims will expand to include deducing design factors that facilitate intergenerational interactions.

The Theoretical Frameworks used for this research include contemporary public space evaluation frameworks from theorists such as Stephen Carr (1993) and Jane Gehl (1987) (Carr et al., 1993; Mehta, 2014; Hespanhol, 2018; Project for Public Spaces, no date). Intergenerational practice theories will include Nelischer and Loukaitou-Sideris's (2023) extrapolation of environmental design strategies from their review paper paired with relative policy such as World Health Organisation's Age-Friendly Cities (2010) and UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities (1996) initiatives (Biggs and Carr, 2015; Nelischer, Loukaitou-Sideris and Wendel, 2024; Global Cities Hub Geneva, 2025; UNICEF, no date).

Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the Main Research Approach will involve ethnographic observations in various public spaces within Barcelona, coupled with interviews of local urban planners and academics to contextualize design impacts. Secondary data collection will include analysis of how contemporary public space evaluation frameworks accommodate diverse age-based requirements.

The Key Arguments suggest that Barcelona's urban design choices uniquely facilitate intergenerational interactions and that contemporary public space evaluation frameworks do not account for user types with differing needs or priorities. Since this research is in its early stages, Findings and Conclusions have not yet been developed.

The Practical Implications of this research will be to provide actionable insights for urban planners and policymakers seeking to create vibrant, inclusive public spaces. It will aim to identify best practices in public space design that promote social well-being and support intergenerational interactions, offering guidance for replicating Barcelona's success in other urban contexts.

Keywords: Public space; Urban planning; Intergenerational interactions.

Challenging innovation narratives: Stakeholder networks and local knowledge in wine tourism as drivers of place branding and regional development

Afroditi Kazakou¹

1. Department of Marketing, International Business and Tourism, Manchester Metropolitan University

The research examines how innovation in the wine tourism sector of the Peloponnese contributes to regional place branding and development, focusing on how local actors conceptualise and enact innovation in ways that challenge dominant narratives. Moving beyond traditional high-tech definitions, the study frames innovation as a relational and experiential process, rooted in local knowledge and stakeholder collaboration. By focusing on low tech sectors, the study situates wine tourism within Smart specialization strategies, examining how tourism can act as a catalyst for cross sector innovation and regional development, that influence tourist experience and policy choices.

Drawing on theories of culture as accumulated shared learning, the research investigates how wine, local production and heritage narratives are mobilised to differentiate places while sustaining community identity and development aims. The project adopts a multi case study approach and uses thematic analysis to qualitatively analyse interviews with key stakeholders, to identify nodes such as temporal place framing, regional branding and product marketing and map barriers and catalysts that can enable inclusive regional development and innovation.

Keywords: Wine tourism; Regional place branding; Heritage; Local knowledge.

Could image of a country in conflict be managed: Place branding as a tool for conflict reconstruction and reputational security

Martina Kolská¹

1. Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

This contribution responds to increasing global geopolitical pressures that underscore the growing importance of reputation in shaping conflict dynamics and national security. The PhD Colloquium presentation shares insights from ongoing research exploring the relationship between place branding and conflict. While not positioning reputation management above conventional reconstruction or security tools, this research emphasizes its relevance within the broader strategic toolkit.

The research builds on Cull's concept of reputational security, suggesting there are reasons to believe that reputation significantly impacts the country's security (Cull, 2022). However, a research gap remains in understanding the role of reputation in conflict reconstruction, particularly concerning humanitarian aid, peace negotiations, and international support. Existing literature on reconstruction and image often limits itself to tourism (Currie, 2020; Alaji et al., 2022; Volcic et al., 2014; Amujo and Otubanjo, 2012; Bassols, 2016), missing the broader implications. The contribution builds on Avraham's (2009) place branding management of countries in crises or Dinnie's (2016) concept of stigmatized country brands.

This contribution approaches place branding from a multidisciplinary perspective while taking a broad strategic perspective (Govers, 2024). Place branding has been challenged because of the often narrow focus on marketing and branding techniques (Anholt, 2008). The complexity of the conflicts, security, and reconstruction offers significant opportunities to enhance understanding of the concept.

The contribution combines two studies. The first examines how place branding strategies enhance reputational security, based on thematic analysis of strategic documents and communication channels from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, complemented by interviews with local practitioners. The second investigates how place branding contributes to reconstruction goals through an analysis of reconstruction documents from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Syria, and Ukraine.

The first-mentioned research revealed multiple mentions of war in Ukraine and the striving of the Baltic states to stress their sovereignty and place as a democratic, innovative, and sustainable partner of the Western world. National symbols were prevalent, including notable occurrences of military motives. The second research uncovered fields such as tourism, FDIs, or innovations had the strongest connections between the need for enhanced reputation and the successful completion of the reconstruction process, pointing out that a cohesive place branding strategy could benefit the process.

These findings, to be presented during the colloquium, offer initial insights into the intersection of conflict, reputation, and security and aim to open space for further research into the strategic use of place branding in crises.

The wartime campaigns, such as Brave Like Ukraine (Kaneva, 2022), Bring Them Home Now, or All Eyes on Rafah, are the viral testaments of the impact of image on public support, humanitarian aid flows, or arms deals. At the same time, the pictures of the Prince of Wales on a tank in Estonia circulated world media, sending a message from the buffer states to the other side of the border. The increasing place branding efforts in the Baltic states, Finland, and Czechia send a similar message – these do not take their reputational security lightly. Analyzing this might have essential practical implications for managing reputation in crises.

Keywords: Conflict reconstruction; Place branding; Reputational security.

AI-Enhanced Place Branding for Coastal Tourism: A Qualitative Study of St Annes

Georgina Bearman¹

1. Department of Marketing, International Business and Tourism, Manchester Metropolitan University

This research investigates how artificial intelligence (AI) can enhance place branding to support the sustainable revitalisation of coastal tourism in St Annes-on-the-Sea, Lancashire. The study addresses a pressing challenge many UK coastal towns, including St Annes face such as economic stagnation, changing visitor expectations, and the need for sustainable growth. While place branding is a well-established field, the integration of AI-driven tools, such as natural language processing and augmented reality, remains underexplored in small-town, coastal contexts.

The research will uncover:

How can AI-enhanced place branding strategies be co-created with local stakeholders to foster sustainable tourism, preserve local identity, and improve St Annes's competitiveness in a changing tourism market

To address this, the study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist methodology. Data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with residents, businesses, and visitors, complemented by ethnographic observations and narrative analysis. The project will also test the efficacy of AI-driven experiences, such as AR heritage tours, and use thematic and sentiment analysis of online data to assess public perceptions and inform strategy.

Expected outcomes include:

- The results will provide a framework for the ethical and effective use of AI in place branding for small coastal town, Insights into stakeholder attitudes toward AI and its role in balancing economic growth with sustainability.

It will also provide practical recommendations for co-creating authentic, technology-enhanced visitor experiences that strengthen local identity.

This research aligns with the International Place Branding Association's conference themes by critically examining digital innovation, stakeholder engagement, and the intersection of place branding with sustainable development. The findings will be relevant to scholars, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to leverage emerging technologies for the benefit of local communities and the broader field of place branding.

Keywords: AI; Artificial Intelligence; Place branding; Augmented reality; Coastal tourism.

Branding Slovakia

Zuzana Mikulasova¹

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The current globalized world has created an environment in which countries face increasing competition not only by offering „best conditions ever” of their business environment, in tourism or foreign investments, but also in the way they are perceived on the international stage. The process of building a country brand has thus become an important tool of strategic communication, with which individual states try to influence their position, image and reputation in the eyes of both domestic and foreign audiences.

Slovakia, as a relatively young state, faces specific challenges in this area. On one hand, it has unique attributes such as natural beauty, cultural heritage, traditions or technological potential, but on the other hand, it still struggles with low brand recognition and frequent confusion with Slovenia or historically with Czechoslovakia. Building the Slovakia brand is therefore perceived not as a luxury but importance, nowadays, in such a highly competitive world. The brand awareness is so often replaced only by marketing communication and its tools. However, it is of key importance to have a recognizable brand for the incoming foreign investment and talent from abroad, support for the export activities of domestic entrepreneurs, development of tourism and economic diplomacy.

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze the process of creating the Slovakia brand and identify the needs for continuous and long-term management of building the Slovakia brand. Subsequently, compare the process of creating a brand in Slovakia with selected countries and propose a model that leads to the development of a strategy, the creation of a brand and its subsequent long-term management. The research will combine qualitative and quantitative techniques. The quantitative research will be based on a questionnaire focused on brand perception of Slovakia, value associations, and level of brand awareness being distributed among domestic and foreign respondents. With the qualitative research based on structured interviews information will be obtained about models of functioning abroad and their impact on macroeconomic indicators in the long-term effort to target the management of the national brand. The thesis also tries to point out the possibilities of how Slovakia could work more effectively with its identity and perceived image abroad, and which elements should be part of its strategic “nation branding” also regarding the marketing communication. Modern countries no longer use only traditional methods of nation branding, but integrate digital technologies, public diplomacy, and environmental strategies to strengthen their identity.

The work consists of four chapters. The first chapter deals with the theoretical foundations of the topic of place, country, state branding and respected definitions. It also pays attention to the current state of solving the issue of the relatively young scientific discipline called “Nation Branding”. The second chapter describes the main and partial goals of the work. By defining the research problem, it also describes the working procedures and scientific methods used in solving the problem. The third chapter describes the results obtained from the researched sources. The fourth chapter contains suggestions on how to practically use the obtained results and recommendations for implementation into practice.

Keywords: Nation branding; Brand Slovakia; Brand identity; Building brand.

From promotion to governance: towards a comprehensive place branding policy ecosystem

Mihalis Potapovs¹

1. University of Latvia

Historically, place branding initiatives have often been viewed and implemented as marketing or promotional activities, isolated from broader public policy contexts. Yet, as nations and regions navigate complex geopolitical, economic and social challenges, the limitations of episodic campaigns have become apparent. This paper aims to reframe place branding as an integral element of public governance, intrinsically linked to foreign and domestic policy and overarching strategic objectives. Building upon and expanding existing theories, the paper argues for a comprehensive policy and governance approach that embeds place branding within broader policy processes.

The paper proposes a governance-oriented framework that reshapes the conception, development, adoption, implementation and evaluation of place branding policies within a holistic policy ecosystem. Four interrelated elements underpin this approach:

1. Contextual alignment, situating place branding within the national (regional, local) strategic agenda to ensure consistency with diplomatic, political, economic and societal goals
2. Collaborative policy design, facilitating coherent and meaningful participation from government institutions, local and regional authorities, private sector partners, and civil society
3. Institutional integration, embedding initiatives through dedicated structures, stable funding and cross-sector routines that guarantee continuity beyond political cycles; and (4) performance measurement, employing a balanced suite of quantitative and qualitative indicators to monitor policy performance, guide resource allocation and inform iterative policy refinement.

To support practical application, a set of indicators is proposed to facilitate systematic evaluation of place branding policies. This evaluative toolkit offers policymakers actionable insights into policy monitoring, enabling evidence-informed strategic decisions across varied policy objectives. By advocating a paradigm shift towards the policy ecosystem approach to place branding, the paper makes both theoretical and practical contributions. It illuminates how fragmented promotional efforts can evolve into coherent policy instruments, equipping policymakers with the frameworks and tools required for integrated, sustainable and impact-driven place branding strategies in today's interconnected world.

Keywords: Place branding policy; Public governance; Stakeholder engagement; Policy evaluation; Policy ecosystem.

IPBA 2025 – 9th International Place Branding Association Annual Conference – DAY 1 THURSDAY 30/10/2025

Session 1A:

Heritage (10:50-12:10)

7. Destination Image Attributes With Repertory Grid: The Case Of North Wales UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Sonya Hanna¹, Sara Parry¹ and Linda Osti¹

1. Bangor University, United Kingdom

North Wales is an established tourist area generating an estimated £1.8bn for the economy per year (North Wales Tourism, 2024). An annual average of 3.7 million overnight domestic trips, 299,000 international visits and 22.7 million Tourism Day visits were made to North Wales between 2017-2019 (Welsh Government, 2021). The region has continued to attract large tourist numbers due to the rise in staycations and the popularity of adventure holidays, however concerns around 'over-tourism' have prompted the Welsh Government to introduce a Tourism Tax from 2027 (BBC News, 2021). Moreover, a report from the Welsh Affairs Committee (2023) suggests that Wales lacks a coherent and recognizable international brand.

Out of four UNESCO World Heritage sites (WHS) in Wales, three are situated in north Wales; the Castles and Town Walls of King Edward I in Gwynedd, the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct in Llangollen and Canal and the Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales (Visit Wales, 2023). WHS status is lauded as a marker of authenticity and quality, with some calling it a 'coveted brand and seal of approval' (Ryan and Silvanto, 2011, p. 306). By promoting a site's cultural and historical uniqueness, the WHS status can boost a place's touristic appeal.

This study adopts a business/organisational perspective of all UNESCO WHS across north Wales to explore their influence on the region's image and the local economy. While research into visitors and resident's perspectives of destinations has gathered momentum (Wang et al., 2021; Afshardoost and Eshaghi, 2020; Akroush et al., 2016), there is a lack of research into destination image from an organisational perspective and none that considers the tourism destination context of North Wales.

A two-stage mixed methods approach was adopted consisting of (1) a series of semi-structured interviews (25 professionals/experts across public, private and third-sector businesses and organisations), and (2) employing the repertory grid method (Eden and Jones, 1984) by randomly shuffling and presenting north Wales destinations (as identified by Visit Wales) in triads to our interviewees for them to express bi-polar attributes to create the repertory grid. A third phase is planned whereby this grid will be incorporated into a survey to collect data across north Wales from public, private, and third sector businesses and organisations within the tourism industry.

The interviews uncovered several bi-polar attributes (62/31 pairs) as representative of north Wales's destination image attributes from the business perspective. Pairs included industrial past/natural landscape, rural picturesque/candy floss belt, coastal/rural, community oriented/tourism orientated, Welsh/English, built for tourists/organically evolved, stagnant/evolving, stay put/adventurer visitor, and upper middle class/working lower class visitor economy. The findings are aimed at the tourism sector to help align the destination development strategies with the identity of the place.

Keywords: Destination image; North Wales; UNESCO World Heritage Sites; Business tourism stakeholders; Qualitative; Repertory grid.

133. Rebranding the Past for the Future: Place Branding Strategies in Beijing's Historic Daji Alley under Urban Regeneration

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In the context of accelerated urbanization and rising concerns over “urban diseases” such as aging infrastructure, overcrowding, and declining cultural cohesion, cities across China are undergoing large-scale urban regeneration. Since the Central Economic Work Conference of 2019 first proposed “urban renewal” as a national strategy, historical neighborhoods—often neglected in modern urban planning—have re-emerged as key arenas for cultural preservation, identity reconstruction, and spatial reinvention. These districts are not only rich in heritage resources, but also hold the potential to become symbolic nodes of soft power through place branding.

This study investigates how place branding can serve as a strategic tool in the regeneration of historical neighborhoods, focusing on the case of Daji Alley in Beijing. Located in the heart of the capital, just 2.8 kilometers from Tiananmen Square, Daji Alley possesses deep cultural and historical significance. From its origins in the Song-Liao period to its prominence during the Ming-Qing dynasties and early 20th-century reform movements, the area embodies a unique convergence of tradition, modernity, and political memory. However, prior to renewal efforts, the neighborhood faced severe deterioration: over 70% of its courtyard houses suffered from structural instability, public facilities were lacking, and ownership disputes hampered any comprehensive intervention.

Through a qualitative case study approach combining field observation, stakeholder interviews, and policy document analysis, the research explores the strategies employed in Daji Alley's brand reconstruction. The project implemented a multi-pronged place branding approach involving:

1. Cultural storytelling and memory reconstruction, leveraging key heritage assets such as the former residence of reformer Kang Youwei and the site of *Weekly Review* edited by Li Dazhao
2. Visual identity design, including signage, architectural preservation, and spatial elements reflecting the hutong culture
3. Experiential placemaking, introducing themed restaurants, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) workshops, and creative retail; and
4. Integrated communication, with digital platforms (WeChat, Xiaohongshu, Douyin) driving awareness and user-generated content.

The results were substantial. Daji Alley's reopening attracted over 3 million visitors in its first month, with significant media coverage from national outlets such as CCTV and Xinhua. Over 50% of businesses in the area were first-store or customized flagship models, generating nearly 300 million RMB in sales within four months. More importantly, the brand repositioning not only stimulated economic vibrancy but also reignited public engagement with Beijing's layered urban heritage.

This paper argues that place branding, when aligned with heritage conservation and participatory urban design, can create a dynamic interface between past and future, memory and modernity. The success of Daji Alley underscores the importance of strategic narrative construction, authentic spatial identity, and cross-sector collaboration in urban branding. It also reveals tensions around commodification and authenticity that need to be carefully negotiated in future heritage branding practices.

The study contributes to the interdisciplinary discourse on place branding by offering a replicable model for integrating cultural heritage into urban regeneration frameworks. Its findings hold relevance for global cities seeking to revitalize historical districts while building distinctive, resilient, and culturally rich urban brands.

Keywords: Place branding; Heritage conservation; Urban renewal; Historical districts.

112. City Anniversaries as Instruments of Place Branding

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Cities worldwide tend to use their milestone anniversaries as strategic tools for place branding and destination marketing (Hannigan, 2007). This paper applies urban studies perspective to examine the relatively recent emergence of city anniversaries as the tool of urban policy (Valois-Nadeau, 2023). During the last decades these celebrations have shifted from heritage-focused, historically inspired performances to the catalysts of urban regeneration, source of city pride and re-imagining, reframing the narrative. Drawing on the author's extensive field materials, including state-commissioned evaluations of large-scale anniversary events in Russian cities (Perm 300, Novokuznetsk 400, Nizhny Novgorod 800), and comparative insights from international cases such as Detroit 300, New Orleans 300, Gothenburg 400, and Vilnius 700, the study provides a cross-cultural analysis of how anniversary events can shape city narratives and development trajectories.

The comparative approach highlights the diversity and development of brand objectives, resident engagement strategies, and legacy outcomes across different governance contexts. The examples of 1990s characterise the jubilees as external image promotion activities and top-down image-building exercises, while the most recent cases highlight economic revitalization, incorporating grassroots cultural festivals and neighborhood celebrations to foster local pride and increasingly experimenting with participatory methods. The shift in anniversary representation accounts for the shift in success metrics: whereas past events prioritized visitor numbers and tourism performance evaluation, contemporary practice across cases emphasizes citizen involvement, volunteerism, and local meaning-making as more authentic indicators of impact.

The study outlines how innovative practices such as public ideation workshops, microgrant programs for community projects, inclusive heritage exhibitions, and urban art initiatives are employed to engage residents in co-creating the jubilee experience. It critically reflects on lessons learned, noting that meaningful resident engagement and a focus on long-term legacy (from improved public spaces to strengthened civic identity) are crucial for avoiding one-off "festivalization" traps and ensuring lasting post-event benefits.

Keywords: City anniversary; Mega-events impact; City branding activities; Residents' involvement.

115. Extensibility of place brand: A case study of rice selective breeding and rebranding in Japan

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Japan has long been known as a rice-producing place, particularly Niigata Prefecture is the most rice-producing place in Japan. However, in the early years, the rice produced in Niigata were poor quality and was called 'bird-straddling rice', meaning that even birds would straddle and pass over it without eating (Niigata Prefecture, 2019). To solve this problem, Niigata Prefecture began to work on improving rice varieties, and the result was Koshihikari, the most widely produced variety in Japan. However, it was difficult to produce and was grown only in Minamiuonuma City in Niigata Prefecture. Therefore, Minamiuonuma City sought to promote and improve its brand image by offering Koshihikari for tourists (Minamiuonuma City, 2009). Thus, the place brand of 'Major production area for quality rice', which started in Minamiuonuma City, was later extended to the whole of Niigata Prefecture.

From the above, this paper aims to clarify the process by which place brand are extended from the municipal to the prefectural level, based on a case study of rice breeding and rebranding in Japan. In particular, the paper focuses on the process by which the place brand of 'Major production area for quality rice' was extended from Minamiuonuma City in Niigata Prefecture.

This paper is based on the place branding proposed by Govers & Go (2009), particularly the Place Brand Performance Gap. Furthermore, I also advance discussion from the position that place brands arise from dialogue and participation among internal and external stakeholders (e.g., Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013; Kavaratzis and Kalandides 2015).

The research method is a literature review and semi-structured interviews (Flick, 1998). The literature will be based on the data published by the government on the history of rice production and brand development. In addition, interviews are conducted with administrative officials and others using questions based on the data.

There are two key findings. Firstly, it shows the extension process of the regional brand. Secondly, it explains the history of the rice industry in Japan from the perspective of place branding. It is important that this case has been identified the process of extending the regional brand from one region to a province along with the development of the rice industry.

In conclusion, this paper clarifies the process of the extensibility of regional brands from the municipal level to the prefecture level, based on examples of rice breeding and rebranding in Japan.

The first practical contribution is the need to establish a regional brand, the first step is to establish the brand in smaller regional units, such as municipalities. The second point is that it showed the importance of refining local industries in building regional brands. The brand image was rebuilt through improved varieties, the efforts of farmers and other local people. Thus, the practical contribution of this paper is that it has shown that it is possible to build a strong local brand, even from the bottom up, by nurturing local industries.

Keywords: Extensibility; Selective-breeding; Re-branding; Rice-industry; Japan.

34. Place making and branding based on wildlife conservation: the case of Costa Rica place branding harmonizing human well-being and biodiversity protection

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3. Biocaminatas Ecotourism Company, Costa Rica
4. Fundación Turismo y Ambiente, Costa Rica

Aims: The aim of this paper is to analyze the concepts of co-creating a sense of place based on wildlife conservation, and place-making by combining human well-being and progress through nature conservation or wildlife restoration.

Theoretical framework: A theoretical-conceptual approach is explored regarding the interactions between nature ecosystems and human service ecosystems. In this context, the influences of nature on human beings and other biotic actors are examined through the concept of Nature's Contributions to People (Díaz et al., 2018 – IPBES); similarly, the influences of human actors on nature are addressed through the concept of actor engagement (Brodie et al., 2019).

Main research approach: The concepts of sense of place, place-making, and place branding are integrated into a model of complex human-environment interactions, thus shaping harmonious socio-ecological systems.

Method approach: Five protected natural areas in Costa Rica have been visited the Monteverde Cloud Forest, and the national parks of Marino Ballena, Corcovado, Cahuita, and Cerro Chirripó. A qualitative approach is adopted, involving onsite observation and in-depth interviews with multiple engaged key actors, including service providers – such as governmental agencies, public administrations, businesses, NGOs, and civil society entities – and service users – such as residents and tourists. Additionally, a netnographic analysis (Kozinets, 2015) is conducted to complement the data analysis.

Key arguments/findings: The importance of wildlife conservation for human well-being is emphasized. Beyond human actors, it is also advocated to incorporate non-human biotic actors (Arnould, 2022) – such as wildlife animals and plants – as key actors, given their essential ecological functions and their longstanding cultural significance for human societies across different historical periods and cultures worldwide.

Conclusions: In a global context of climate change and the increasing fragility of the planet's wild spaces, with the looming threat of extinction for multiple animal and plant species (IPCC, 2022), the need to harmonize human well-being and biodiversity conservation becomes evident.

Practical implications: The case of Costa Rica is analyzed as an example of a small country that has committed to nature conservation and, as a result, has fostered human progress and prosperity. Its emerging ecotourism sector has contributed to raising collective awareness of the benefits of wildlife and biodiversity conservation. This case may serve as a reference for other countries or regions seeking to develop wildlife conservation or restoration strategies as vectors for human progress.

Keywords: Wildlife conservation; Place branding; Human-environmental interactions; Ecotourism; Humans and biotic actors.

118. Historical Research on the Discovery and Protection of Local Resources: The Case of Oze Wetlands in Japan

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2. Yokohama City University, Japan

This paper aims to historically examine the discovery and protection of regional resources in Japan, focusing on the Oze Marshland, a world-renowned Ramsar Convention wetland.

In Europe, particularly in France, efforts to protect and utilize unique regional resources with economic and cultural value have been promoted at the national level since ancient times. A notable example of this is the AOC (appellation d'origine contrôlée) introduced by the French government. AOC certifies agricultural products and foods produced in specific regions using traditional methods and quality standards, guaranteeing the value of products linked to the terroir (the combination of soil, climate, and human factors) unique to that region. Notable examples of this system's success include the world-renowned Bordeaux wines and Camembert cheese from Normandy. These products have established themselves as trusted brands by obtaining AOC certification, which protects their unique flavors and traditional production methods (e.g., Barham, 2003; Gomez et al., 2015). These examples suggest that regional resources can be developed into internationally competitive brands through appropriate institutional design and quality control (Govers and Go, 2009).

On the other hand, in Japan, the marketing value of such regional resources has not been sufficiently explored in academic research or practical initiatives compared to Europe. In recent years, a system based on geographical indication law, known as "regional GI (geographical indication)," has been introduced, and awareness of the importance of protecting regional brands is gradually increasing (Yagi et al., 2019; Shimamoto and Morozumi, 2023). However, the types of regional resources covered by this system are still limited when compared to the diverse regional products found in Europe. This may be since awareness of regional resources in Japan and the maturity of strategies for linking their value to marketing are lagging behind those of European countries.

Therefore, this presentation aims to examine in detail the historical changes in the region centered on the Oze Wetlands, which are globally important wetlands registered under the Ramsar Convention, from the perspective of the discovery and rediscovery of buried regional resources, with a focus on the potential value of regional resources in Japan and ways to sustainably protect them. Specifically, we will focus not only on the natural environmental value of the Oze Wetlands, but also on the diverse regional resources that exist in the surrounding area, such as traditional industries, culture, and landscapes, and examine how these have been recognized and utilized throughout history, as well as what potential value they hold today. The research methods for this study will include literature research, interviews with local residents, and analysis of historical records and materials. Literature research will involve collecting existing studies, reports, and local government documents related to the nature, history, and the culture of the Oze Marsh and its surrounding areas, mainly extracting the descriptions of regional resources. Interviews with residents will involve collecting information directly from people that have knowledge and experience rooted in the region to reveal aspects of regional resources that are not recorded in literature.

Keywords: Geographical indication; Regional resources; Japan; Oze Marshland.

92. Place branding and sustainable development in mountain destinations: The perspective of place management stakeholders

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Mountains are home to over 1.1 billion people (FAO and UNWTO, 2023) and are the second most popular destination in the world (UNEP, 2007). Their high altitude, distinctive topography and aesthetic appeal attract tourists seeking breathtaking landscapes and a range of outdoor activities. However, due to their unique characteristics, mountains are fragile both to climate change and human impact. While tourism can be a driver to reduce poverty and stimulate the local economy in mountain destinations, it can also result in cultural disruption, environmental degradation and generate economic inequalities, if sustainable development measures are not applied (Zeng et al., 2022).

Place branding and its intersection with sustainable development is still a developing field of research (Aguilera-Cora et al., 2025). Moreover, place branding has traditionally focused on urban areas and tourism destinations (Gulisova, 2021), with limited research focusing on rural and mountain areas. Place brands are created and managed in a collective effort of a network of stakeholders (Ripoll González et al., 2024), who participate in the creation of narratives (Björner and Aronsson, 2022), and endow place brands with meaning (Kavaratzis, 2012). Yet, this diversity of actors turns place branding into an ongoing process of negotiation and identity formation (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013).

In this context, the aim of this study is to explore the perspectives of different stakeholders on the governance and communication of a renowned mountain destination in the Spanish Pyrenees and its link with sustainable development.

Adopting a case study approach, this research draws on semi-structured online interviews conducted with a range of stakeholders including local and regional public authorities, tourism representatives, and institutions responsible for regional promotion and development. The conversations were designed to collect insights on place branding strategies, sustainable development, and potential tensions derived from tourism activity in the destination.

This research identifies actors in the branding process, their levels of engagement, and the application of sustainable development initiatives. Findings reveal diverse perspectives, with the branding processes themselves sometimes lacking clear definition. Moreover, branding is seen both as a tool for identity and territorial cohesion and as a means for promoting tourism and economic growth, creating potential tensions, while the integration of sustainable development appears uneven across different branding efforts.

These results underscore the complexity of coordinating branding initiatives in a multi-stakeholder context. While sustainable development is widely acknowledged as important, its practical integration into place branding strategies remains challenging and often ambiguous.

This study contributes to the literature on place branding by examining its intersection with sustainable development within the context of mountain destinations. The findings offer timely insights that may be applicable to other destinations facing similar challenges, especially considering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the International Year of Sustainable Mountain Development (2022), and the Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions (2023–2027).

Keywords: Place branding; Sustainable development; Sustainability; Mountain destinations; Mountain tourism.

26. Does special interest tourism lead to sustainability? Place vs. destination branding breaking the myth in the case of Mount Olympus

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Despite their similarities, the differences among place and destination branding remain evident, as well as the need to prioritize place rather than destination branding strategies in pursue of sustainability. To be specific, overtourism and overcrowding have long been analyzed for their negative impact on destinations and, in response, destinations may turn from mass to special interest tourism. Still, with tourists being the key stakeholder of branding decisions, what happens when a special interest tourism destination becomes as popular as to again lead to overcrowding, how do special interest tourists respond to the popularity of the destination, and how should the place prioritize sustainability through brand development?

In an attempt to shed light into such aspects, this study builds on the responses provided by hikers of Mount Olympus, Greece, i.e. a special interest tourism destination which has started being overcrowded. Particularly, the purpose of the study is to explore the relationship between perceived destination adaption and destination satisfaction by using the overtourism awareness perception as a moderator. The respondents will be recruited on-site and/or online via link. Data collection takes place during the main season of the mountain huts in the national park (July-September 2025). The research instrument reflects a three-concept combination of: a) Perceived destination adaptation with six items adapted from Jacobsen (2004), b) Tourists' overtourism awareness with three items as proposed in Papadopoulou et al. (2023), and c) Tourist satisfaction with three items adapted from Kim et al. (2016). The validity and reliability of the scales will be tested; descriptive and inferential statistics will be used to analyze the data. The study provides information about the level of destination adaption of Olympus as a destination, hikers' overtourism perception of the place and overall satisfaction of their experience. Implications help us advance place and destination branding research and facilitate practitioners' understanding that a place is not a destination merely seen as a landmark in tourists' bucket list but part of a larger ecosystem for which Olympus is part of a larger 'story'; and this ecosystem connects to a sustainable place brand.

Keywords: Special interest tourism; Hiking; Sports tourism; Sustainability; Place brand ecosystem.

20. From destination to influence: How tourism shapes national Reputation and global appeal

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The Global Soft Power Index 2025 is the world's most comprehensive study on nation brand perceptions, drawing insights from over 170,000 respondents across 100+ markets and covering all 193 UN member states. This year's data highlights a striking trend: being perceived as a desirable travel destination has become increasingly central to a nation's soft power.

As tourism grows and global audiences seek deeper, more experiential connections, the emotional appeal of a country is gaining prominence—often outpacing traditional drivers like governance and sustainability. For the second consecutive year, 'great place to visit' has surged in importance, alongside a rising emphasis on People & Values.

Tourism is no longer just a leisure sector—it is a strategic asset. A country's appeal as a destination can shape first impressions, spark curiosity, and lay the foundation for long-term reputation-building. In a world where nations compete for talent, trade, and investment, tourism offers more than economic gain: it fosters trust, familiarity, and engagement.

By recognising and leveraging tourism's soft power potential, nations can build enduring influence, positioning themselves as centres of culture, commerce, and innovation in the global imagination.

Keywords: Soft Power; Nation branding; Tourism and reputation; Global perceptions; Destination appeal; Cultural influence; Country branding; Place branding.

82. Visual analysis of Germany's nation branding through the "Du bist Deutschland" and "Land der Ideen" campaigns'

Abhinav Bhole

This paper presents a visual analysis of posters and billboard advertisements of the "Du bist Deutschland" and "Land der Ideen" campaigns as a part of Germany's nation branding efforts. Drawing from the multimodal framing analytical framework (Moernaut et al., 2020), this paper investigates Germany's efforts to rebrand itself.

Since the term "nation branding" was coined in the 1990s, the field has evolved into a globalised and formalised practice. Nation branding is a rapidly developing field with a plethora of studies emphasising the critical approach within the field. However, studies focused on its visual and multimodal aspects are very much under-represented. In addition, it has been identified that there exist numerous studies on a limited number of countries, while studies on Germany especially focusing on the role of visuals are lacking. This study seeks to add to the research on the role of visual and multimodal framing analysis (VMFA) in nation branding campaigns. This paper contributes to the broader discourse on place branding, public diplomacy, and the intersection of national identity and visual storytelling, offering insights for nations undergoing image rehabilitation or repositioning in the global order. The study also interpreted the creation of meaning in the visuals through the multimodal framing analytical framework.

The findings demonstrate the critical role of visual framing in constructing persuasive narratives that enabled Germany's nation brand, corroborated through various nation branding indices. The analysis shows meticulous creation of the a) motivational and inspirational frames, and b) attraction and desire frames through multimodal interactions that enhanced the visual storytelling.

Keywords: Nation branding; Soft power; Germany; Cultural diplomacy; National identity.

88. Nation Branding for Sustainable Development: Leveraging Heritage to Connect the Past to The Future

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A nation's identity is more than a historical relic; it is a powerful force that shapes its future. In an era where sustainability dictates global progress, it has become imperative to consider how nation branding can be used for sustainable development. Nation branding has evolved beyond a mere promotional tool; it is now a strategic instrument for global positioning (Browning and Ferraz de Oliveira, 2017; Rojas-Méndez and Khoshnevis, 2023). Ghana, with its deep-rooted heritage and cultural resilience (Tijani et al., 2024), stands at an inflection point where its historical legacy can serve as both a foundation and a catalyst for future growth. Extensive scholarly discourse on nation branding has illuminated the strategic mechanisms through which countries in the Global North have cultivated robust global identities, securing economic, diplomatic, and cultural influence (Nobre and Sousa, 2022; Moscovitz, 2024). Leveraging sophisticated branding frameworks, these nations such as the United States of America, China, Russia and the United Kingdom have systematically positioned themselves as innovation hubs, economic powerhouses, and cultural epicentres, reinforcing their competitive edge in international markets (Hurn, 2016; Vecchi et al., 2021).

In Africa, few countries have been able to truly harness this tool to reshape their socio-economic and geopolitical destinies (Matiza, 2021; Mogaji, 2021; Thondhlana et al., 2021). Quite recently, Ghana forged a compelling brand identity through its “Year of Return” campaign that sought to connect black people in the diaspora to their historical heritage (Gebauer and Umscheid, 2021). This campaign succeeded in enhancing the global image and positioning of Ghana as a culturally vibrant country with rich heritage and tourism (Mensah, 2022). However, beyond the glamour of global attention and public relations, key questions remain regarding how countries in the Global South like Ghana can pioneer a model of nation branding that is not only forward-thinking but also deeply authentic, and one that connects generations while shaping a sustainable legacy (Ahmed et al., 2022).

This study aims to assess the role of nation branding in fostering sustainable development. By integrating sustainability into its national identity, countries in the Global South can forge a brand narrative that not only preserves the past but propels the nation toward innovative, environmentally conscious, and socially inclusive development. The Focus Theory of Normative Conduct provides a theoretical basis for arguing for preserving heritage while promoting sustainability by framing these values as desirable, socially approved behaviours (Kallgren et al., 2000). The study engages a qualitative research approach to interview three groups of participants: policy makers, locals and diaspora tourists. In doing so, this study aims to establish a model that links cultural authenticity to economic advancement through a sustainable blueprint that can underpin national progress.

Keywords: Nation branding; Sustainable development; Cultural heritage; Brand Ghana.

104. Persona-Driven Public Diplomacy at Expo 2025: Ambassadors' Social Media Practices and Nation Branding in Japan

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Aims: This study examines how foreign ambassadors to Japan utilise social media to promote their national pavilions and convey their country's image to international public during the Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan. It explores how ambassadors engage in online communication as part of broader public diplomacy and nation-branding efforts.

Theoretical framework: Reputation, while originating in marketing and branding, is increasingly recognised as central to international relations and public diplomacy (Cull, 2024). International expositions are not merely promotional platforms but competitive arenas for reputation management and cultural projection. Prior studies have highlighted such global events as critical intersections of nation branding and public diplomacy (e.g. Chen, 2012; Cull, 2022; Lee and Kim, 2025; Ogawa, 2007). In the digital era, foreign ambassadors are increasingly expected to act as public personas who engage international audiences through emotionally resonant communication, reflecting how digital technologies have transformed diplomatic norms and practices (Manor, 2019). Building on this framework, the present study discusses how foreign ambassadorial communication related to Expo 2025 contributes to the construction of a nation brand via Ambassador-led public diplomacy. This conceptual lens offers a perspective on how state images are shaped not only by institutional actors but also through the personalised, emotionally resonant narratives of individual diplomats.

Main research approach: Among the 158 participating countries, 45 were confirmed to host pavilions as of April 2025. This research considers both Tokyo-based embassies and ambassadors and analyses their Expo 2025-related posts. Using four key indicators—transparency (communicating facts about participation), immediacy (timely, real-time updates), personal expression (emotion or individual style), and engagement (interactive communication with users)—the study compares the communicative patterns and functions of institutional and personal accounts.

Key arguments/findings: Preliminary findings suggest that persona-driven public diplomacy by ambassadors, including on-site visits and personal reflections, adds emotional and relational depth to nation branding, creating a more humanised national image than official messaging. These practices suggest that social media aligns closely with the dual role of ambassadors as both official and personal actors in diplomacy.

Conclusions: This study contributes to theorising how mediated public diplomacy conducted through ambassadorial personas operates as a dynamic form of nation branding in the digital era. It highlights the pivotal role of individual ambassadors in shaping national images, especially during global events like World Expos, where countries have unique opportunities to project their identities to international publics. By examining how diplomatic actors translate national narratives into culturally resonant and affective messages, the study offers both empirical evidence and conceptual tools for understanding the evolving logic of digital diplomacy and soft power.

Practical implications: Practically, the research offers a case of how nation branding and public diplomacy are enacted through social media in a major international event, highlighting the strategic use of digital platforms by diplomatic institutions and individual ambassadors working in tandem.

Keywords: EXPO2025; Social media; Ambassadors; Digital diplomacy; Nation branding.

56. Stakeholder Management: Necessity or Norm? – A Case Study of Eindhoven 365

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1. Eindhoven365, Netherlands

Aims: This paper aims to integrate foundational and contemporary theories on stakeholder management, network strategies, and strategic adaptation in dynamic environments such as city marketing organisations.

Theoretical Framework: Recent literature addresses the role of stakeholders within the development of place brands. Houghton and Stevens (2011) argue that the success or failure of city branding strategies depends on how effectively local stakeholders are engaged throughout the process. Building on this Kavartzis (2012) emphasized that stakeholders should be considered co-developers, thus co-owners of the place brand. Residents are considered key internal stakeholders (Golestaneh et al., 2022). Differences in stakeholder perspectives, interests and associative networks (Beckmann and Zenker, 2012) positions place branding as a governance process (Klijn et al., 2012) that requires network management (González et al., 2024).

Question remains how stakeholder involvement can be structured within the broader process of strategic decision-making and how a deeper sense of coalition-thinking fosters network strategies that strengthen stakeholder engagement and align external dynamics with the internal organisation.

Main Research Approach: In 2024, González et al. stressed that network management was under-developed in place marketing and place branding literature. This contribution applies a conceptual framework based on stakeholder management theory to the context of Eindhoven365, the city marketing organization for the City of Eindhoven in the Netherlands. A literature review anchors the approach, supplemented by desk research and theoretical application using stakeholder analysis tools.

Key concepts include Mendelow's Power-Interest Matrix (Mendelow, 1991), Mintzberg's emergent strategy framework (Mintzberg, 1978), and Teece's dynamic capabilities model (Teece, 2007). The theoretical lens emphasizes the necessity of treating organizations as open systems (Ansoff and Thanheiser, 1978) that must co-evolve with their environment through continuous learning, relational alignment, and strategic responsiveness.

Key Arguments / Findings: Findings underscore that stakeholder management should not be treated as a periodic necessity but as a strategic norm, particularly within innovation-driven ecosystems (McGrath, 2019; De Wit, 2020). Through the Power-Interest Matrix (Mendelow, 1991), stakeholders were classified based on influence and interest, revealing distinct engagement needs. By aligning this classification with the dynamic capabilities model—sensing, seizing, and transforming (Teece, 2007)—Eindhoven365 is able to structure strategy formulation around real-time environmental scanning and collaborative agility. A custom-developed monitoring framework is proposed to institutionalize this ongoing engagement and learning process.

Conclusions: The research concludes that stakeholder alignment is essential for sustainable strategic success in volatile environments (Waal and Roobeek, 2018; Teece, 2007). Eindhoven365's ability to fulfil its public mandate relies on its capacity to co-create value with influential actors across the Brainport-region. Strategy, in this context, becomes a hybrid process—partly planned, partly emergent (Mintzberg, 1978)—driven by dialogue, experimentation, and adaptive leadership.

Practical Implications: For public-private entities like Eindhoven365, practical tools such as the Power-Interest Matrix (Mendelow, 1991) and a stakeholder-dynamic capabilities dashboard enable more targeted strategy development. Findings recommend embedding stakeholder analysis into mid-term evaluations and strategic planning cycles, with structured internal reflection and external engagement loops. Leadership must champion a culture of agility and inclusivity to balance strategic intent with responsiveness (McGrath, 2019; De Wit, 2020).

Keywords: Stakeholder engagement; Network strategy; Public-private governance; Place marketing; Place branding.

81. The Structural Imbalance in Place Branding: A Case Study of Saudi Vision 2030

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2. Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Saudi Arabia

Purpose: This paper explores how co-creation is conceptualised and experienced across the strategy and delivery stages of place branding, using Saudi Vision 2030 as a case study. It highlights a structural imbalance in which co-creation is emphasised during the planning phase, while coordination in delivery remains limited and informal. This imbalance risks undermining the brand's coherence and long-term effectiveness.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study adopts an exploratory instrumental case study approach, drawing on semi-structured interviews with stakeholders involved in both strategic planning and service-level delivery. Data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and interpretations of co-creation and coordination in practice.

Findings: The analysis reveals that co-creation is primarily framed as a tool for strategic alignment, with limited attention given to its role in implementation. While senior participants stress the importance of shared vision, frontline stakeholders describe a lack of formal structures for engagement in delivery. This creates a fragmented approach, where brand delivery is left to informal and individual efforts, rather than supported through integrated governance.

Originality/Value: This study contributes to place branding research by highlighting the gap between strategic intent and delivery practice. It brings attention to the limited procedural integration of internal stakeholders and challenges assumptions that strategic clarity alone can ensure effective brand implementation. The findings offer practical insights into the need for more coordinated, inclusive delivery frameworks within place branding initiatives.

Keywords: Co-creation; Brand delivery; Stakeholder engagement; Strategic planning.

59. Stanwell Speaks: A Data-Led Community Engagement Model for Place-Based Strategic Development

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2. Voluntary Support North Surrey, United Kingdom

Aims: This case study presents a comprehensive approach to community engagement in Stanwell, a deprived neighbourhood in Surrey. The aim was not only to listen to residents, but to transform their voices into structured, data-informed insights that directly shaped strategic priorities for local development, aligned with the four core Sport England Place Partnership outcomes: reducing inactivity, supporting young people, improving wellbeing, and addressing inequality. Framed within micro-place branding theory, the project sought to integrate functional development priorities with the symbolic dimensions of place identity, recognising that perceptions, narratives, and emotional attachment are central to sustainable change.

Context and Rationale: Stanwell faces persistent inequalities including poverty, poor transport access, youth anti-social behaviour, and low physical activity. While previous interventions were informed by professionals, the missing element was direct resident input. From a place branding perspective, this absence meant that the “insider” narrative — the way residents perceive, value, and emotionally connect with their place — was not represented in strategy-making. The rationale of this project was to co-create a development path based on lived experiences, unlocking both unmet needs and underused community assets, and aligning them with the community’s authentic identity.

Main Approach: The process was built around Appreciative Inquiry, used to conduct 145 one-on-one and group interviews across demographic segments. But the core innovation lay in what followed: a structured insight analysis framework was applied to the qualitative data. Using AI-supported clustering and categorisation, recurring themes were organised into need-based categories — helping identify which issues were both most urgent and most feasible to address. This reflects place branding principles of co-creation, identity mapping, and the translation of qualitative narratives into actionable, prioritised strategies.

Key Findings: The analysis revealed a dual insight: some of the issues most critical to residents — such as safety, youth disengagement, and health barriers — are foundational for designing large-scale, long-term investment strategies. At the same time, several issues that strongly affect residents’ pride, belonging, and emotional connection to place — such as neglected public spaces, visible decay, or lack of acknowledgement — can be addressed through low-cost, quick-win actions. This mirrors micro-place branding research, which highlights that symbolic and perception-based improvements can be as influential in shaping place attachment as major infrastructural change.

This distinction allowed the strategy to be structured in a layered way: combining deep investment areas with immediately visible improvements. These small, symbolic yet meaningful changes have the power to quickly activate local pride and increase residents’ willingness to engage. Furthermore, the research revealed that a significant part of how people perceive their place is shaped by communication — visibility, recognition, and narrative — rather than infrastructure, and can be shifted without large capital expenditure.

Conclusions: This engagement model proved that community voices can go beyond storytelling — they can become data that drives high-level strategic planning. By combining participatory methods with structured analysis, and grounding the process in place branding concepts such as co-creation, identity alignment, and perception management, the project enabled the identification of both high-impact investment areas and low-cost communication-based interventions that could rapidly shift perceptions. This duality — insight for long-term planning and immediate activation — makes the approach highly scalable and locally empowering.

Practical Implications: This case offers a replicable model for deprived areas aiming to make engagement meaningful, not symbolic. It shows how combining listening techniques with digital tools and strategic mapping can turn community feedback into a foundation for place strategy. By embedding academic concepts from micro-place branding — including the interplay of functional change and symbolic signalling — it bridges theory and practice, offering a roadmap for visible, meaningful transformation with limited resources.

Keywords: Place-based strategy; Community engagement; Insight-driven planning; Place branding; Appreciative inquiry; Qualitative analysis; Low-cost transformation; Citizen participation; Narrative mapping; Deprived communities.

129. Community Development as a Strategic Tool for Place Branding

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2. Planet Smart City, Italy

3. Planet Smart City, India

Purpose: This study examines the role of community development as a strategic tool for place branding within a competitive Prop-Tech real estate enterprise specialising in affordable housing. Through the integration of social innovation, participatory engagement, and digital solutions, the research explores how resilient communities that are aligned with brand values can enhance resident satisfaction and business value.

Design/methodology/approach: Building on the Social Capital Theory and Theory of Change (ToC), an original review of referenced frameworks—including Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)- provides the solid foundation for analyzing social and economic impact dynamics.

A comparative case study evaluates how governance, digital infrastructure, and participation shape urban communities. Data sources include engagement metrics, governance participation rates, and digital interactions, offering a structured evaluation of community-driven urban value creation. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, this study combines qualitative and quantitative analyses.

Findings: The study highlights several key findings, as clustered in three main areas:

1. **Place Branding:** Theory of Change mapping validates the long-term impact of CD and branding efforts. Enabling the emergence of social capital enhances urban resilience and supports branding by creating vibrant, connected communities. Participatory governance improves brand perception because resident-driven storytelling ensures authenticity in place branding. Furthermore, Prop-Tech (digital infrastructure) facilitates engagement and supports branding narratives.
2. **Place Identity:** Community engagement strengthens place identity, fostering a sense of belonging and long-term resilience.
3. **Real Estate:** Integrated Community Development approaches increase real estate perceived value and investment potential.

Practical implications: The study provides insights for real estate developers, urban planners, and policymakers, emphasizing digital tools and participatory governance to enhance brand identity and project success.

Originality/value: By bridging real estate branding, place branding, and community development, this research highlights the role of social innovation through digital engagement (Prop-Tech) in building sustainable, people-centred urban environments.

Keywords: Community development; Proptech; Real estate marketing; Place branding; Social innovation.

22. Place Brand Citizenship Behaviour: Expert Perspectives on a Multidisciplinary Conceptualization and Measurement

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2. International Place Branding Association, Poland
3. Griffith University, Australia

Aims: This project explores the sources of conceptualization and measurement of Place Brand Citizenship Behaviour (PBCB). Our long-term objective is to conceptualize and operationalize PBCB as a measure of community engagement in place branding processes, ultimately developing a dedicated measurement scale. The project comprises several stages. The current study aims to collect insights from academic experts representing domains identified as instrumental to developing a comprehensive PBCB measurement scale.

Theoretical framework: Community engagement, defined as active participation and involvement of residents and stakeholders in shaping and promoting the identity and reputation of a place, is crucial for fostering a sense of ownership, pride, and connection among community members. This engagement enhances the effectiveness of place branding efforts through activities such as public consultations, collaborative decision-making, and participation in events. However, community engagement has not been sufficiently operationalized in the literature. To address this gap, the project builds on previous work, including the City Brand Effectiveness Measurement (Florek et, 2021), where community engagement was identified as a key measure of brand health as well as the conceptualization of Brand Citizenship Behaviour by Ripoll González and colleagues (2024). We understand PBCB as all cooperative and contributing behaviours by actors in place branding processes that assist the development, delivery, and overall aims of a branding project or related initiatives.

Main research approach: We combine a multidisciplinary literature review and an expert-led approach to developing a scale of measuring PBCB. Our approach considers all stakeholders, not just residents, reflecting the multifaceted nature of place brands. We have identified three main areas – place, brand, and citizenship behaviour – and relevant concepts from literatures in human geography, environmental psychology, marketing and management, and public administration and political science, as potential sources of scale development. We have also identified some of the scales that measure these concepts and are currently inviting 18 experts representing the key domains to evaluate them and to propose alternatives. In this study the experts are asked to (i) assess the identified concepts and add any measurable concepts that may still be missing; (ii) recommend valid and reliable measurement scales for these concepts within their field of expertise and evaluate the ones already identified by the authors; (iii) provide additional comments/guidance relevant to the project. Subsequently, the insights from the experts will be analyzed to identify both common themes and divergencies in conceptualizations of PBCB across disciplines, and to develop the list of key items that could constitute the foundation of the future measurement scale.

Key arguments/findings: The research is in progress, and the results will help us to propose a scale that will be subject to further evaluation among academics and practitioners and finally will be empirically tested. This interdisciplinary approach ensures the relevance and accuracy of the scale designed, contributing to a comprehensive definition of PBCB and enhancing community engagement in place branding processes.

Practical implications: Once developed, the PBCB scale can be used by local administration as a single measurement tool for community engagement in place branding practices and initiatives.

Keywords: Place brand; Citizenship behaviour; Measurement; Scale; Place branding; Community engagement; Residents.

29. Local People Engagement in Adaptive Place Branding

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Aims: This article aims to investigate the critical role and mechanisms of local people engagement within adaptive place branding using a Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) approach. The paper specifically addresses the theoretical and empirical gap concerning mechanisms of resident engagement holistically and their implications for effective place branding in an ecosystem context. Adaptive capacity and viability are fundamental characteristics of resilient place brands. Adaptive capacity refers to the ability of place brands to dynamically respond to internal changes and external pressures, ensuring long-term sustainability and resilience (de Vos et al., 2019). This adaptive management involves iterative learning processes that help brands effectively navigate emerging challenges, supporting ongoing brand viability.

Theoretical Framework: This study builds upon the framework of stakeholder engagement in place branding—philosophical, strategic, and concrete—as proposed by Pohjola et al. (2023; see also Helmi et al. 2020). It further builds upon the theory of participatory branding (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015), and emergence within service-dominant logic (Vargo et al., 2023), emphasising relational and multi-level stakeholder interactions. To deeper understand the mechanisms of engagement in place branding, the CAS approach (Wollin and Perry, 2004; Giesler & Fischer, 2016) is operationalised.

Main Research Approach: The research employs a qualitative approach using theory-driven content analysis methodology applied to regional identity survey data (N=800), collected from residents of a Finnish municipality. This empirical case study illustrates how local stakeholder inputs at philosophical, strategic, and concrete levels holistically and actively shape adaptive place branding processes.

Key Arguments / Findings: The study reveals that at the philosophical level, residents potentially offer foundational knowledge and emotional connections essential for authentic branding. Strategically, resident feedback enriches decision-making processes, enhancing dialogue and mediating diverse perspectives to guide strategic directions. At the concrete (or tactical) level, residents provide actionable ideas and actively participate, thus becoming transformative brand advocates (Jain et al., 2022; Freire, 2009). These mechanisms significantly enhance feedback loops, underpinning place brands' resilience, adaptability, and authenticity. The research identifies a gap in existing literature, noting insufficient theoretical and empirical exploration of local people's active roles, despite acknowledging multi-level stakeholder interactions.

Conclusions: A deeper theoretical and empirical understanding of resident engagement is essential for adaptive place branding. Genuine involvement ensures branding initiatives resonate authentically with local cultural narratives, reinforcing brand legitimacy and relevance. Participatory approaches cultivate ownership and community commitment, critical for sustainable branding. Additionally, embedding residents' lived experiences and aspirations into branding strategies substantially enriches adaptive capacity and emergent opportunities, allowing place brands to dynamically respond to socio-economic and ecological shifts.

Practical Implications: Practically, this research offers insights into effectively integrating stakeholder engagement at philosophical, strategic, and concrete levels, improving adaptive brand management practices. Emphasizing participatory approaches highlights the transformative potential of local engagement, essential for sustainable, authentic, and resilient place branding strategies responsive to complex socio-ecological and economic dynamics.

Keywords: Place branding; Stakeholder engagement; Local people; Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS).

35. Defining a new type of place consumer: Ancestral travellers and place branding

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Ancestral tourism focuses on travel to the location from where a traveler's family originally came before settling in what was to become their native country. However, place branding does not traditionally include ancestral visitors as a place branding target group, which are defined as residents, companies, and visitors (Hospers, 2004). Due to a variety of factors, ancestral visitors do not consider themselves to belong to these categories, and research has failed to explore reasons why ancestral visitors rarely consider themselves to be tourists (Basu, 2007). This research seeks to demonstrate why ancestral visitors should be considered as a place branding target group by examining how social identity theory explains the relationship between ancestral visits and ancestral homeland marketing.

Keywords: Place branding; Place marketing; Ancestral visits; Ancestral tourism; Destination marketing.

77. Exploring Geographical Indications (GIs) through socio-spatial lenses: The case of the Prosecco

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Geographical Indications (GIs) are considered a peculiar type of brands in which the product and the place of origin are inextricably linked (Charters & Spielmann, 2014). Literature (Charters & Spielmann, 2014; Spielmann & Williams, 2016) points out how origin-specific resources – encompassing geographical (terroir, microclimate etc.) and cultural (actors' know-how) elements (Rinaldi, 2017) both related to provenance – support the establishment of territorial brands as “unique, geographically bounded, non-proprietary, and overarching brand shared by all firms within an origin” (Spielmann & Williams, 2016). However, research on geographical indications often concentrates on benefits that GIs provide, rather than on contestations that might predate their official establishment and recognition. In particular, collective brand identity – that characterises GIs as territorial brands – often leads to conflicts.

Different studies (e.g. Ferrari, 2014; Rinallo & Pitardi, 2019; Checchinato et al., 2024) concentrated on issues arising over the collective identity by exploring conflicts emerging over time among different groups of stakeholders (Reynolds et al., 2024), generally incumbents and newcomers. However, these conflicts have not yet been analysed through the lenses of sociospatial relations. Understanding the multidimensional character of sociospatial relations, namely its polymorphy – that is – “the organization of sociospatial relations in its multiple forms” (Jessop, 2008) allows the unpacking of how sociospatial relations are configured and reconfigured and can determine the emergence of conflicts. Therefore, this exploratory study aims to fill this gap by examining the Prosecco GI's collective identity through socio-spatial lenses (Jessop, 2008). The Prosecco GI is a relevant context to carry out such an investigation because its spatial features have dramatically changed: the first Protected Designation of Origin was obtained in 1969 including only the Valdobbiadene Conegliano area located in one province of the Veneto region, while in 2009 the production area was extended to include the city of Prosecco located in Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG), ultimately encompassing nine provinces and two region of North-East Italy (for a complete account of the extension of the Prosecco GI, see Checchinato et al., 2024; Ponte, 2025). Accordingly, Prosecco serves as an important case to explore how socio-spatial configurations might result in conflicts that shape and reshape the collective identity of the GI.

Keywords: Geographical indications; Territorial brands; Socio-spatial relations.

97. The National Football League's International Expansion: A Place Branding Perspective on Market Viability and Cultural Diplomacy in London, Mexico City, and Frankfurt

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This research investigates the National Football League's (NFL) potential for international expansion through the lens of place branding. The NFL has developed a strategic plan to expand America's most popular sport overseas. The goal of the expansion program is to expand football's international footprint, build a new global fanbase, and to inspire athletes around the world to play football. Currently, the NFL is actively expanding its international presence through its "Global Markets Program" and by hosting regulars season games in various countries. In 2025, 29 clubs will participate in the program across 21 international markets. The NFL also has plans for future expansion to new markets and is considering international franchises. Using a comparative case study approach, the study assesses potential markets for expansion. Focusing on London, Mexico City, and Frankfurt, the study compares each city's market viability based on economic indicators, infrastructure readiness, cultural resonance, and opportunities for diplomatic engagement.

The findings suggest that effective place branding strategies are essential for global expansion, requiring tailored approaches that align with the unique characteristics of each market. London stands out as the most developed market, characterized by a robust fan base and infrastructure conducive to branding efforts. In contrast, Mexico City offers significant audience potential and favorable logistical conditions but faces infrastructure challenges that could hinder branding initiatives. Furthermore, an analysis of psychic distance reveals how the local sports culture can help navigate linguistic and cultural differences, as seen in Mexico's rich football heritage. This study advocates for a phased strategy in place branding, commencing with London and Mexico City, and subsequently addressing Frankfurt as it matures. The findings contribute valuable insights into how professional sports leagues can harmonize commercial interests with place branding and cultural exchange in a globally interconnected sports landscape.

Keywords: Place branding; Sports internationalization; Cultural exchange; Market expansion; Psychic distance; Sports diplomacy.

12. From Desires to Destinations: An Appetite-Based Segmentation Model for Strategic Place Branding

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This study proposes an appetite-based segmentation framework as an innovative alternative to traditional demographic or firmographic methods for developing and promoting place brands. A place brand encompasses a range of dimensions that shape both the perceptual and tangible aspects of how the place is experienced (Anholt, 2007; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008; Govers and Go, 2009; Hanna, Rowley and Keegan, 2021). There are various objective-based segments for a place brand – such as investors, immigrants, tourists, or trading partner, which are further refined using characteristics of the actors, such demographics or firmographics. This study develops an appetite-based approach informed by work originally done by Geraldine Fennell (1975, 1978).

This study builds on Fennell's (1978) work, which proposed that consumer appetites result from the interaction between personal characteristics and the premarket environment. The interaction between the market environment (place identity, in this case), and the individual's personal characteristics results in unique perceptions of the brand array (place image). While similar to benefit segmentation, appetite segmentation provides a richer and more nuanced understanding of consumer decision making as it includes motivations and interactions upstream of the consumer's decision process. Appetite segmentation provides insights into how place images develop and create value for different consumers.

Two data sets inform this study. The first comprises survey responses from tourists who visited a mountain town in the American West (n = 517), rating the importance of 26 different attributes of a tourist visit. A combination of factor and cluster analysis identified seven unique appetite segments, five of which represent 97% of the sample and cut across demographic variables. The second dataset consists of ad hoc interviews with approximately 120 individuals (visitors and residents) across diverse destinations. These interviews explored appetite patterns as well as collecting demographic data for comparison. In both datasets there is evidence of diverse appetites being satiated by the consumption of the same place. They exemplify different motives, different choice behaviors, and vastly different importances for the different dimensions of the place identity.

These findings demonstrate that multiple, diverse appetites can be simultaneously satisfied by the same destination, revealing significant divergence both within and between visitor groups and residents. Appetite segmentation enriches place brand strategy by informing both identity design and promotional messaging, providing actionable insights that transcend traditional segmentation models.

Keywords: Segmentation; Place brand; Appetite segmentation.

15. Lived place brand experiences of foreign residents: A longitudinal study in Oulu, Finland

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Aims: As cities continue to attract global talent, promote international collaborations, and foster cultural exchanges, understanding how foreign residents experience place brands becomes increasingly important, particularly in terms of how place brands are lived, interpreted, and reshaped through everyday encounters (Xu and Au, 2023; Eshuis and Ripoll González, 2025). To this end, this study investigates the lived place brand experiences of international students in Oulu, Finland, with the broader goal of understanding the meanings embedded in their lived experiences.

Theoretical framework: Place is not merely a geographic setting but a lived and experienced phenomenon. Drawing on the “sense of place” theoretical lens (Relph, 1976), this study interprets how individuals associate meanings with their lived place brand experiences. Sense of place encompasses emotional, cognitive, and symbolic connections that individuals form through their interactions with the environment. Particularly, this study acknowledges that for foreign residents, place is experienced through personal adaptation over time.

Main research approach: Longitudinal qualitative data were collected between 2022 and 2024 through a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews, reflective diaries, photographs, and participant-generated drawings. This dataset offers rich and meaningful insights into the lived experiences of foreign residents. This study follows the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith and Nizza, 2022), which emphasizes understanding how individuals make sense of their lived experiences. The data will be analyzed using the guidelines of longitudinal IPA (Farr and Nizza, 2019), allowing for the exploration of how participants’ perceptions, emotions, and place attachments evolve.

Key findings: Methodological triangulation using semi-structured interviews, reflective diaries, photographs, and participant-generated drawings has the potential to offer a richer understanding of lived place brand experiences. Preliminary findings reveal that the meanings of lived experience regarding place environments evolve and contribute to the construction of potential place brand identity. A deeper longitudinal IPA analysis is expected to uncover richer insights into the evolving meanings of lived place brand experiences in Oulu. These findings carry practical relevance for Oulu 2026 – Oulu’s status as the European Capital of Culture for the year 2026 – offering valuable perspectives on how international voices can be more effectively integrated into the city’s place brand identity.

Conclusions and implications: This study contributes to the literature on place brand identity by uncovering the meanings that foreign residents attach to their lived place brand experiences, shedding light on how personal narratives and cultural engagement actively shape the evolving place brand identity of both the residents and the city. The findings offer valuable insights for urban policymakers, particularly for Oulu 2026, on how to foster a more inclusive and resonant city brand.

Keywords: Place brand experiences; Place branding; Foreign residents; Lived experiences; Phenomenology; Longitudinal design.

69. From aisle to archive: Visualizing place through Zimbabwean wedding rituals

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Aims: This paper examines how Zimbabwean weddings operate as culturally saturated, performative tools for grassroots place branding, emphasising their capacity to influence perceptions of place through sound, ritual, dance, and collective emotion. Drawing from visual ethnography and theories of placemaking and performativity (Benson & Jackson, 2013; Pink, 2008), the study analyses 35 wedding videos—including the author's own—using thematic and autoethnographic methods.

The analysis reveals three interrelated dimensions:

1. Emotional placemaking, where music, movement, and shared ritual transform ordinary venues into affectively charged and memorable spaces
2. Cultural symbolism, wherein attire, language, and traditional practices reassert identity and heritage within specific spatial contexts; and
3. Aspirational place branding, in which weddings, especially those circulated via digital platforms, function as public spectacles that portray Zimbabwean culture as modern, vibrant, and cosmopolitan. These events transcend religious and social boundaries, disrupt traditional hierarchies, and promote inclusive, community driven narratives of place.

Therefore, this study reframes weddings as informal yet affectively potent modalities of cultural diplomacy and place branding. It positions them as vernacular interventions into dominant, state-led narratives of identity and development. By foregrounding their ritualistic and creative dimensions, the study advances a relational understanding of place-making, one that contributes to emerging discourses on sustainable, participatory, and culturally grounded spatial governance.

Keywords: Wedding rituals; Place-making; Visual ethnography; Cultural diplomacy; Zimbabwe.

67. Re-framing the role of community capital in regional branding and development

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3. CT Consults, United Kingdom

Aims and theoretical framework: In recent years there has been increasing attention paid to place branding and its ability to stimulate regional development, centred around competitiveness, image building and securing lucrative investment or a talented workforce (Cleave et al., 2016). Much of the initial focus therefore prioritised economic impacts and tended to underplay the importance of socio-cultural value created by local communities' more everyday celebration of their places and regions. More recently, fostering place attachment, belonging and pride have been linked to regional development in terms of boosting prosperity and wellbeing (Martin et al., 2024).

We build on a body of work that has begun to emphasise the 'place brand as embodied experiences' (Eshuis and Ripoll González, 2024). Place brand experiences are based not only on seemingly exciting and planned experiences, but also the everyday experiences occurring through local communities' daily interactions and activities (Florek and Insch, 2020). The notion of 'everyday life and experiences' rooted in human geography (de Certeau, 2011; Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]) and its 'embeddedness' in the relational and cultural contexts of place (Haugh, 2022; Willett, 2023) serves as the theoretical underpinning to reframe the role of communities in region branding. We ask, how do communities build socio-cultural value for the regions they represent and what are the impacts for the places involved?

Methodology: To address these questions, we draw on two in-depth UK case studies of Northamptonshire and the West of England (Bath and Bristol) undertaken between 2015-2020. Combined, the cases include interviews with 89 participants, focus groups, field observations and secondary source analysis. The analysis focused on the experiences of actors in relation to community engagement and the everyday performances of communities in shaping the vision, identity and narrative of their place.

Key findings, conclusions and implications: Thematic analysis illustrates the role of everyday and organised performances in contributing to quality-of-life aspects, positive social identity (e.g., pride), and the mobilisation of social capital (Figure 1). Moreover, community activism, protests and counter-narratives are being enacted to resist and redirect dominant economic narratives. We posit that the socio-cultural value generated by these enactments accumulates community capital which is advantageous for both those actors involved and to the regions, given its potential to generate both network and normative embeddedness. Thus, we concur that the experiential and embodied place brand is 'enacted on the ground' (Rabbiosi, 2016) and reflects socio-economic dynamics and power plays. Further, the 'everyday place brand' can reveal how policy impacts the everyday lives, experiences, hopes and concerns of communities, and how they in turn contribute to regional branding and development.

Figure 1: Preliminary themes from the data:

How/processes:

- Community engagement reveals 'local' knowledge and needs
- Everyday performances and presence as co-producing the place experiences
- Community activism, protests and counter-narratives for resistance and accountability

What/outcomes:

- Positive social identity (pride) and belonging to place
- Social ties and capital
- Wellbeing and quality-of-life
- Community Capital

Keywords: Place branding; Everyday place; Regional development; Embeddedness; Communities.

78. Multi-sensory place brand experience and emotions: a theoretical framework for the affective dimension of place brand experience

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Aims: This theoretical paper aims to deepen the understanding of the emotional dimension of multisensory place brand experience. It aims to develop a theoretical framework that integrates the concepts of emotion, emotion regulation, and emotion rules in place branding.

Theoretical framework: The paper draws on literatures from psychology on emotions and emotion regulation, from sociology on emotion rules, and from marketing and place branding on brand experience.

Emotions play an important role in place brand experience (Eshuis and Ripoll 2024), which can be seen the “sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli” (Brakus et al 2009: 54). Emotions are whole body phenomena that can be triggered by different senses (e.g. touch, smell, taste, view, hear) (Gross 2014).

Emotional appraisal theory (Lazarus 1991) shows that all emotions are unique in terms of what causes the emotion, what feeling an emotion gives, and the behavioral responses. Understanding what emotions place brand prosumers have, and how they actively regulate emotions through emotion regulation strategies (Gross 2014) and emotion rules (Hochschildt 1979), clarifies how people experience place brands and how they regulate/manage their experience.

Main research approach: This conceptual paper adopts an integrative literature review. This method enables uncovering links between different research streams and theoretical frameworks towards an integrative theoretical framework (Cronin and George, 2020).

Key arguments/findings: The key finding of this theoretical paper is the conceptual framework that will be presented. It will present a framework that integrates emotions, emotion regulation strategies, emotion rules, and place brand experience.

Conclusions: Emotions form a crucial dimension in place branding, because they shape the place brand experience. Emotions about place brands are actively regulated by individuals through various strategies, whereby emotions rules play an important role. By providing a theoretical framework that theorizes these shape place brand experience, this paper enables future research on the affective dimension of place brand experience.

Practical implications: Understanding the affective dimension of place brand experience, and how emotions are regulated, provides important handles to manage this important dimension of place brands.

Keywords: Emotions; Emotion regulation; Emotion rules; Multisensory place brand experience.

1. The Non-Linear Impact of Soft Power and Nation Branding on Economic Performance

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Soft power and nation branding are widely acknowledged as influencing national economic performance, yet their precise effects remain underexplored. Traditional economic models often assume linear relationships between these constructs and economic outcomes, overlooking the possibility of threshold effects and non-linear interactions. This presentation explores how different dimensions of soft power and nation branding contribute to economic performance in non-linear ways. Specifically, it identifies key inflection points beyond which these factors exert a disproportionate influence on national economic indicators and offers theoretical interpretations of these non-linear dynamics.

This presentation builds upon Taecharungroj & Pattaratanakun's (2025) study employing a Random Forest (RF) machine learning technique to analyse data from two widely used indices: the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index (NBI) and the Global Soft Power Index (GSPI). These indices measure multiple dimensions of nation branding and soft power, such as reputation, influence, familiarity, exports, investment attractiveness, and cultural impact (Anholt, 2005; Nye, 2008; Pamment, 2014). Economic performance is assessed using GDP and GDP per capita data spanning from 2010 to 2023, sourced from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Unlike traditional econometric models, machine learning allows us to uncover non-linear patterns and interactions between these variables.

Insights from the Taecharungroj & Pattaratanakun's (2025) study reveal that economic performance is not uniformly responsive to changes in nation branding and soft power metrics. For GDP per capita, the Reputation dimension of the GSPI exhibits an S-shaped curve, indicating that substantial economic benefits only emerge once a country's reputation score surpasses 6.4. Similarly, the Investment and Immigration dimension of the NBI has a critical threshold at a score of 50, after which economic returns escalate rapidly. These results suggest that soft power and nation branding operate as accelerators of economic performance rather than as steady linear drivers (Carminati, 2022). Conversely, dimensions such as Culture show mixed effects, contributing positively to GDP but having a weaker or even negative association with GDP per capita in certain contexts.

These findings hold significant implications for policymakers and economic strategists. Countries aiming to leverage soft power and nation branding for economic advancement must recognise that incremental improvements may not yield immediate results; instead, surpassing critical reputation and investment thresholds is key to unlocking substantial economic gains. The insights contribute to the growing literature on the economic impacts of nation branding and soft power by demonstrating their non-linear relationships with economic performance, urging a reassessment of conventional models that assume direct, linear causality (Kaneva, 2011; Pattaratanakun & Taecharungroj, 2024).

This presentation builds on those insights to identify key inflection points and theorise the mechanisms that may explain the sudden increase in predicted economic gains. Rather than treating soft power and nation branding as uniformly productive, we argue that their economic effects are contingent—emerging only after surpassing specific perceptual thresholds that unlock disproportionate returns.

Keywords: Place branding; Soft power; Nation branding; GDP; GDP per capita; Economic performance.

57. “The Other” Narrative of Brand Image Communication of Chinese Cities from the Perspective of Interculturality: A Case Study of IShowSpeed’s “China Travel” live streams on YouTube

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With the deepening of global digital media convergence and the continuous formation of interculturality public spheres, city brand image communication is gradually shifting from “self” narratives to “other” narratives. This article conducts empirical analysis and in-depth research on the audience feedback of IShowSpeed’s “China Travel” live streams on YouTube, and finds that “the other”, as otherness cultural subjects, can significantly enhance overseas audiences’ cognition and understanding of Chinese city brand images such as “modern and prosperous”, “profound cultural”, “leisure and entertainment”, “technological metropolis”, etc., through cultural interaction narratives such as “local” context integration, symbol translation, and emotional labor. However, due to the influence of the subjectivity of the “Western gaze” and the imagination of “digital Orientalism”, overseas audiences will still have some textual misreadings and misunderstandings of the image of Chinese cities in “the other” narrative. The paper suggests that while using digital media technologies such as live stream to “activate communication”, multiple subjects can be absorbed to enrich the narrative dimension, and emotional resonance can be stimulated by non-spectacle daily narratives and value sharing, promoting the transformation of “the other” from “viewers” to “interlocutor” and facilitating the three-dimensional international communication of the image of Chinese cities.

Keywords: Interculturality; “The other” narrative; “China Travel”; City brand image; International communication.

116. The Nation as a Parent: Understanding the Effects of Anthropomorphism on Citizen Confidence, Brand Love and Psychological Ownership

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A nation is not simply a political entity; it is a dynamic construct of identity, memory, and belonging, influenced by the narratives its people embrace and the symbols it projects to the world (Browning, 2015; Rojas-Méndez and Khoshnevis, 2023). Nations transcend geography and represent emotional constructs that shape collective identity and belonging (Zhu et al., 2016). For decades, the discourse on nation branding has focused on the relationship between nations and external stakeholders, namely tourists and investors (Yadav et al., 2023). This one-sided discourse has created the perception of nation branding as an outward-looking initiative (Matiza and Slabbert, 2024). The impact of nation branding on citizen sentiment has become an emerging issue with calls for further research on the relationship between nation brands and citizens (Makgosa and Maswabi, 2025). While nation branding has been extensively explored in the context of tourism and global positioning (Dubinsky, 2024), its direct influence on citizen sentiment remains an under-examined.

Existing literature offers fragmented insights, yet a comprehensive framework linking nation branding to citizen sentiment spanning aspects of belonging, love, and psychological ownership remains elusive (Wu, 2017; Ripoll Gonzalez et al., 2025). This gap underscores the urgent need for further empirical and theoretical research to unravel the complexities of nation branding as a tool for internal cohesion and long-term national engagement, especially in countries in the Global South where the relationship between nation brands and citizens is often unclear. This study attempts to investigate the relationship between nations and citizens from a brand anthropomorphism perspective. Specifically, the study intends to explore the conceptualisation of nations as parents, exhibiting parental attributes that shape citizen sentiment and behaviour. When citizens perceive their country as a parental figure, a form of anthropomorphism emerges, influencing how they relate to national identity, governance, and civic engagement (Mihailovich, 2006). This study examines the psychological effects of nation-as-parent brands, exploring their impact on citizen confidence, emotional attachment ('brand love'), and psychological ownership of national identity. By analysing how anthropomorphism strengthens public trust, this research offers insights into nation branding as a tool for fostering unity, engagement, and long-term loyalty among citizens.

Keywords: Nation branding; Brand anthropomorphism; Citizen sentiment; Parental anthropomorphism.

64. Nation branding research: themes, trends, and gaps

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Facing contemporary globalization and the intensification of international competition, nations are undergoing significant transformations in economic and geopolitical terms. Nation branding, a concept introduced in the mid-1990s by Simon Anholt, has become a strategic lever allowing countries to enhance their attractiveness to investors, tourists, and international talent. It is based on the development of an appealing and unique national identity, aiming to influence the economic, cultural, and political aspects of a country.

This study aims to provide a general overview of the existing scientific literature on nation branding and to understand its contributions, methodologies, and research gaps in order to propose a potential research agenda that delves into underexplored aspects of nation branding. To the authors' knowledge, this is the first study to quantify the evolution of research on nation branding using a bibliometric approach focused exclusively on the concept of nation branding. Unlike previous studies, which encompass several related terms such as country branding, place branding, and others, this research focuses solely on articles incorporating "nation branding" as a keyword, ensuring a more targeted perspective on the evolution of this research field. The data were organized and presented using the VOSviewer software and Bibliometrix via RStudio.

This study, based on an in-depth analysis of 360 articles published between 2006 and 2024 in the Scopus academic database, highlights a continuous increase in academic interest in this field. The main findings of this study indicate that the historical evolution of nation branding reflects a shift from a purely marketing-driven approach to a broader strategy integrating political, social, and geopolitical dimensions. The study identified four main research axes: soft power and international relations, the role of media and social networks in nation branding, the influence of cultural industries, heritage, and sporting events on national perception, and the impact of economic policies on a country's attractiveness. These research axes were thoroughly analyzed and discussed to establish connections between each domain.

It is worth mentioning that the journals *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* and the *International Journal of Communication* stand out for their significant scientific impact in disseminating knowledge in this field. Influential publications, such as those by Ying Fan, Melissa Aronczyk, and Nadia Kaneva, focus on an in-depth exploration of the complex interactions between national identity, international perception, and soft power.

Methodological challenges remain, particularly regarding the measurement of the impact of nation branding campaigns and the sustainability of the results achieved. Current literature calls for a deeper exploration of digital tools, the role of global crises, and the ethical implications of this strategy.

Keywords: Nation branding; Soft power; Public diplomacy; Bibliometric analysis; VOSviewer; Bibliometrix.

103. The Global Soft Power Index 2025: The zero-sum game of soft power

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This presentation will share implications of the key findings from the Global Soft Power Index 2025 regarding soft power dynamics among top and bottom performing nation brands.

The analysis will examine the findings of a global survey measuring perceptions of nation brands and apply game theory concepts to draw conclusions and implications both for the theoretical understanding of place branding and for practical management of nation brands.

The Global Soft Power Index measures soft power by compiling perception research data, including three KPIs (Familiarity, Reputation, and Influence) and 35 attributes grouped under eight pillars, e.g. Business & Trade or Culture & Heritage. The survey, conducted across 102 markets with 170,000 respondents, evaluates 193 nation brands, making it the most comprehensive study of its kind.

Analysis of this year's data challenges the assumption, posited by some commentators in the field, that there would be a universal inflation of nation brand perception scores over time. Instead, the results suggest that soft power operates as a competitive field, with finite space for nations to capture the global public's attention and admiration. This year, the average increase in the overall soft power score among the top 10 nations was +0.9, whereas the bottom 10 saw an average decline of -3.0.

This divergence underscores an increasingly competitive global environment for place branding, where gains are not uniformly distributed but instead reflect a zero-sum game. It suggests that place branding is a dynamic space where strategic focus, sustained investment, and popular relevance make a difference.

Keywords: Soft power; Zero-sum game; Nation branding; Brand perceptions; Market research.

93. Should they stay or should they go? Media framing analysis of the tourism degrowth movement

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Media can influence the perception of places and what happens within their boundaries, thereby contributing to framing their reputation. By framing reality, media define places and influence place branding processes, particularly when audiences are unfamiliar with a place and form their perceptions based on mediated experiences (Boisen et al., 2011). Media framing has been widely used to analyse the representation of different social phenomena, including protests (Brown and Harlow, 2019; Gruber, 2023), conflicts (Perales-García et al., 2024) or tourism-related issues (Clark and Nyaupane, 2020; Hansen, 2020), among others. Framing involves presenting a central organizing idea of news content, and provides a context for understanding a topic, through processes of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration (Tankard et al., 1991).

However, research on the intersection between media framing and place branding remains limited. This study addresses this gap by analysing media coverage of a demonstration for tourism degrowth held in Barcelona in July 2024. Grounded in framing and place branding theories, it proposes a multidisciplinary approach to examine how digital newspapers reported on the event.

This research provides a detailed analysis of media coverage by examining frames of headlines, subtitles and leads, as well as visual frames of accompanying images across 28 local, regional, national, and international digital newspapers.

Results show that the newspapers mainly framed the demonstration as a conflict. Images and texts depict scenarios of conflicting perspectives, between protesters and tourists and between protesters and government leaders and tourism guilds. Coverage often relies on official data and narratives to describe the event, limiting protesters' voice to slogans or general descriptions of their goals and demands. The results indicate that Spanish media tend to focus on the demonstration itself, while international coverage places emphasis on the interaction between protesters and tourists. Several international media oversimplify and dramatize the demonstration, focusing on anecdotal events, while conferring a violent dimension to protesters.

These findings point to a branding narrative (Araya López, 2021) that portrays Barcelona in an undesirable way, that could negatively affect how the city and its residents are perceived abroad and that highlights tensions between residents and destination managers (Zerva et al., 2018). Additionally, a narrative of speciesism emerges, framing tourism as a potential threat to the survival of local communities. Lastly, the visibility tactics employed by protesters to attract media attention may have unintentionally overshadowed their core demands and underlying messages.

This paper provides a multidisciplinary exploration of media coverage surrounding the largest demonstration for tourism degrowth to date in Barcelona. It contributes to place branding literature by focusing on its intersection with media framing of a timely issue, providing insights that could be valuable for other cities facing similar tourism-related challenges.

Keywords: Media framing; Digital newspapers; Place branding; Tourism; Protests.

52. From Olympic Legacy to Sustainable Tourism: Innovative Branding Strategies for Chongli as a Ski Destination in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Purpose and Objectives

This paper explores how Chongli, a co-host city of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, transformed its Olympic spotlight into a sustainable tourism brand as a leading ski destination. The study examines the innovative communication strategies employed during the Winter Olympics to highlight Chongli's unique attributes and evaluates their adaptation in the post-Olympic period to sustain and expand its appeal among tourists. Specifically, the research addresses the following questions:

1. What branding strategies were implemented during the Winter Olympics to position Chongli as a ski destination?
2. How have these strategies evolved post-Olympics to attract domestic tourists?
3. How has the Olympic legacy been integrated into Chongli's long-term tourism development?

Originality

This study fills a gap in research on leveraging mega-event legacies for sustainable destination branding, with a specific focus on winter sports tourism. Drawing on Buhalis and Park's (2021) perspectives, it highlights the critical role of stakeholder collaboration and continuous innovation in creating and maintaining a compelling destination image. Moreover, the concept of "city brand love" (Ghorbanzadeh, 2024) underscores the significance of memorable experiences in enhancing a destination's attractiveness and fostering long-term tourist engagement.

Chongli's approach provides valuable insights into the integration of winter sports tourism, digital innovation, and post-pandemic recovery strategies. The city's use of advanced technologies like augmented reality (AR) and 5G live streaming, alongside targeted digital marketing campaigns on platforms such as Douyin and Xiaohongshu, exemplifies innovative branding practices. These efforts align with sustainable tourism principles, fostering a strong and resilient brand identity (Buhalis & Park, 2021) while enhancing tourist loyalty through immersive experiences (Ghorbanzadeh, 2024).

Research Methodology

A qualitative case study methodology was used, integrating primary and secondary data sources. Data collection included in-depth interviews with local government officials, tourism operators, and communication experts. Online user discourses from social media campaigns, promotional materials, and visitor feedback were analyzed following Pikkemaat, Pachucki, and Scholl-Grissemann's (2024) methodologies. Field observations further contextualized the integration of Olympic infrastructure and branding elements into Chongli's tourism offerings.

Findings and Discussion

The study identifies three key dimensions of Chongli's branding strategies:

1. **Olympic Branding Innovations:** During the Winter Olympics, Chongli employed advanced technologies such as AR and 5G live streaming to create immersive experiences. Visual storytelling showcased its pristine natural environment, state-of-the-art ski facilities, and rich cultural heritage. Strategic collaborations with international media and influencers ensured global visibility and resonance.
2. **Post-Olympic Strategies:** After the Winter Olympics, Chongli focused on domestic markets, particularly urban residents in Beijing and nearby regions. Digital marketing campaigns on Douyin, Xiaohongshu, and WeChat promoted user-generated content, tailored experiences, and seasonal events to sustain interest and encourage repeat visits.
3. **Legacy Integration and Evolution:** Chongli successfully repurposed Olympic-era infrastructure, such as high-speed rail connections and modern ski resorts, into its long-term tourism offerings. The continued use of Olympic branding elements and the development of year-round activities like hiking and mountain biking demonstrate adaptability and alignment with trends in destination competitiveness (Xu & Au, 2023).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study advances the understanding of how mega-event legacies can be utilized for sustainable tourism branding. It highlights the importance of continuous innovation, stakeholder collaboration, and adaptive strategies in maintaining destination competitiveness (Buhalis & Park, 2021). Practically, the findings provide actionable recommendations for policymakers and marketers aiming to transform mega-event investments into sustainable tourism growth and economic development.

Conclusions

Chongli's success illustrates the potential of innovative branding and legacy integration in establishing a regional city as a global ski destination. By aligning post-Olympic strategies with consumer preferences and leveraging cutting-edge communication technologies, Chongli has created a sustainable model for winter sports tourism branding. Future research could expand on these findings through comparative studies of other Olympic host cities.

Keywords: Winter Olympics; Destination branding; Legacy utilization; Innovative communication; Sustainable tourism.

83. Limitations of augmented reality in place branding of peripheral destinations

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The use of augmented reality (AR) in tourism enhances visitor engagement, destination branding and tourist attraction. However, existing literature on AR tourist applications often overlooks the critical role of strategic digital communication in leveraging this innovative technological tool to attract tourists at peripheral destinations. This study offers a critical perspective on the interplay between AR and digital communication in the promotion of Ulldecona, a peripheral destination in Catalonia, Spain. By analysing visitor and tourist data from the past decade to identify trends and adopting a mixed-methods approach – including an analysis of online communication and semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders – we assess the current state of online communication and the perceived importance of effective Information and Communication Technology (ICT) strategies according to both local and non-local stakeholders. Findings reveal that, despite AR's own ability in destination branding and marketing to attract local visitors, enhance visitor experiences and promote local heritage, the absence of a robust communication strategy limits its effectiveness in attracting non-local visitors and tourists. The study highlights that advanced technologies like AR are insufficient by themselves, and that strategic digital communication is essential to maximise the technology's impact specially in peripheral destinations. Recommendations are finally provided to peripheral Destination Marketing Organizations for integrating AR with ICT strategies to enhance tourism and destination branding in peripheral areas.

Keywords: Augmented reality; Peripheral destinations; Destination branding; Place branding; Online communication strategies.

123. Unlocking Capital Through Place Branding: Financing Tourism and Wellness in Thailand's New S-Curve Economy

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Abstract

Tourism and wellness are core pillars of Thailand's New S-Curve agenda, envisioned as engines for sustainable and inclusive economic growth. However, their intangible nature—centered on experiences, perception, and service quality—creates structural barriers in accessing traditional forms of finance. These sectors often lack physical collateral, generate delayed returns, and are assessed with tools ill-suited to non-tangible asset classes. This study investigates how financial innovation and, critically, place branding can serve as catalysts to overcome these barriers and enable capital flow into tourism and wellness ventures. Using a triangulation methodology—drawing from documentary research, expert interviews, stakeholder focus groups, and both qualitative and quantitative surveys—this research captures a holistic understanding of the financial ecosystem and its limitations in supporting intangible-heavy industries.

The findings reveal that the absence of a strong investment narrative, combined with fragmented institutional mechanisms, significantly constrains financing. In this context, place branding emerges not merely as a promotional tool, but as an economic strategy that can shape investor perception, define destination value, and coordinate stakeholder vision. By articulating clear narratives around identity, quality, wellness orientation, and cultural significance, destinations can enhance their financial attractiveness and reduce perceived investment risk. Moreover, place branding fosters strategic alignment between public and private actors, enabling the co-creation of investment cases that extend beyond tourism and into wellness infrastructure, creative hubs, and regenerative spaces.

To capitalize on this potential, the study recommends a reorientation of financial strategies toward models that integrate branding with capital design. These include the development of place-based revenue-sharing mechanisms, wellness-linked investment bonds tied to brand impact metrics, and geographically anchored public-private funding platforms. Policy should also support the creation of localized investment facilitation centers that package destination narratives with tailored financial instruments. Critically, these platforms should emphasize not only tourism volume, but quality, wellness standards, and the long-term economic identity of the place.

In reframing place branding as an investment instrument—rather than merely a communication exercise—this study highlights its essential role in mobilizing capital for the tourism and wellness sectors. As Thailand seeks to move beyond a resource- and volume-driven model of growth, aligning financial innovation with strong place identity offers a pathway to unlock the true economic potential of its most culturally rich, yet financially underserved, industries.

Keywords: Financing for tourism; Financing for wellness; Capital for place branding; New S-Curve.

4. Understanding Transmedia Tourism: A Definition and Future Research Directions

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The main goal of this research is to provide a new definition of transmedia tourism, understanding it not only as the effect of transmedia narratives (Jenkins, 2003) on destinations, but also as a way of understanding tourism as a contemporary phenomenon and as an innovative methodology for designing tourist spaces.

The current post-tourism context is shaped by three main trends: cultural convergence (Jenkins, 2006), the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), and technological reconfiguration (Dorcic et al., 2019). Taking these three axes into account, our new definition expands on and complements those of Jansson (2020, 2022), Garner (2019), and Mansson et al. (2020), in the sense that it presents transmedia narratives as a design vector capable of generating new tourist spaces.

Our research is organized around three research questions: (1) To propose an interpretation of tourism from the communication field and, specifically, analyse the impact of stories/narratives on the relationship between tourists and destinations. (2) To explore the relationships between transmedia narratives, cultural convergence, and tourism, through the identification, understanding, and analysis of theories and advancements made by both academia and the professional sector, and (3) To define and characterize the concept of transmedia tourism and understand its tools and practical design capabilities for creating tourist spaces.

To address the research objectives, a qualitative multimethod methodology was designed, combining different research techniques. On one hand, a literature review and a benchmarking of transmedia projects related to tourism, and on the other hand, an in-depth study following the case study method, including semi-structured interviews and qualitative and comparative content analysis. Specifically, five tourism projects incorporating transmedia communication elements were examined —the fiction series *The Plague* and *Bridgerton*, the CATCAR and Saints of Olot initiatives, and the *Romeo and Juliet* phenomenon in Verona. Based on the results obtained from the analysis, conclusions and recommendations were formulated, defining and characterizing the concept of ‘transmedia tourism’ and its tourism impact on a territory.

The focus on the tourism and transmedia relationship involves incorporating these narratives to better connect destinations with tourists and residents, activating heritage to design new spaces for tourism experience and participation. The research concluded with recommendations for academia and professionals in the sector, as well as the study’s limitations and future lines of work.

Keywords: Cultural convergence; Transmedia narratives; Communication; Experience economy; Tourism; New technologies; Gamification; Participation; Engagement; Prosumer; Co-creation; Post-tourism.

49. Beyond Mascots: The Kumamon Strategy as an Evolutionary Model of Place Branding

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Abstract

Aims: Whilst Japanese municipalities commonly use mascot characters ('Yuru-Chara') for promotional purposes, most employ these merely as 'animated logos'. Kumamon, Kumamoto Prefecture's black bear mascot, has achieved unprecedented success beyond its simple promotional use. This study presents Kumamon's developmental trajectory as an advanced practical model that is integrated into regional governance and identity formation initiatives and suggests the potential for transforming mascot-based place branding into a new theoretical model.

Theoretical Framework: This study applies the conceptual distinctions between promotion, marketing, and branding developed by Boisen et al.(2018), whereby 'promotion generates favourable communication, marketing balances supply and demand, and branding creates and maintains place identity'. The analysis is grounded in the Structurationist Dynamics of Place Brands model of Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), which conceptualises place branding as a cyclical process linking culture, identity, and image. In addition, our research is complemented by the 3i model (Identity, Integrity, Image) of Kotler et al. (2010), which emphasises the importance of authenticity and emotional connections in modern branding. Together, these theoretical approaches enable a nuanced analysis of how mascot characters can serve as dynamic mediators in place-identity formation processes.

Main Research Approach: The methodology employs three distinct approaches. First, it conducts a systematic review of existing brand asset surveys, including longitudinal national character ranking data and 2025 surveys on Kumamon's recognition and contribution to prefectural governance. Second, it examines the brand evolution process through public document reviews, licencing statistics analysis, newspaper database research, and oral history interviews with Kumamon's creators, stewards, and successive department managers. Third, it conducts a comparative analysis with reference to Gunma Prefecture's 'Gunma-chan'.

Findings: Four innovations define the Kumamon strategy: (1) 'Rakuichi-Rakuza' royalty-free licencing system enabling widespread adoption, (2) a cross-functional organisational structure that officially appoints the mascot as an official 'Sales and Happiness Manager' of the prefecture, integrating it into administrative functions, (3) transforming Kumamon into a symbol of recovery after the 2016 Kumamoto earthquake, and (4) strategic integration into governance through educational programmes and cultural diplomacy. From a structurationist perspective, Kumamon functions as a mediator in the cyclical process between expressing regional identity, forming an external image, and influencing internal culture. From the 3i perspective of Kotler et al. (2010), Kumamon successfully appeals to stakeholders' spirit and mindsets. By cultivating trust through integrity, it has developed into a place brand that carries deep emotional connections.

Conclusion: Mascot-based place branding can evolve beyond promotional tools through appropriate strategies and organisational structures. The Kumamon case demonstrates progression from promotion to true branding and integration into governance frameworks, extending the structurationist dynamics model by applying it to symbolic entities in place-identity formation.

Practical Implications: The Kumamon model offers a reproducible framework for mascot-based place branding. Its royalty-free strategy fosters community adoption, while its cross-organisational structure ensures consistent management. These practices provide guidelines for transforming mascots from promotional tools into comprehensive branding assets with socioeconomic impact. This model demonstrates how mascots can function at the intersection of economic development, cultural identity, and governance to create sustainable place brands.

Keywords: Place branding; City branding; Mascot-based place branding; Kumamon; Brand identity.

53. Innovative Applications of Staged Narratives in Large-Scale Sports Events: Transforming Audience Engagement and Media Storytelling in the 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games Media Tours

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Abstract

1. Introduction

Large-scale international sports events are not only competitions but also significant platforms for cultural diplomacy, nation branding, and media innovation. As digital transformation accelerates, event organizers must adopt innovative communication strategies to sustain audience engagement and maximize global media impact. The 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games, held in the post-pandemic era, offered a unique opportunity to transform traditional event storytelling by integrating staged narratives into its media communication strategy.

This paper explores how the Hangzhou Asian Games media tours utilized staged narratives as an innovative approach to strategic communication. By structuring narratives into three phases—natural spectacle (Qiantang River tidal bore), cultural and artistic fusion (sports aesthetics exhibition), and rural revitalization (Qingshan Village tour)—the event transformed how sports, culture, and media engagement converged in an era of digital storytelling. This study examines how these staged narratives enhanced audience immersion, diversified content dissemination, and reshaped international media perceptions.

This paper positions staged narratives as a novel framework for evolving sports event communication, integrating digital tools, and expanding cross-cultural influence.

2. Literature Review

Research on sports event communication has evolved from traditional one-way broadcasting to interactive and immersive storytelling (Müller & Scheurer, 2019). Studies on strategic communication in mega-events (Smith & Higgins, 2013) highlight the increasing need for adaptive, audience-driven narratives to maintain engagement across different cultural contexts.

Scholars emphasize the importance of integrated media strategies in modern event storytelling (Jenkins, 2006), particularly through digital transformation and cross-platform storytelling (Dissanayake, 2003). However, limited research has examined how staged narratives can be structured to enhance audience retention and media amplification.

By bridging insights from sports branding, digital media studies, and strategic event communication, this study contributes to understanding how staged narratives can serve as a transformative strategy for global event storytelling.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the staged narratives framework, which integrates event storytelling theory and strategic communication models. Staged narratives are designed to unfold in phases, sustaining engagement over time and maximizing audience immersion (Foss, 2009). This approach aligns with framing theory (Entman, 1993), which posits that selective content structuring shapes audience perceptions and engagement levels.

For the Hangzhou Asian Games, staged narratives transformed traditional event communication into a multi-layered, immersive storytelling strategy:

1. Natural Spectacle: The Qiantang River tidal bore was framed as a grand opening, setting the stage for event storytelling through powerful natural imagery.
2. Cultural and Artistic Fusion: The sports aesthetics exhibition merged visual storytelling, cultural branding, and digital interaction, demonstrating innovation in event identity.
3. Rural Revitalization: The Qingshan Village tour emphasized sustainability narratives, expanding the discourse of sports events beyond urban spectacle to regional transformation.

This transformative framework provides a systematic method to evaluate how staged narratives innovate sports event storytelling and audience participation.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study approach (Yin, 2018), utilizing content analysis, semi-structured interviews, and digital media analytics to examine how the Hangzhou Asian Games media tours transformed event communication through staged narratives.

Data collection includes:

- Content Analysis: Examining global media coverage from Xinhua, The Guardian, NHK, and The Korea Times to analyze how staged narratives shaped media discourse.
- Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducting interviews with media professionals, event organizers, and international journalists involved in the media tours.
- Social Media Analytics: Assessing audience engagement on Xiaohongshu, Weibo, Twitter, and YouTube, measuring public interaction and sentiment.

By integrating qualitative and digital methodologies, this study ensures a comprehensive assessment of how staged narratives drive media transformation in sports event communication.

5. Findings

The study identifies three key ways staged narratives transformed sports event communication:

1. Revolutionizing Media Engagement through Structured Narratives
 - The Qiantang River tidal bore event generated high-impact international coverage, utilizing natural spectacle as a storytelling anchor.
 - The sports aesthetics exhibition facilitated cross-sector dialogue, merging sports media with art, design, and technology.
 - The Qingshan Village tour transformed rural development into a global media narrative, expanding sports event branding beyond traditional urban settings.
2. Enhancing Digital Interactivity and Cross-Platform Engagement
 - User-generated content (UGC) from journalists and influencers amplified staged narratives across digital platforms.
 - The structured approach allowed for multi-phase audience engagement, increasing interaction across different demographic groups.
3. Balancing Authenticity with Strategic Event Messaging
 - Some journalists raised concerns about the over-curation of media narratives, questioning the balance between organic storytelling and controlled messaging.
 - Differences in media framing across cultural contexts influenced audience interpretation, highlighting challenges in narrative adaptability.

6. Discussion

Findings demonstrate that staged narratives represent an innovative transformation in sports event communication by:

- Enhancing audience engagement through structured storytelling phases.
- Expanding event branding by integrating sports, culture, and sustainability into a single narrative.
- Adapting media messaging to digital ecosystems, ensuring long-term impact and cross-cultural resonance.

However, the study also identifies challenges in maintaining narrative authenticity while ensuring strategic event messaging remains effective. Future innovations should integrate AI-driven content personalization and real-time audience interaction to refine staged narratives dynamically.

7. Conclusion

The 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games successfully transformed event communication through the innovative use of staged narratives. By structuring the event's media storytelling into three interconnected phases, the organizing committee redefined how large-scale sports events engage global audiences.

This study contributes to event communication research by demonstrating how staged narratives function as a transformative tool for international sports branding. Future research should explore how AI, immersive media, and digital interactivity can further evolve this storytelling model for greater audience participation and engagement.

Keywords: Staged narratives; Large-scale sports events; Hangzhou Asian games; Media tours.

91. Integrating Sense of Place and Co-created Storytelling in Place Branding: The Evolution of the Setouchi Triennale

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This study examines the Setouchi Triennale, an internationally renowned art event in Japan. Its origins trace back to art initiatives launched in 1985 on Naoshima, a once depopulated island that has since become a leading example of regional revitalization through art. Over time, it expanded across the wider Setouchi region, involving diverse stakeholders and fostering cultural and economic renewal. The festival serves as a unique case in which businesses, residents, artists, and tourists have collaboratively co-created value and shaped the region's brand narrative.

Storytelling has gained increasing significance in place branding as a strategic means to convey the unique identity and values of a destination. Recent research highlights the importance of interactive, co-created storytelling processes, where residents, tourists, and other stakeholders collectively shape the perception of a destination. At the same time, the emotional connection between people and places—often conceptualized as Sense of Place (SOP)—has been suggested in the literature as a factor contributing to the development and evolution of place branding. However, current studies tend to focus on SOP at the individual actor level, such as residents' or tourists' SOP, while overlooking the dynamic, co-created SOP emerging through value co-creation among multiple actors.

By analyzing the evolution of art-related activities from Naoshima to the broader Setouchi area, this research aims to demonstrate how place branding functions as a dynamic story formed through value co-creation among diverse actors. Furthermore, it explores the critical role of SOP within the co-created storytelling process, highlighting how shared meanings and emotional connections are continuously negotiated and reconstructed through interactions among stakeholders.

This study contributes to the theoretical advancement of place branding by integrating the concepts of co-created storytelling and SOP, offering a novel perspective on how collaborative narratives and shared emotional ties drive successful place branding outcomes. The findings offer practical insights for policymakers, destination managers, and marketers seeking to foster sustainable and inclusive place branding strategies through participatory and co-creative approaches.

Keywords: Co-created storytelling; Sense of place; Place branding; Value co-creation; Setouchi Triennale.

14. Morally obliged to care: Rethinking inclusive place branding through feminist ethics

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Aims: This paper contributes to ongoing debates on inclusive place branding by introducing a feminist ethics of care approach. While existing research often treats inclusion as a strategic or instrumental move, aimed at enhancing collaboration or democratic legitimacy, it is rarely framed as an ethical imperative. Moreover, prevailing human-centred perspectives tend to marginalize non-human and environmental dimensions of place. In response, we argue for a relational and performative understanding of place branding, one that is essential for advancing genuinely inclusive practices.

Theoretical Framework: We outline a feminist ethics of care approach that shifts the focus from conventional stakeholder engagement toward relationality, interdependence, and vulnerability, encompassing human, non-human, and environmental dimensions of place. This perspective conceptualizes places as dynamic and relational, where agency is distributed across human actors, non-human entities, and ecological processes.

Main Research Approach: A qualitative study of residents' experiences with sustainable transition in a rural Spanish region serves as an illustrative example to explore how theories on feminist ethics of care could inform future research in place branding.

Key Arguments/Findings: Our analysis shows how a care-oriented approach can shape place identity and support more equitable and just branding practices. It offers an alternative to commodification by foregrounding the moral responsibilities of stakeholders to nurture communities and environments.

Conclusions: We argue that inclusivity should be embedded at the core of place branding practices. A care ethics approach offers transformative potential by reframing branding as a moral practice grounded in social justice and environmental sustainability. In doing so, it moves inclusion beyond tokenism, fostering deeper, more meaningful engagement with the human, non-human, and environmental dimensions of place.

Practical Implications: This approach encourages place brand practitioners and policymakers to rethink inclusivity as an ongoing ethical responsibility. It invites the adoption of practices that nurture long-term, reciprocal relationships with place, understood as a network of human, non-human and environmental connections, enabling more meaningful and sustainable branding strategies.

Keywords: Inclusive place branding; Ethics; Care; Feminism; Non-humans; Sustainability.

47. The Emotional Infrastructure of Place Branding: Deep Acting, Relational Labour, and Social Capital in 24/7 Promotional Work

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Aims: This paper explores the underexamined affective dimensions of place branding by foregrounding the emotional labour embedded in the everyday work of practitioners. It aims to build on Warren's (2024) social capital framework by extending it with theories of emotional labour, arguing that emotional regulation—both deep and surface acting—is a critical, yet invisible, resource in the branding of place.

Theoretical Framework: The study draws from three main theoretical pillars:

1. Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1984; Warren, 2024) to understand how personal networks and cultural authority underpin legitimacy in place branding.
2. Emotional Labour (Hochschild, 2003), particularly the distinction between surface and deep acting, to explain how emotional expression is both a personal cost and professional necessity.
3. Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory (1959) to conceptualize place brand professionals as performers managing impressions within relationally intensive environments.

Main Research Approach: The study adopts an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) based on in-depth interviews with over 40 place brand practitioners globally. This qualitative method prioritizes lived experience and offers a rich account of the emotional and relational demands faced by professionals.

Key Arguments / Findings: Place branding is not merely strategic communication but a form of affective labour that requires continuous emotional regulation.

Emotional performances—whether through enthusiasm, patience, or charisma—are critical to maintaining stakeholder trust and brand consistency.

These professionals often work in high-exposure, 24/7 relational settings, where their emotional investment remains largely invisible yet central to perceived legitimacy.

Emotional labour is tightly interwoven with social capital, becoming a mechanism through which practitioners accrue symbolic value in complex stakeholder environments.

Conclusions: The emotional demands of place branding call for a re-evaluation of the profession, particularly around recognition, legitimacy, and occupational support. As place branders operate as cultural intermediaries who must continuously perform emotional credibility, there is a need to address the toll and expectations placed on them within the neoliberal governance of cities.

Practical Implications: This research urges institutions and city stakeholders to:

- Integrate emotional competence and social capital as key qualifications in recruitment and -training.
- Develop formal support systems (e.g., peer networks, reflective supervision, resilience-building programs).
- Reassess how emotional contributions are valued in policy and performance frameworks.

Keywords: Emotional labour; Practitioners; Social capital.

48. The powerful impact of emotions: A missing link in place brand management

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Despite significant research on emotions across disciplines highlighting their importance in shaping the world around us (Firth-Godbehere, 2020), their role in place branding lies far from being fully understood, as according to Swain et al. (2024) “researchers have rarely used any theory to understand the role of consumer emotions in place branding”. As place branding is an inherently multidimensional and elusive concept (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2021), co-created by multiple stakeholders (Eletxigerra et al., 2018), whose interactions are driven by their own perspectives and perceptions of omni-temporality (Reynolds et al., 2024), it is clear that emotions play a significant role in these interactive processes, influencing peoples’ behavior and participation (Sharma et al., 2021). It seems therefore imperative to further study the role of emotions in all aspects of the place branding process. This is expected to support a better understanding of how relationships with the place develop; facilitate a stronger brand stakeholder involvement; and enable more effective brand communications.

Most place promotion campaigns attempt to trigger emotions towards a place (Bennett, 2013), as places are considered ‘products offering emotional and economic benefits to their “consumers”’ (Burgess and Wood, 1988: 115). A notable example is one of the most famous and successful campaigns in the field that was designed for the state of New York, with the simple yet very impactful tagline: “I Love New York” (Godfrey, 1984). Emotional branding strategies for cities have demonstrably been found to reinforce place attachment for visitors and residents alike (Casais & Poço, 2023), while similar findings have been reported for rural tourism as well (Kastenholz et al., 2020). Within this context it comes as no surprise that destination brand love has been linked to destination brand defense and resistance to negative information (Haq et al., 2024), demonstrating the link between emotions and place resilience. In this sense, a better understanding of the role of emotions is expected to have important implications for a place’s future sustainability.

To address the need to understand the role of emotions in place branding, the present study builds on the work of Kavaratzis and Hatch (2021), who recognized the dynamic and direct role of multiple stakeholders in the place brand management process and conceptualized the brand as open-ended and continuously evolving based on the different meanings different individuals assign to it. In accordance with the recent redefinition of place brands as emotional experiences proposed by Eshuis and Gonzalez (2024) and drawing from a) the role of aesthetic atmospheres in place branding (Anderson and Ash, 2015; Eronen, 2024), b) the Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance theory (P-A-D) (Huang et al., 2017), and c) the affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) we attempt to embrace and highlight the role of emotions in the place brand management process, by incorporating emotions in the ATLAS wheel of place brand management.

To support our conceptual proposition, we delve into real-life case studies that have been recognized for their emotional resonance, excellence, and sustainability focus. The analysis draws from the submissions nominated for the Place Brand Impact Stories awards in 2024 by The Place Brand Observer. Findings shed light on emotions’ pivotal role, discussing their importance in crafting the sense of place, in generating the stakeholders’ inclusion and engagement, in creating long-term relationships, as well as in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the place brand.

Keywords: Emotions; Place brand management; Stakeholders; Sustainability.

124. Branding from the Inside Out: The Role of Employee Wellbeing, Organizational culture, in Shaping place Identity and Destination Branding

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1. The American College of Greece, Greece

In tourism and hospitality, employees are often the most immediate and enduring point of contact between a destination and its visitors (touch points). While traditional place branding research centers on visual identity, narratives, and promotional strategies, this paper argues that internal organizational dynamics, particularly employee wellbeing, organizational culture, and employer branding are pivotal to the creation and sustainability of a destination's image.

Bringing together perspectives from tourism studies and organizational behavior, this study explores how human resource practices, employee engagement, and workplace culture contribute to shaping place identity. It draws on theories of internal branding, service-dominant logic, organizational commitment, and place attachment to propose a framework linking the employee experience (EX) to the customer experience (CX) and, ultimately, to place brand equity.

We argue that investments in staff development, psychological safety, and inclusive HR practices not only improve service quality but also foster local pride and stronger emotional connections with visitors. Employees become both brand ambassadors and active co-creators of place meaning. Research in organizational behavior emphasizes that employee wellbeing and engagement are critical to both internal performance and external brand image (Krekel, Ward & De Neve, 2019). In the context of tourism, the integration of internal branding with destination branding has been shown to enhance authenticity and emotional resonance with visitors (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013).

Case studies from Greek island destinations—where tourism dominates the local economy illustrate the tension between the image of Greece as a welcoming destination and the often-precarious working conditions of hospitality staff. We explore whether employers recognize the strategic importance of long-term employee wellbeing for both business sustainability and destination brand equity. This dual focus allows us to reframe hospitality employees not merely as service providers but as key agents in the co-construction of ethical, people-centered place branding.

Keywords: Employee wellbeing; Employer branding; Destination brand equity; Place identity.

13. Puerto Rico as a Brand: A Contested Destination

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Earlier this year, after pop culture icon Bad Bunny co-hosted “The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon” an American TV show and announced a 21-show residency in Puerto Rico, the recently reelected mayor of San Juan, Miguel Romero, quipped that the artist had done a better job of promoting Puerto Rico than the island’s official destination marketing organization. The goal of this paper is to address how the idea of a Destination Marketing Organization created by the Puerto Rican government has run into significant political opposition. In 2017, Discover Puerto Rico took control over the island’s place-branding efforts. However, its performance has been polarizing, with critics pointing to significant blunders. For example, an early ad in its “Live Boricua” campaign sparked backlash for featuring a family that did not look like most Puerto Ricans. Critics have also raised concerns about the productiveness of the DMO considering its \$50USD million budget for an island like Puerto Rico that is financially bankrupt. Beyond its marketing blunders, Discover Puerto Rico has struggled to navigate Puerto Rico’s politically charged place-branding landscape. In fact, it has been contested from the start, and remains so, as recently elected Gov. Jennifer González evaluates its future. This paper will make use of primary documents, interviews, and literature in the field, to document what were the origins of Discover Puerto Rico as a non-partisan organization. Followed by describing how the DMO has been embroiled in a tumultuous political landscape, and what the future of Discover Puerto Rico will hold. To conclude, this paper aims to bring politics back to place branding.

Keywords: Place branding; Puerto Rico; Political science; Destination marketing organization.

117. Securing the brand: How are the post-communist buffer states attempting to enforce their security by re-branding

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Abstract: The war in Ukraine amped up the debates around the connection between a country's reputation and security (Cull, 2023). Especially, in the buffer states, the pressure is omnipresent with the increased tensions between Russia and NATO. The paper aims to explore the ongoing strategic place branding projects attempted by Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, which find themselves in a difficult geopolitical position that puts them in security danger. The paper also aims to outline the overall urgency in the region.

Not many studies have explored the concept of wartime branding, place branding in conflict reconstruction, or strive to deter a possible conflict through image (Kaneva, 2022; Lee, 2023). The war in Ukraine prompted researchers to dive deeper into the connection between security matters and the country's image (Cull, 2022; Kaneva, 2022; Horbyk and Orlova, 2022; Lee, 2023). As the place branding concept faces a divide in approaches, it is important to stress that this paper looks at it from a broad strategic perspective (Govers, 2024), guided by grand positioning strategy, influencing policy-making styles. Cull (2024) suggests that reputational security should not only focus on presenting the country's positive attributes but also attempt to limit the negative associations and attributes. According to Anholt (2007), people are very reluctant to let go of the old narratives and associations, and therefore, a long-term strategic process of rebranding and repositioning is needed. This approach applies well to the security and conflict studies of the country's image.

The paper answers how place branding strategies are used to enhance a country's reputational security. Multiple case studies were conducted to answer the research question, combining data from social media, official strategic documents, and interviews with local place branding practitioners. Thematic analysis was conducted across the analysed documents.

The case studies revealed multiple mentions of war in Ukraine; it also highlighted the striving of the analysed countries to stress their sovereignty and place in the geopolitics as a democratic, innovative, and sustainable partner of the Western world. Attempts to associate the nation brands with technology, modernity, and connectivity were prevalent. National symbols were a strong part of the analysed materials, including notable occurrences of military motives.

This paper offers important insights into the regional urgencies visible even outside the borders of the Baltic states. The historical connections with Russia and cultural and demographic specifics put the region's countries under pressure to secure their reputation, gain international support, and have a strong position in defense and world politics. This intersection of disciplines could help to demonstrate the importance of place branding and reputational security to still hesitant politicians, scholars from different fields, and the public.

The case studies also aim to serve as a practical guide on how these countries approach the issue. This could benefit countries in a similar anxious situation while only beginning their place branding effort. Such case studies offer an overview of potentially successful and less effective approaches and techniques.

Keywords: Place branding; Reputational security; Buffer states.

58. Politics against place branding in the current international education market

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This paper aims to provide insights into, and draw operational lessons from, the sudden recent incursion of an illiberal domestic politics into the marketing of higher education institutions to foreign students. It does so through a close study of the Australian case, situated within the broader context of recent restrictive policy turns in Canada and beyond. The Australian case is striking because it was a pioneer, from the late 1980s, of shifting 'from aid to trade' in its policy towards international students: encouraging universities to become active participants in the growing international market for full-fee study abroad. In turn Australian universities developed strong marketing and recruitment capabilities.

Successive Australian national, state and local governments have invested heavily in branding their locales as attractive destinations for study abroad. National higher education policy has made international student revenues central to funding sectoral expansion for domestic students and cross-subsidising research capacity. Yet since 2024 oppositional politics led the federal government to introduce unprecedented caps on international student visas – mirroring Canada's measure – and impose micro-level controls on universities' international recruitment, hitherto unregulated. However, education is still prominent in public diplomacy even while the recent national election featured promises to curtail further international student numbers, to restore the ostensibly damaged 'social license' of universities.

The theoretical framework is necessarily multi-disciplinary as the disruptive impact of an electoral politics calculus upon the logics of place branding strategy and tactics is the core of this study. The international business literature has primarily examined political risk through the prism of investor-host state relations (eg. Kobrin, 1979, Gomes-Casseres, 1990); and more recently in terms of illiberal populism (eg. Hartwell & Devinney, 2021, Rašković et al, 2023). Yet the international education enterprise is beholden to home government border/migration controls (quotas, work rights), direct sectoral regulation, funding and governance, as well as complex local and regional regulatory impacts on hosting capacity (housing) and support (health access, student transport subsidies). Universities are embedded now in a vibrant ecology of onshore enterprises and institutions, and offshore partners and agents, that enable, complement, and constrain their international recruitment, and complicate supporting public sector place branding initiatives. Political markets theory, and recent conceptually-rich works on stakeholder engagement in place branding (eg. Källström and Siljeklint, 2024, Kavaratzis et al, 2018, Lucarelli, 2018), therefore inform the research inquiry.

The research approach includes desk research of extensive secondary reportage of comparative international cases, given the still emergent dynamics and cross-border interdependence of this new politics of international education, and interviews and correspondence with representative Australian higher education industry actors. Content analysis of populist critiques of Australian universities' international recruitment is undertaken. From this, conclusions are drawn about the factors accounting for their recent political saliency, and the public policy challenges entailed for reestablishing the public legitimacy of higher education as export sector. Practical implications for universities include recognition of substantive issues arising from an influx of international students, and how branding communications must also foreground the benefits to the domestic electorate-at-large, and to universities' immediate domestic constituencies.

Keywords: Universities; Destination marketing; Illiberal populism; International students; Stakeholders.

18. Including Protest Voices in the Place Branding Process: Towards a Typology of Anti-Tourism Movements' Communication in Recent Years

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2. Lund University, Sweden

Aims: This study explores the online communication strategies of anti-tourism movements to evaluate their potential contributions to place branding—a topic that has received limited scholarly attention. While prior research often views such movements as antagonistic to place branding efforts, we challenge this assumption. Through an analysis of nine movements across five countries, we apply the typology developed by Neumayer and Svensson (2016) to classify these groups and examine their core claims and agendas.

Theoretical Framework: Rising dissatisfaction with tourism-driven urbanization has fueled the emergence of anti-tourism movements across Europe. These protests have intensified in the post-COVID-19 era, as concerns about overtourism have resurfaced in public discourse (Milano, Novelli, and Russo, 2024). These movements advocate for community rights and propose alternative tourism development agendas (Milano, Novelli, and Cheer, 2019). However, media portrayals often frame them as radical or dangerous, leading to their marginalization in policy discussions. This study explores whether such movements can offer valuable perspectives in shaping place branding.

Research Approach: The study investigates anti-tourism movements from Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Italy. The material was collected from the official websites of these movements and analyzed using NVivo 15. Through content analysis, we examined their claims, agendas, and perspectives on tourism urbanization, ranging from utopian to dystopian (Harvey, 2001), and classified them according to Neumayer and Svensson's (2016) framework.

Key Findings: Our findings offer insights into how these activist voices might be constructively integrated into the place branding process. The movements analyzed show considerable diversity. While a minority engage in radical actions (civil disobedience), the majority adopt moderate approaches and seek constructive dialogue with local stakeholders (civil obedience). Their agendas vary, including proposals for improved tourism planning, sustainable development, and in some cases, tourism degrowth. These groups also differ demographically, with some dominated by younger activists and others by older generations, many of whom study or work within tourism-related fields.

Conclusions: All the movements strive to represent and defend the interests of their local communities. They are composed of individuals with substantial knowledge of tourism dynamics and articulate clear visions for tourism development in their areas. This positions them as valuable actors to consider within the place branding process.

Practical Implications: The study proposes a typology of protest movements that can serve as a tool for place branding practitioners and tourism policymakers to identify relevant stakeholders.

Keywords: Anti-tourism movements; Tourism urbanization; Place branding; Typology of protests.

89. A new place branding strategy for Amsterdam – what kind of city do we want to be and project?

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In 2024-2026 Amsterdam is developing a city branding strategy in which the question is answered 'what kind of city do we want to be and project?' The goal of the strategy is to reflect Amsterdam's style in all aspects of city life and to comply with the needs citizens, visitors, and businesses and institutions express.

With the aim of contributing to the knowledge on place branding processes, we elaborate in this case study, from a practitioners' point of view, on:

1. The development process: research and continuous stakeholder engagement;
2. The city branding strategy, comprising of a brand essence, a brand vision, brand values with a formula, and 3 themes we want to grow on;
3. Insights on how we developed it using contemporary place branding literature;
4. Practical implications and discussion.

Keywords: City branding; Stakeholder engagement; City branding strategy; Branded house strategy.

108. “Stockport isn’t shit”: The inter-relationship between shaping the experience and image of towns and cities

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The thesis underpinning this paper is that the inter-relationship between what it refers to as “place-shaping” and place branding could be strengthened to improve how towns and cities evolve, are experienced, and perceived. The paper applies existing theory about the links between place branding and urban policy, to an initial assessment of Stockport in Great Manchester, UK.

A review of the characteristics of cities used in international place branding indices is used as a prompt to widen the scope and balance between ‘people and place’ than typically applied in place management. A section exploring the importance of residents’ demographics in place-shaping and branding serves as a reminder that there are ‘communities within communities’ and that responses and communications should be cognisant of this. The application of an outline framework created through learning from the first two research points shows how simple prompts can help create a comprehensive and coordinated narrative across policy silos. Lastly, early observations about well-documented levels of communication in Stockport, emphasises how the familiarity of residents means they are especially influenced by experiences and informal communications.

The aspiration is that through review amongst practitioners and academics, the core concepts in the paper can be refined and in-time tested as part of more in-depth research as part of wider learning about the inter-relationship between place-shaping and place branding.

Keywords: Place branding; Placemaking; Urban policy; Stakeholder engagement.

111. The long-term impact of city branding-The case of Athens

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1. University of the Aegean, Greece

For cities, regions, and countries looking to establish a competitive position on the international scene, place branding has evolved into a strategic tool. Although there are short-term impacts such as tourism promotion, the long-term effect of place branding includes shaping place identity, encouraging civic pride, and driving sustainable development. Over time, consistent and participatory place branding efforts can influence the perception of internal and external audiences, strengthen place narratives, enhance economic development, and support place resilience. This study explores the long-term impact of place branding in the case of the “This is Athens & Partners” Partnership. The Partnership launched in December 2016 and consisted of Athens International Airport, Aegean Airlines and Athens Development and Destination Management Agency. Today it has been extended to include the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (SETE), Lamda Development, Ionian Hotel Enterprises and Lampsa Hellenic Hotels. As the initial aim of “This is Athens & Partners” was to strengthen city’s position as a city break destination, this study aims to detect the long-term impact the aforementioned initiative. The hashtag #thisisathens has been used for detecting Instagram posts produced by stakeholders and tourists since 2016. Structural topic modeling (STM) assisted us in identifying latent subjects in the posts’ text, while R was utilized for data collection and analysis.

Keywords: City branding; Destination branding; Participatory place branding; Stakeholders’ engagement in place branding; Digital technologies in place branding.

90. Reframing Talent Attraction through Place Branding: The Case of Gothenburg's Future Workforce Strategy

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Aims: This paper aims to critically examine the intersection of place branding and talent attraction, using Gothenburg as a case study to explore how cities can strategically position themselves to secure a future-ready workforce. The study contributes to theoretical debates on the role of human capital in urban competitiveness and the evolving responsibilities of public actors in talent attraction.

Theoretical Framework: The research is situated within the frameworks of place branding (Kavaratzis, 2004; Barkun et al., 2021), human capital theory (Lucas, 1988; Kotsantonis & Serafeim, 2020), and the emerging literature on talent attraction ecosystems (Andersson & King-Grubert, forthcoming). It also engages with Hospers' (2010) typology of city marketing — cold and warm — as a lens to evaluate Gothenburg's strategic positioning.

Main Research Approach: The study combines document analysis, observations, and semi-structured interviews with residents, newcomers, and institutional actors. The research design is exploratory and interpretive, aiming to generate grounded insights for theory-building.

Key Arguments/Findings: Gothenburg's attractiveness is co-produced by public infrastructure, employer branding, and the lived experiences of residents and newcomers. The city's current approach reflects a hybrid of marketing strategies, with potential to evolve into a more inclusive and data-driven model. There is a conceptual tension between the economic framing of "talent" and the need for socially sustainable, inclusive urban development.

Conclusions: The study concludes that Gothenburg's future competitiveness hinges on its ability to integrate place branding with inclusive talent attraction strategies. This requires a shift from fragmented initiatives to a coordinated, long-term vision that aligns urban development, labour market policy, and international positioning.

Practical Implications: Recommendations include the development of a unified talent attraction strategy embedded in the city's Business Strategic Programme, enhanced cross-sector collaboration, and the institutionalisation of welcoming infrastructures such as International House Gothenburg. The findings also call for a redefinition of "talent" to include underutilised local populations, particularly in vulnerable areas.

Keywords: Place branding; Talent attraction; Human capital; Urban development; Gothenburg.

DAY 2 FRIDAY 31/10/2025

Session 4A:

Branding neglected places (10:20-11:40)

44. Spatial context matters: A conceptual framework for urban and rural-peripheral place branding

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2. University of Lisbon, Portugal

Aims: This paper critically examines place branding strategies across the urban-rural spectrum, identifying conceptual gaps in how branding strategies are formulated and applied in different spatial contexts. While extensive literature exists on urban place branding, frameworks for rural, remote, and peripheral areas remain underdeveloped (Zenker, 2024). We question why urban-centric approaches fail in rural settings and we explore theoretical foundations needed for effective rural-peripheral place branding, examining whether socio-economic structure, stakeholder composition, and place identity formation differences necessitate distinct theoretical approaches (Rauhut & Rauhut Kompaniets, 2020).

Theoretical framework: The paper operates at the intersection of place branding, territorial development, and rural studies, building upon identity-based branding (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013), stakeholder theory (Henninger et al., 2016), and the interactive network approach (Hankinson, 2004). It distinguishes between place branding and the broader concept of place marketing, offering spatially sensitive working definitions and challenging the dominant urban-centric paradigm (Rauhut Kompaniets & Rauhut, 2016).

Main research approach: We employ comparative theoretical analysis, systematically examining constructs developed for urban contexts and evaluating their rural applicability. Through literature review, we identify tensions in applying urban-centric theories to rural contexts. The approach develops theoretical propositions about contextual differences and their implications for branding strategy, ensuring rigor through systematic comparison and conceptual model development.

Key findings: Rural-peripheral areas demonstrate different resource configurations, stakeholder dynamics, and power relations that render urban frameworks inadequate. While urban branding leverages density, diversity, and complexity, rural branding confronts resource scarcity, smaller networks, and identity assets tied to landscape and tradition. We identify paradoxical tendencies in rural-peripheral branding: either mimicking urban qualities or over-emphasizing rustic stereotypes, and argue for collaborative, rather than competitive, branding approaches.

Conclusions: Place branding must develop contextually sensitive frameworks across the urban-rural/peripheral continuum rather than applying universal models. We propose an integrated theoretical framework accounting for varying resource intensities, stakeholder configurations, and identity formation processes across different spatial contexts, recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities of different territorial types.

Practical implications: The findings provide a theoretical foundation for rural-peripheral communities, practitioners and policymakers to resist one-size-fits-all strategies developed for urban contexts. The proposed framework offers guidelines for development of authentic, asset-based rural branding approaches and informs more effective resource allocation. It also helps practitioners set realistic objectives, contributing to regional development policy by enabling more effective symbolic capital formation in peripheral areas that traditionally struggle to compete with urban centres.

Keywords: Place branding; Brand identity; Territorial development; Urban-rural nexus.

46. Branding in spaces of contested place identity: Sweden's vulnerable urban areas

Cecilia Cassinger¹ and Ola Thufvesson¹

1. Lund University, Sweden

Aims: This paper investigates place brand communication in marginalised urban areas with limited appeal to residents, visitors, and investors. While existing studies focus on crime prevention and security, this research shifts attention toward branding and place-based attractiveness. It critically examines how branding initiatives engage with complex social, spatial, economic, political, and cultural dynamics. Empirically, it explores suburban places in Sweden designated by police as “vulnerable” – areas marked by high crime, a culture of silence, visible drug markets, and persistent negative media portrayal (Gerell et al., 2022). The study deepens understanding of tensions and possibilities in branding spaces subject to symbolic and material exclusion.

Theoretical Framework: A spatial-geographic perspective on place branding guides this analysis (Aharon & Alfasi, 2022; Lucarelli & Cassel, 2020; Pike, 2009; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013), enriched by human geography literature on ‘left behind places’ (Pike et al., 2024; Tups et al., 2024). The theoretical lens is adapted from rural and post-industrial contexts to examine urban peripheries shaped by socio-economic exclusion, symbolic dislocation, and fragmentation.

Research Approach: The study centres on a Swedish suburban municipality (MUX), encompassing several police-labelled vulnerable areas. Lacking a unified identity, MUX illustrates the challenges of branding fragmented urban spaces. A qualitative approach was adopted using mobile methods (O'Neill & Roberts, 2019), including walkabouts, ten in-depth interviews with officials and stakeholders, and a narrative analysis of national media coverage.

Key Findings: Efforts to build a cohesive brand in MUX are obstructed by deep spatial and social fragmentation. Residents identify more with their immediate neighbourhoods or other vulnerable areas than with the broader municipality. Branding narratives emphasize the perceived ‘un-Swedishness’ of these communities, celebrating creativity, intercultural richness, and diversity. This framing evokes mixed reactions – some see it as empowering; others argue it perpetuates stereotypes or excludes less diverse groups. Negative media representations focusing on crime and vulnerability reinforce stigma and hinder efforts to reshape public perception.

Conclusion: This paper contributes to city branding scholarship by revealing how branding intersects with uneven development, socio-spatial inequality, and fragmented identities. It highlights the spatial-geographic dimension of brand communication and shows how physical separation, restricted mobility, and symbolic dislocation hinder formation of a unified place identity.

Practical Implications: Branding strategies premised on consistency may falter where residents relate more to their neighbourhoods than the broader municipal identity. Municipalities should promote pluralistic place identities and elevate grassroots storytelling reflecting lived community experiences. Such narratives can contest stereotypes, foster pride, and enhance legitimacy and appeal in marginalised urban areas.

Keywords: City branding; Urban marginalisation; Spatial-geographies; Communication; Attractiveness; Vulnerable urban areas.

61. Can islands become “places that matter” and how important is cultural activity for re-branding insularity? The case of the border islands in Greece

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Aims: Connecting cultural infrastructure, cultural activity and cultural work with a vibrant and attractive place has been discussed in various works. Supporting the development of culture is considered vital in order to create and sustain healthy, open-minded and sustainable communities. Culture adds value, helping to create a sense of identity and pride for the place and for its inhabitants, while affirming values, embracing diversity and reflecting the aspirations of the area concerned. Equal access to culture is a central objective of cultural strategy, with the main challenge being to coordinate its main actors in order to support a diverse range of public, private and voluntary stakeholders (Cheer et al., 2022, Petridou et al 2025). The economic sustainability of cultural activity through the market is not always secured, especially in insular and peripheral areas. Lately the ‘cultural industry’ concept has been criticized: the economic role of culture, the risk of its instrumentalization, the precarious position of cultural workers and the unequal participation of local populations in the production and consumption of culture are in the frontline of discussions on cultural policy (Bell & Oakley 2016; Mould, 2018; O’Connor, 2024).

Main research approach: The paper aims to discuss insular cultural strategies within this context by reflecting on extended field research which included detailed mapping of the cultural sector and a participatory approach to cultural planning that was carried out for the larger islands of the Aegean Sea. The islands of Lemnos, Samos, Chios, Lesvos and Rhodes are being discussed within the context of a research project carried out by three Greek universities for the Ministry of Culture.

Key arguments/findings: As some of the economies are dominated by the tourism sector during the summer season, the main question is whether cultural activity can become part of a development path and the identity-place brand. The fieldwork included two parts: a) desk-research, interviews with stakeholders’ representatives and artists/creatives involved in contemporary culture and having a significant role in the cultural events, and b) face-to-face participatory workshops with the representatives of local public and private institutions/associations and creative cultural professionals. The discussions led to a clear vision on a future cultural brand in the context of a long-term local cultural policy.

Conclusions: Synergies and networking between artists, local institutions, businesses in the creative and cultural industries and tourism actors need to be supported through local policymaking, with the notion of place branding being also crucial in this discussion. The economic sustainability and resilience of cultural activity and employment is a common concern of the local cultural actors.

Keywords: Culture; Creative activities; Cultural brand; Insularity; Greece.

125. From 'heydays' to 'maydays': Place revitalisation through entrepreneurial activity

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Recent times have seen growing debates about the vibrancy of local towns across the UK, with increasingly visible levels of empty shops, deprivation and inactivity. Consequently, places are being viewed and experienced in different ways, as changing consumer behaviours (brought about by increasing digital activity and changing attitudes following the experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic) lead to changing perceptions of place. This is true for many towns across the UK and beyond, but particularly prominent for places that have strong associations with tourism and hospitality, as previously thriving coastal towns face challenges of providing locals and visitors with experiences that align with modern expectations, especially given the out-dated perception of some places, inconsistent weather conditions, and competition from European destinations through cheap flights and the ease of travel. Despite these challenges, these coastal towns remain communities where locals and visitors retain a pride of place and a certain quality of life that ensures a certain level of attachment to these places. While the heydays may be in the past, and some places sending out 'mayday' distress signals, other places are finding new ways to build resilience and develop new perceptions of place for modern times. This can be seen through increasing entrepreneurial activity and the development of new opportunities through local small businesses, which initiate new ideas, often led by locals who understand the needs of the community.

This research presents the case study of Aberystwyth, a seaside town in west Wales, known for its Victorian and Georgian-styled promenade, which has long been seen as a destination for visitors from Wales and the Midlands, but has experienced difficult times in recent years with numerous empty units along the high street, empty buildings along the promenade, and a lack of investment. Despite this, changes to regulations have allowed for businesses to set up along the promenade in recent years, enabling new businesses to bring vibrancy to the town, ensuring that new offerings are available for locals and visitors throughout the year. This research looks at how these entrepreneurial businesses are helping to change perceptions of Aberystwyth through a netnography study of Instagram posts relating to Aberystwyth from 2015-2025. This methodology allows for people's perceptions of Aberystwyth to be analysed in the ways that the public share their images of Aberystwyth and how they express their vision of the place. Theoretically, this research draws on entrepreneurship and place theories to outline how entrepreneurial activity can create more positive place representations. This is linked to three key segments of population that are prominent in Aberystwyth, namely the student population, underlining changing perceptions from nightlife towards well-being; the tourist population, with new attractions and experiences that maintain their interest and keep them coming back; and the local population, who have a pride of place and are keen to engage in the community by supporting local businesses. Findings from this research provide insights to other similar places to show how entrepreneurial activity can support changing perceptions of place.

Keywords: Place revitalisation; Local communities; Entrepreneurship; Resilient places; Netnography.

39. The interplay of design, architecture and city branding in shaping city diplomacy

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In an increasingly globalized world, cities have assumed an active role in international relations, becoming key actors capable of attracting investment, talent, tourism, and global events. Even if city diplomacy has not gone unnoticed, most studies tend to focus on global cities (Acuto, 2013; Castells, 2020; Curtis and Acuto, 2018; Sassen, 2007), and this led to a gap in the literature on the diplomatic experiences of so-called medium-sized cities (Hassen-Dakhli, 2023).

Aims: This research aims to fill a theoretical and empirical gap in the study of city diplomacy by analyzing how medium-sized cities use design and architecture, mediated through city branding, to achieve international diplomatic visibility. It seeks to explain the conditions under which these urban strategies translate into tangible diplomatic outcomes.

Justification: Design and architecture has proven to be a crucial tool in shaping the visual identity of a city, since it facilitates the projection of its image on a global scale (Cull, 2015; Muratovski, 2012; Ohnesorge and Decker, 2024; Sklair, 2012). However, the role of design and architecture on the global stage remains something exclusive and strategic, since only six out of the fifty-five new cities joining the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in 2023 were recognized for their approach to design and five cities have been designated as World Design Capital by WDO.

Nevertheless, while these strategies may generate significant local impact, their ability to translate into effective city diplomacy on the international stage is not guaranteed. Design and architecture alone are often insufficient to position a city globally. These efforts must be supported by a clear, coherent, and effective city branding strategy that serves as a mediator between local interventions and their international projection (Sevin, 2024).

Theoretical framework: City branding, understood as a strategic narrative that communicates a city's values, identity, and vision to a global audience, plays a crucial role in linking urban policies to tangible diplomatic outcomes, such as the formation of alliances, participation in international networks, and cultural positioning. This highlights a knowledge gap in urban studies and international relations: How do design and architecture interact with city branding to build effective city diplomacy?

In order to answer this question, this research from an interdisciplinary perspective, it explores the theories of complex interdependence and new public diplomacy as general frameworks structuring the phenomenon from the perspective of International Relations. More specifically, it proposes a theoretical framework that articulates the concept of city diplomacy (Simon, 2023), with the three levels of urban communication that comprise image construction in the city branding theory (Kavaratzis, 2008). In this model, architecture and design are understood as narrative vehicles within city diplomacy, due to their strategic capacity to produce texts. This conceptual framework is complemented by a review of the contributions that link design and architecture with city branding and international projection.

Key argument: Notable cases, such as the success of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao or the development of the Helsinki Design District, demonstrate that an effective combination of strategic design and coherent branding can significantly enhance a city's diplomatic projection. However, these experiences also emphasize the importance of analyzing the mediating conditions that enable such success and understanding the challenges faced by cities operating with diverse contexts and strategic visions.

Keywords: City diplomacy; Design; Architecture; City branding; Medium-sized cities.

17. How public buildings preserve thick regional identities: Exploring place branding through architecture styles in six French border regions

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Prominent public buildings in cities do not only serve functional purposes; they also act as visiting cards of their geographies, as expressions of urban and/or regional identity. As symbols they may refer to a deeper sense of belonging to certain spaces, or as Kees Terlouw calls them 'thick regional identities': strong, deeply rooted sense of regional belonging that significantly shape the social, cultural and political life of a region (as opposed to more instrumental and short-term 'thin identities' adopted by policymakers and marketers). Municipalities responsible for urban development, tourism and cultural preservation can thus deploying place branding activities and position themselves amidst historical cultural references, present national political realities and future economic ambitions. In this study, we have examined the characteristics of prominent public buildings (townhalls, stations, belfries, theatres, operas, museums, memorials, historical monuments and prominent mansions in city centres) in all municipalities of over 20,000 inhabitants in six French border regions: (1) French Flanders/Hainault/Artesia near Belgium, (2) Lorraine/Alsace next to Germany, (3) Savoy/French Liguria at the Italian border, (4) Basque country/Catalonia at the Spanish border, (5) Brittany and (6) Corsica. We have established how in and around their main public buildings and spaces, visible display of identity-related symbols and other features attached to urban architecture and infrastructure (regionalist or neo-regionalist architecture styles, flags, historical events, local heroes, street names etc.) is used. We establish to what extent and how they point to thick regional identities and attempt to explain our findings with a number of different propositions.

Keywords: Thick regional identity; Place branding; Public architecture; Building style; French border regions; Nation state.

66. Beyond the desk: Coworking spaces management strategies and the positioning of Barcelona as a nomadic destination

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2. University of Economics, Czechia

Global cities have become strategic epicentres for the new dynamics of digital work and the creative class, facilitating the hypermobility of professionals operating in knowledge, innovation and leisure economies (Florida, 2019; Orel, 2019; Sequera, 2024). In the context of Barcelona's internationalisation strategy, institutional, governmental and business actors emphasise the city's capacity to attract a nomadic community, thereby facilitating their temporary residence, investment, entrepreneurial activity and consumption of services that contribute to their comfort and convenience (Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023). The increasing dissemination of co-working spaces has been identified as a key factor in the development of Barcelona as a business city, leading to the establishment of a significant startup ecosystem that contributes to its global visibility (Milano et al., 2023; Russo & Scarnato, 2018). In recent years, the city's reputation as a tourist destination has been bolstered by its business competitiveness and digital transformation (Condom-Vilà, 2020; Vinyals-Mirabent et al., 2019), positioning Barcelona as a leading nomadic destination (Ciuculescu & Luca, 2024; Compte-Pujol et al., 2018).

This paper employs a qualitative approach, utilising in-depth interviews with 12 coworking space managers and a thorough analysis of organisational documents to provide a comprehensive analysis of the management processes of coworking spaces in Barcelona. The study also explores the methods through which digital nomads are provided with knowledge and urban narratives, facilitating their rapid integration into the city's dynamics. The study also examines how these spaces facilitate the establishment of social and community ties, participation in local cultural practices, and the identification of business and growth opportunities.

Findings reveal that the role of the coworking manager is not confined to the internal and corporate sphere but also extends to the realm of city brand ambassador, providing guidance and support to digital nomads throughout their journey. Conversely, both public and private entities play an active role in promoting the culture of the digital nomad, thereby reinforcing the tourist narratives that position Barcelona as a city geared towards business and creativity. In this manner, the provision of coworking spaces fulfils not only operational requirements but also contributes to the shaping of the urban imaginary associated with the nomadic lifestyle.

The study emphasises that a sense of community belonging and attachment to place are fundamental to nomads' experience of the city. These elements foster a sense of belonging to a global-local community, thereby reinforcing Barcelona's reputation as a desirable workation destination. In summary, the provision of coworking spaces has been demonstrated to facilitate labour mobility, whilst simultaneously effecting a transformation of both urban and tourist practices, thereby consolidating the city's position as a benchmark within the contemporary digital economy.

Keywords: Coworking spaces; Digital nomads; Nomadic destination, Workation, Barcelona.

101. Policy Making and Visual Identity in the Promotion of Territorial Units

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Purpose: This article investigates the relationship between public policy, dominant political ideologies, and the visual communication of territorial units. It aims to explore how the neoliberal zeitgeist is reflected in the visual identities (logos and slogans) of Polish cities. The study seeks to answer whether these promotional signs prioritize universal, market-oriented values over the unique, local genius loci.

Methodology: The research is based on a comprehensive analysis of the entire population of 66 cities with poviat rights in Poland. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining a multifaceted content analysis with a semantic differential technique. The visual and textual layers of the promotional signs were systematically examined using three distinct taxonomies to ensure methodological triangulation and enhance the reliability of the findings.

Findings: The analysis reveals the specific values and ideological assumptions embedded in the visual branding strategies of Polish cities. It identifies the prevalence of symbols associated with modernism, progress, and economic efficiency, often at the expense of historical and cultural heritage. The findings demonstrate how visual identity serves as a tool of public policy, reflecting a broader shift towards market-driven governance in local administration.

Originality/Value: This paper contributes to the fields of public policy, place marketing and branding, and visual communication by empirically linking the design of promotional signs to macro-level ideological trends. Its originality lies in the robust, mixed-method approach applied to a complete national sample, providing a comprehensive diagnosis of how contemporary policy paradigms are visually articulated and communicated by local authorities.

Keywords: Zeitgeist; Place branding; Territorial marketing; Genius loci; Policy making.

120. Teaching Place Branding in Japan: Towards a Framework for Undergraduate Engagement

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Significant strides have been made in developing university-level place branding education and sharing these efforts. Notable examples include the How-To Guide by Florek and Sevin (2019), the design of the first master's program in place branding (Warren, 2024), and the IPBA Academy's mission to train both practitioners and instructors in outcome-oriented theory and practice.

Yet, despite two decades of nation branding and regional revitalisation policies in Japan, dedicated place branding courses at the undergraduate level remain rare. Recently (2024), researchers Yamashita and Toyokawa secured a national research grant to address this gap, highlighting its importance.

This paper presents insights from integrating a place branding project module within an existing English-language "Global Branding" course at a Japanese university since 2019, with a view to launching a standalone course by 2026.

The module, taught in the second half of a 14-week semester, introduces students to the idea that brands—and marketing more broadly—extend beyond goods and services (Kotler 2024). It emphasises the distinctiveness of place brands in contrast to product/corporate brands, the jurisdictional complexities of engaging in "branding", and the importance of identity as a foundation of a place brand, and its use as a vehicle for tourism, trade, investment, and community engagement.

Eight student teams are each assigned a lower-ranked prefectures from the Brand Research Institute's annual survey of Japan's 47 prefectures. Their task: to devise a strategy to transform their assigned prefecture into a "global" brand. Following a single introductory place branding lecture, students work through a five-step framework combining Govers and Go's (2009) 3-gap model, Dinnie's (2016) nation branding principles, and Roll's Brand Management Model:

- A. Place Brand Audit – Assess perceptions, existing branding, and stakeholder involvement.
- B. Brand Identity Analysis – Explore natural, industrial, cultural, and craft-based elements of identity.
- C. Product Offering Review – Distinguish between intrinsic identity and its marketed forms.
- D. Target Market & Positioning – Identify strategic segments across tourism, trade, or residence.
- E. Strategy Implementation – Propose authentic narratives, visual identity, and implementation strategy.

Key challenges include limited student exposure to branding or policy, lack of fieldwork opportunities, and no mechanism for implementation or feedback from local stakeholders. Despite this, the structured framework has proven effective in helping students focus on collecting and interpreting data. While many management/marketing students initially rush to propose solutions, the project encourages deeper reflection on identity and the importance of authenticity in branding. Astute students notice how identity boundaries often diverge from administrative ones, and local culture often diverges from offerings and projected images for tourist markets.

The experience reveals both student interest and the pedagogical value of a full course on place branding. Whether future iterations shift focus from distant prefectures to local municipalities to facilitate stakeholder engagement and potential fieldwork, or broader national or city branding frameworks are incorporated remains an open question.

Keywords: Japan; Place branding; Education; Teaching framework; Regional branding.

63. TOURResearch: Innovative Research Methodology capturing the real-time visitor experience insight and perception, leading to co-created, data-driven Place Branding Strategies

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Aims: The innovative research method TOURResearch aims to:

- Ensure direct access to the perception of visitors with a recent visiting experience of the destination
- Measure the visitors' expectation/visit/satisfaction ratio
- Compare visitor perceptions vs the perceptions of locals and stakeholders
- Capture the consumer behavior, selection criteria, information channels and trip-planning choices of visitors
- Assess visitor intention to revisit and recommend the destination, socially and online
- Extract measurable, real-time primary data directly from the field
- Detect infrastructure shortcomings requiring improvement
- Evaluate the relevance of global trends vs local context
- Measure the destination's resources "consumption" by its visitors
- Assess the effectiveness of the destination's proposition, narrative and claims
- Enable accurate formulation/updating of place branding strategy based on field-sourced data
- Support the competitiveness of the destination and allow flexible, real-time planning of actions, events, and communication
- Enhance targeting of desired audiences
- Identify opportunities to shift perceptions, address seasonality and increase per-visit consumption
- Improve the overall visitor experience to benefit both the destination and its visitors

Theoretical framework: The scarcity of reliable primary data for destinations, significantly limits their ability to develop an effective place branding strategy. In tourism, collecting data/insights directly from visitors almost immediately after their visit is considered highly valuable, but difficult to execute systematically. This challenge is more acute in smaller or developing destinations, or when visitors come from different countries, have diverse profiles or selection criteria: traditional data collection methods may be impractical or insufficient. TOURResearch was designed to provide a reliable, applicable research answer to this problem.

Main research approach: The TOURResearch method combines the experience of designing and implementing place branding strategies of a dedicated team with many years of award-winning field experience, and the international know-how of designing, implementing and evaluating large-scale multi-level surveys of IPSOS / Opinion, the Greek branch of the globally recognized research company IPSOS. The method's effectiveness and credibility are reinforced by the active, continuous involvement of the destination DMO and stakeholders throughout the survey from the formulation of questions to its completion, and by the confirmed possibilities of the internet and of cutting-edge technologies in the research sector.

The seven-month joint process/study of the two teams includes:

- Thorough formulation of research framework and methodology,
- Evaluation of other research models/case studies (theoretically and practically), and
- Justification of their positive and negative points.

The proposal was tested with pilot presentations/consultations with stakeholders from destinations of varying profiles (size, performance, maturity, etc.). Their feedback and concerns were addressed and integrated into the final methodology.

Key arguments / Findings / Conclusions: The core philosophy of the TOUREsearch method centers on the:

- Flexibility of approach and real-time insights
- Adequacy and reliability of the visitor sample examined
- Structured stakeholder co-creation and co-management
- Scalability to different destination types and needs

The method empowers destinations with evidence-based insights, strategic and action planning capabilities, minimizes the risks of ineffective planning and funding allocation, or missed opportunities for sustainable, resilient development. It also strengthens their ability to respond to visible or latent challenges, changing conditions and problems of the destination.

Keywords: Research; Real-time insights; Co-creation; Strategy; Data; Effectiveness.

119. Exploring the Role of Content Characteristics in Fostering Audience Engagement on Social Media

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Abstract: This study examines the relationship between specific content characteristics in place branding posts on Instagram and their impact on audience engagement. The characteristics of the examined content encompass i) authorship of the content, ii) visual appeal, and iii) types of audios. A total of 680 posts were extracted from an official place branding account alongside seven native influencer accounts. The dataset provides metrics for post engagement, quantified through likes, comments, and shares, alongside qualitative data that facilitates an examination of the selected posts by assessing their content. The results indicate that content generated by individuals exhibits the highest engagement levels across all measurement metrics, whereas content lacking a clear source demonstrates the lowest engagement levels. The results indicate that the use of strong visual elements, specifically vibrant colours, high-resolution imagery, and distinctive photographic angles, in place branding content is associated with increased engagement levels. The integration of ambient audio in place branding posts has been shown to enhance audience engagement levels.

Keywords: Place branding; Social media; Audience engagement.

98. “Ten songs of Rimini”: reflecting on songwriting as a research platform for more-than-representational marketing inquiries

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Aims: The proposed paper presentation offers critical reflections that are supposed to contextualise and complement the live performance presented within the IPBA Art Gallery by the same contributor. This paper presentation discusses the pedagogic process leading to an original music show created by the researcher for the 2023 European Researchers' Night. The show is titled “Ten songs on Rimini” and aims at explaining to a wider audience the evolution of the identity of Rimini, a middle-sized Italian city once known for being one of the largest seaside resorts in Europe. In doing so, the presentation catches up with relevant trends in marketing theory and methodologies within the context of tourism places.

Theoretical framework: This presentation builds upon the growing scholarly interest about the research value of songwriting (see Bakan, 2014; Giovanardi, 2025; Hartmann and Ostberg, 2022). Notably, songs constitute a valuable instrument in the context of teaching and learning (e.g. Halpin, & Crowther, 2021) and at the same time provide researchers with multilayered texts, where place brand manifestations are forged by music artists over time. Going a step further, this presentation also intends to contribute to the growing domain of more-than-representational marketing theory (Lorimer, 2005; Hill, Canniford and Mol, 2014) and consumer research studies that explore the particular role of sound and sonic methodologies (e.g. Hall, Lashua and Coffey, 2008; Patterson and Larsen, 2019).

Main research approach: Songwriting can be considered as a gateway for conducting creative more-than-representational research on tourism places with a two-fold function. First, it generates a corpus where place brand manifestations can be investigated. Second, it can also be considered a method whereby scholars can produce meaningful qualitative research and enrich findings dissemination. In particular, geographer Marcello Tanca has argued that songs are valuable because they are “a source for ascertaining the sense and the meaning that a society attributes to a given territory” (Tanca, 2016, p. 343). Thus, it is no surprise that the scholarly work produced so far has prioritised either famous songwriters or iconic places, for which several songs may have accumulated over time thanks to the celebrations forged by different songwriters.

Key arguments/findings: During the show, a selection of songs composed by Italian as well as foreign music artists illustrate the changing urban identities of Rimini across decades. The proposed presentation presents an evaluation of the selection process operated by the author during the choice of the ten songs to perform during the show. Overall, the corpus of music texts illustrates the modifications in the common perception of the city narrated by singers-songwriters in different moments and different countries. Different nuances and contradictions coexist in the way in which Rimini is portrayed in commercial songwriting across decades. Novel themes appear to be juxtaposed to more traditional ones, such as the permanence of traditional tourism identities. In particular, tensions, clashes and ambiguities in place branding result to be magnified and better understood when the lens proposed by this presentation are adopted by sonic ethnographers.

Conclusions: The creation of the music show provides an opportunity to reflect on the dynamic nature of place brands and to reconsider the relevance of songs as place brand “primary communication”. Clearly, doubts remain as to what place managers can actively do to inspire the creation of meaningful songs that portray a positive image of their city, such as funding community-based projects where local artists can provide their input by engaging in sonic methodologies guided by researchers or facilitators. Undoubtedly, listening to (and analysing) the sonic renditions of famous tourism places emerges as a fruitful integration to common text-based analysis.

Keywords: Arts-based method; Music, Songwriting; Sustainability; Rimini; Italy; Non-representational theory.

105. Towards green conation in travel and tourism: The role of green nation branding

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1. North-West University, South Africa

Aims: As the Trump 2.0 phenomenon triggers geo-political tensions that induce isolationist policy stances amongst nations, issues of global importance, such as the Paris Climate Agreement's collective action against climate change, are increasingly coming under threat (Campbell, 2025). It follows that in the absence of concerted supra-national interventions, a tourist destination's carbon footprint may soon become an even more important nation branding prerogative and heuristic cue for international tourists' consumptive behaviour (Aronczyk, 2024; Gomes & Lopes, 2023; Ngxongo, 2021). There is, however, limited academic inquiry into climate-sensitive nation branding or green-nation branding (G-NB), and its potential influence on the behaviour of international tourists. Therefore, the study aimed to model the influence of green nation branding on tourist conation.

Theoretical framework: The study developed a novel G-NB model and tested the primary hypothesis that G-NB influences the green-oriented travel conation of tourists. The hypothesised model intersects the adapted Nation Brand Octagon (Matiza, 2021) and Value–Belief–Norm theory (Stern, 2000). Our study theorises that the G-NB triggers tourists' personal norms which are activated by the interaction of the G-NB and tourists' value orientations (pro-environmental tourism behaviour), awareness of consequences (environmental knowledge), ascription of responsibility (environmental concern) and resulting in a new environmental paradigm (green travel motives, green travel intention, and green travel behaviour).

Main research approach: A quantitative cross-sectional deductive study was conducted in March 2025. A multi-country survey was conducted, and data were generated from a pre-recruited panel of n=499 German and UK international travellers via the Prolific research panel. The online questionnaire was published in English and was self-administered via the QuestionPro online survey platform. The primarily causal relationships hypothesised by the study were assessed by means of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) and Multi-Group Analysis (PLS-MGA) using Smart-PLS 4 software.

Key arguments/findings: The G-NB emerged as a higher-order construct that influences green tourist conation, namely the green travel motives, behaviour, and intentions of tourists. Further, the positive effect of the influence of green travel motivation is negatively nuanced by tourists' existing environmental concerns about travel and tourism. While some differences emerged between the German and UK markets, G-NB generally positively influences tourists' conation.

Conclusions: As a complex composite construct, it is imperative to note that as an antecedent to tourist conation, the G-NB is susceptible to tourists' values and knowledge. The findings highlight the intricate interaction between the G-NB and socio-psychological decision factors and the confounding effect of subjective and intrinsic factors such as environmental concerns in influencing tourist conation.

Practical implications: The findings imply the need for the prioritisation of a holistic macro-level approach to branding destinations from a climate-conscious perspective. The G-NB triggers a cascade of consumer behaviour, including tourists' green conation. Hence, recognition of G-NB as a contemporary destination marketing imperative moves beyond tourist awareness to tourists engaging in behaviour that promotes sustainable tourism as part of a destination's overarching green tourism ecosystem.

Keywords: Green nation brand; Nation brand octagon; Green behaviour; Tourist conation; Value–belief–norm theory.

85. From Waste to Place Brand: Brand building and stakeholder engagement in local waste management

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2. NORCE, Norway

Aims: This paper explores stakeholder acceptance and engagement with municipal waste management and its entanglement with place brand emergence. It presents two case studies focused on municipal waste management: the town of Peccioli in Tuscany, Italy, and the Arctic city of Tromsø in North Norway.

Theoretical framework: The theoretical background combines the concepts of place branding and stakeholder engagement in the municipal waste management sector. Literature suggests a negative connection between litter and place attitudes (Parker et al., 2015). However, further research is needed to focus on how branding contributes to reframing this link towards community acceptance and engagement with local waste management. Local stakeholders' satisfaction, liveability and residents' proximity to public decision-making are the frames in which place branding is envisioned (Insch et al., 2015; Parker et al., 2015). Participation in place brand building has become central to place branding studies (Eshuis et al., 2014; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2019). Beyond residents' participation, there is also room for further knowledge on the participation of a wide range of stakeholders, including local firms and, in the frame of this study, of local waste management companies. In line with a multi-stakeholder perspective on place brand building, the role of local firms in actively contributing to the place brand in the frame of local and regional innovation has remained marginal in the debate (Pasquinelli et al., 2023).

Main research approach: A qualitative methodology elaborates two case studies. The selected empirical contexts (i.e., Tromsø, North Norway and Peccioli in Tuscany, Italy) enable the analysis of local acceptance of municipal waste management initiatives alongside the emerging process of place branding. A cross-case analysis opens to further inquiry on place branding to nurture community engagement with local waste management, local awareness and understanding of how waste is linked with local development.

Key arguments/findings: Findings suggest that place brand emergence unfolds over three stages: communicating waste, connecting waste to the town, and building local pride while promoting place attractiveness. Through a mix of doing and narrating, the case of Peccioli in Italy showed the achievement of these different stages towards turning waste and the local landfill into a key element of the place identity, contributing to embedding new avenues for sustainable local development, such as open education, renewable energies and the building of a waste value chain, public innovative services and tourism. On the other hand, in the case of North Norway, municipal waste management has traditionally focused on providing necessary everyday services. In recent years, however, the North Norway waste management actors have taken steps towards increased cooperation among the local waste management actors and with the R&D community, and significant joint investments are underway, with increased attention to local acceptance issues and stakeholder engagement. Our comparative analysis of cases in Italy and Norway reveals relevant similarities, differences, and points of joint learning regarding stakeholder engagement and the contribution of branding to promoting acceptance, local understanding and stakeholder engagement with waste in the frame of a shared vision of local development.

Conclusions and practical implications: Our paper shows that place branding and stakeholder engagement play an important role in local development and contribute to engaging actors and stakeholders to co-create and co-develop new avenues in the waste management sector towards innovative, sustainable, and engaging local development. Joint international learning and exchange of good practices has taken a promising start between Italy in the European South and Tromsø in the European North.

Keywords: Place brand; Stakeholder engagement; Waste management.

30. Enabling the twin transition through urban social innovation: insights from Málaga (Spain)

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Aims: This paper examines the role of social innovation in advancing key targets of the twin transition (digital and green) at the urban level. It analyzes and systematizes best practices of place stakeholders in the city of Málaga, focusing on the critical economic sectors of energy, transport, and housing.

Theoretical Framework: The study is grounded in theories of urban governance, stakeholder engagement, social innovation, and the twin transition. Within the context of the European Green Deal and the “Fit for 55” package, EU countries are challenged to align digitalization with environmental sustainability to address climate change, promote efficient economies, and build resilient and inclusive societies. While national strategies provide a normative framework for decarbonization and climate action, the practical implementation of digital and green initiatives relies heavily on cities as dynamic hubs of social innovation and transformation. The administrative flexibility of city governments, their proximity to citizens, and their ability to foster effective public-private partnerships make urban environments unique laboratories for innovation.

Main Research Approach: The central research question is: To what extent can urban social innovation contribute to the effective implementation of the EU’s twin transition objectives? To explore this, we conduct a case study of the city of Málaga (Spain) using an action research approach, including thematic workshops and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders from the Málaga city government.

Key Arguments/Findings: The study finds that a collaborative public-private ecosystem, grounded in multidisciplinary stakeholder engagement and bottom-up citizen participation, is a critical enabler of transformative social innovation aligned with decarbonization and digitalization goals. The research identifies and systematizes the key drivers and conditions necessary for effective urban social innovation.

Conclusions: The findings highlight that meaningful stakeholder engagement in urban governance significantly contributes to the twin transition by fostering local innovation and transformation. Trust, transparency, shared commitments, and network governance emerge as essential principles driving successful innovation on an urban scale.

Practical Implications: The study offers actionable insights and a set of best practices for urban governance aimed at supporting the twin transition through stakeholder engagement and social innovation.

Keywords: Social innovation; Stakeholders’ engagement; Twin transition; Urban governance.

Presentation and discussion of this year's artworks by:

Alex Deffner | Hong Fan | Magdalena Florek | Massimo Giovanardi | Nicholas Karachalis | Kate Mclean | Norberto Muñiz-Martínez & colleagues | Laura Ripoll Gonzalez | Laura Reynolds, Marcus Gomes & Felipe Risada | Andrea Szentgyörgyi & Mihalis Kavaratzis | Bianca Vaduva & Ioana Stoica

32. Television Western Serials and Place Marketing and Branding: Separate or Connected 'Universes'?

Alex Deffner¹

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Place marketers and planners are storytellers, e.g., AESOP [Association of European Schools of Planning] was named as such, inspired by the myths of Aesop. In connection with place branding and branding, films and television series/serials have been established as essential means of transmitting storytelling. This presentation is part of an ongoing personal project that started with analysing non-USA television series/ serials. The relevant theoretical framework can be traced to the movie-induced destination image.

At this stage, the emphasis shifts to USA television series/serials, with westerns being one of the most popular film genres, having been established as far back as 1903 (The Great Train Robbery). Westerns constitute one of the most varied genres, connecting with many other genres, even science fiction. However, recently, westerns have been underestimated since their popularity diminished in the 1980s. Thus, in contemporary common sense, the lost memory has contributed to their evaluation mainly as a 'low' culture genre. But still, there have been various successful revivals.

One of the most recent examples is the so-called Yellowstone Universe, which, until now, includes three television serials (in chronological order of the subject) that are among the best western (but not only) television serials of the last 10 years: 1883 (1 season, 2021-2022), 1923 (2 seasons, 2022-2023 and 2025), and Yellowstone (5 seasons, 2018-2024). However, storytelling is also considered one of the most essential elements of Westerns; its link with place branding and marketing must be discovered, especially in Westerns filmed before the Second World War. Thus, the central question of this presentation is: how can the 'Yellowstone Universe' be connected to place branding and marketing?

The starting point of any storytelling is the text, so the initial intention is to exclude the moving image. The form of the work is a collage created mainly by combining parts of the script, sound, and photos. The meaning of the brand, the casino as a destination, the representation of the brand of the ranch, the destination towns in every valley, the use of slogans, the way of advertising, the avoidance of theft, and the importance of tourism are some of the themes that will be presented. The collage will be presented in a poster, except for the sound excerpts, which will be transmitted through a laptop.

Keywords: Storytelling; TV serials; Westerns; Yellowstone Universe; Script.

36. Place making and branding based on wildlife conservation: the case of Costa Rica place branding harmonizing human well-being and biodiversity protection (Photowork)

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3. Biocaminatas Ecotourism Company, Costa Rica

4. Fundación Turismo y Ambiente, Costa Rica

1. Summary: this photographic work complements our paper in this conference on “Place making and branding based on wildlife conservation: the case of Costa Rica place branding harmonizing human well-being and biodiversity protection”
2. Description of the general approach and theme of the work: this photographic work illustrates the natural places we have visited and the wildlife we have observed, and some of the human actors we have interviewed for data collection – qualitative method approach
3. Statement of the purpose of the work: biodiversity conservation is a key strategy that has enabled Costa Rica to attract quality ecotourism, generate economic progress and social stability, and be a reference for wildlife-based place making and branding
4. Justification of the chosen medium: the photographs show evidence of the rich wildlife we have encountered and observed in Costa Rica, and transmits much of the sensorial emotions that we have experienced
5. Statement of how the work will contribute to an enriched understanding of the theory and practice of place branding: wildlife conservation is needed nowadays due to the environmental crisis that affects the planet, and it could represent an optimal strategy for many countries that may develop ecotourism and scientific research. Wildlife conservation may thus enhance sustainable progress, making it compatible biodiversity conservation and human well-being. This framework studies how nature benefits humans and also how human actors shape nature ecosystems, towards harmonious human-environmental interactions

Keywords: Wildlife conservation; Place branding; Human-environmental interactions; Ecotourism; Humans and biotic actors.

51. Panda Greenway: Building Chengdu's Brand Identity through Art, Culture, and Green Infrastructure

Hong Fan¹

1. Tsinghua University, China

A multimedia exhibition combining infographic panels, photo collages, and an optional short video presentation.

Concept Description: From 2016 to 2017, the City Branding Studio at Tsinghua University collaborated with the Chengdu municipal government to co-create the cultural identity of the “Panda Greenway” — a 102-kilometer urban ecological corridor encircling the city's Third Ring Road. As a key component of the Tianfu Greenway system, the Panda Greenway uses Chengdu's symbolic identity as the “home of the giant panda” to integrate artistic expression, local culture, and ecological consciousness into a multifunctional public space conceived as an “open-air creative panda museum.”

The project is structured around four thematic narratives:

1. Panda and Ecological Civilization
2. Panda and Tianfu Culture (Regional Identity)
3. Panda and Public Diplomacy
4. Panda and Creative Industries

Through a combination of artistic installation and participatory spatial design, the greenway has become a vibrant cultural corridor that fuses storytelling, design, and public engagement. Key components include:

Panda-Themed Landscape Sculptures: Numerous panda sculptures are distributed along the route, featuring playful scenes such as pandas eating bamboo, climbing trees, taking selfies, practicing tai chi, or wearing robotic armor. These installations serve as both artistic landmarks and photo-friendly spots for residents and tourists.

Cultural Waystations and Architectural Art: Nineteen waystations along the greenway feature murals painted in fine brush and graffiti styles, portraying harmonious interactions between pandas and Chengdu locals. Many stations incorporate panda-shaped rooftops and panda-themed public furniture, creating immersive family-friendly environments.

Creative Products and Cultural Merchandising: Larger waystations house shops offering panda-themed merchandise, including stationery, apparel, toys, and accessories. These products extend the branding beyond physical space, blending souvenir value with cultural storytelling.

Cultural Festivals and Community Participation: The annual Panda Cultural Festival activates the greenway with performances, educational talks on pandas and ecological sustainability, and panda craft workshops featuring DIY toys and decorations. These activities foster a participatory atmosphere that deepens emotional connections with pandas and space.

Artistic Significance: The Panda Greenway illustrates how narrative, symbolic culture, and creative placemaking converge to shape a city brand that is deeply rooted in local identity. It breaks the boundaries between infrastructure, local icon, and artistic expression – transforming a functional green corridor into an immersive cultural experience and a globally recognizable symbol of Chengdu.

Keywords: Chengdu Panda Greenway; Artistic works; Branding Chengdu as the hometown of Panda.

62. Using urban sketching and the language of comics as a research tool in the city-center of Athens

Nicholas Karachalis¹

1. University of the Aegean, Greece

The contribution will be based on the approach of urban sketching as a way of understanding urban processes. Learning to explore your sense of place through drawing while walking and discovering your particular perspective on the city's stories and identity can be a very enriching experience for a researcher/urbanist. The use of a sketchbook to find interesting urban elements that don't appear on a map is connected to the language of comics and illustrated maps and can create a visual narrative that reflects walking practices (of a flaneur, of a visitor, etc.) focusing on expression, storytelling and reportage. The results tell personal stories of the walk, reveal encounters with people and the built environment, soundscapes and particularities of the city, etc. The artwork will be based on a sketching exercise by the author. The presentation will include the original sketches which are under construction and will be handed in during the conference to be exhibited.

Keywords: Urban sketching; Comics; Narratives; Flaneur.

84. Zines as Aesthetic Expressions of Materiality and Plurality: Highlighting Sense of Place

Laura Ripoll Gonzalez¹

1. Griffith University, Australia

Zines are self-published, low-budget, non-profit print publications that have historically served as a powerful medium for marginalized communities to record their stories, disseminate information, and organize. This artwork submission explores the transformative potential of zines as a medium for expressing materiality, plurality, and counter-narratives within the context of place branding.

This artwork explores zines as a dynamic research tool for place branding researchers working within communities. Drawing inspiration from the rich tradition of zines in subcultures such as anarchist politics, feminism, and queer communities, this artwork emphasizes the dual nature of zining: both as an artful process and as a finished artwork. The zine featured in this artwork serves as a medium for expressing sense of place and personal narratives that are often overlooked in mainstream discourse.

This zine is an ethnographic account set in a coastal community in Australia, where the researcher lives and engages deeply with the local environment and its inhabitants. The zine captures the embodied experiences of the researcher, reflecting her interactions with the coastal landscape, her cultural practices, and her personal narrative(s). The embodied elements of the zine are emphasized through the tactile nature of the materials used, the sensory experiences depicted, and the physical act of creating (and sharing) the zine.

Ultimately, this artwork submission calls for practitioners to explore the potential of zining as a research but also communication tool in various place contexts. By highlighting the aesthetic expression of materiality and plurality, the artwork underscores the importance of fostering inclusive and participatory approaches to place branding. It invites viewers to reflect on how zines can be used to create spaces for critical reflection, dialogue, and transformation, ultimately contributing to more sustainable and equitable place-based governance.

Keywords: Zines; Embodied; Place branding; Aesthetics; Counter-Narratives; Plurality; Sense of place.

95. “Ten songs on Rimini”: narrating the evolution of urban identities through songwriting

Massimo Giovanardi¹

1. University of Bologna, Italy

Aims: The proposed live performance portrays the most salient moments of an original music show created by the researcher for the 2023 European Researchers' Night titled “Ten songs on Rimini”. The show aimed at explaining to a wider audience the evolution of the identity of Rimini, a middle-sized Italian city once known for being one of the largest seaside resorts in Europe.

Theoretical framework: This presentation builds upon the growing scholarly interest about the research value of songwriting (see Bakan, 2014; Giovanardi, 2025; Hartmann and Ostberg, 2022). Notably, songs constitute a valuable instrument in the context of teaching and learning (e.g. Halpin, & Crowther, 2021) and at the same time provide researchers with multilayered texts, where place brand manifestations are forged by music artists over time.

Main research approach: It is difficult to deny that place branding scholars have been increasingly devoting attention to arts-based methods over the last decade (Kavaratzis & Warnaby, 2021; Kavaratzis & Giovanardi, 2025). In this context, music can be used to mobilise emotions and feelings that can support the creation of effective public engagement initiatives (see Giovanardi, 2024).

Key arguments/findings: A selection of songs composed by Italian as well as foreign music artists illustrate the changing urban identities of Rimini across decades. Particularly notable are the nuances and contradictions exhibited by the songs that the proposed presentation combines. The first song emphasises the Roman heritage still visible in the city, through a musical version of a Kipling's marching song telling the story of a Roman legion in the late empire. The second composition, written by the French band Les Wampas, narrates the clash between the typical happiness characterising Italian destinations and the death of Tour-de-France winner Marco Pantani, whom was found dead in Rimini. The final composition reveals the permanence of more traditional tourism identities in the recent work of German singers-songwriters.

Conclusions: The songs provide an opportunity to reflect on the dynamic nature of place brands and to reconsider the relevance of songs as place brand “primary communication”.

Keywords: Arts-based method; Music; Songwriting; Sustainability; Rimini; Italy.

121. Dual Realities: Place Identity in Luang Prabang and Vang Vieng

Bianca Vaduva¹ & Ioana Stoica¹

1. University of Bedfordshire, United Kingdom

This short documentary, style video explores the contrasting place identities of Luang Prabang and Vang Vieng, two destinations in Laos shaped by different narratives of tourism and cultural branding. Drawing on original photographs and video footage captured during my travels in 2024, the film examines how each place constructs and communicates its brand image in ways that both complement and challenge each other within the national identity of Laos.

Luang Prabang, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is portrayed through the lens of spiritual heritage, colonial-era architecture, and a calm, culturally immersive tourist experience. In contrast, Vang Vieng has emerged as a hotspot for adventure tourism, historically associated with backpackers, yet now undergoing a rebranding effort to promote ecotourism and wellness.

The work explores themes of authenticity, soft power, stakeholder tensions, and sustainable development through the juxtaposition of these two places. Using a creative nonfiction narrative style, the film offers a reflective commentary on the role of visual storytelling and lived experience in place branding.

The chosen medium, a short video essay, allows for a layered approach that combines academic insight, visual ethnography, and personal reflection. The aim is to provoke discussion around the visual construction of place identity and the ethical dimensions of branding destinations with complex and evolving narratives.

This artistic contribution seeks to inspire new forms of engagement with place branding theory and practice by inviting viewers to witness, feel, and question how destinations are seen and sold in a global context. The work will be presented in digital video format and is designed to contribute to an enriched understanding of place branding through the lens of culture, creativity, and field-based observation.

Keywords: Place branding; Laos; Storytelling; Cultural Heritage; Destination rebranding.

10. Multispecies place branding – including non-humans in destination stewardship

Jörgen Eksell¹, Maria Månsson¹ and Marlène Wiggill¹

1. Lund University, Sweden

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people acquired dogs that are now integral to their daily lives, leading to shifts in consumption patterns. Globally, every third household owns a dog. This has increased the demand for pet-related products and businesses promoting leisure opportunities tailored for dogs and their owners. The global pet service market, including dog-friendly services, is expected to expand from 24.9 billion USD in 2022 to 50.1 billion USD by 2030. The human perception of dogs has changed, and they are now seen as family members, creating what some human-animals studies researchers call multi-species, or interspecies families (Owens & Grauerholz, 2019). In response to this change, more destinations have adopted a dog-friendly approach in their branding. By introducing the concept of multispecies place branding, this conceptual paper critically discusses what happens to the stewardship of places when non-humans are put at the centre.

Animals are primarily absent from place branding research. Forristal and Lehto (2009) highlight wild animals in destination branding, and Mueller and Schade (2012) discuss animals as symbols of place identity, but domestic animals in pet-friendly place branding remain unexplored. This study draws on Haraway's (2003) *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Others*, addressing the relationship between humans and non-humans, particularly dogs. In this manifesto and in multispecies studies, dogs are seen as agents, not just companions. Further, this study applies Houston et al.'s (2018) concept of 'multispecies entanglement,' critiquing the notion of humans as the sole decision-makers and place makers, while excluding non-humans.

This conceptual paper illustrates points using case studies from dog-friendly destinations, including Chester (UK), Rimini (Italy), and Kalmar (Sweden). It employs qualitative methods like ethnographic chats, photos, multispecies ethnography, semi-structured interviews, along with data from DMO websites and social media campaigns.

This research highlights the role of dogs in place brand communication. Pictures portray dogs as passive agents, as fur babies or accessories to human travellers. In texts, dogs are commonly described as associated with challenges tourists need to solve. Further, the communication reflects a belief that humans and non-humans share similar interests and needs regarding experiences and environments. This could be interpreted as an example of human exceptionalism, where humans define the dog's life world.

To advance multispecies place branding, Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) must adopt roles beyond marketing and concentrate on stewardship for various stakeholders throughout the destination. Ethical coexistence and the recognition of the voices of nonhuman species, such as dogs, must be included in the development of places. This can involve integrating nonhuman perspectives into marketing research, management, economic development, and planning. Consequently, the reimagining of place branding is based on multispecies entanglement – to honour multispecies coexistence rather than human dominance.

To conclude, the place branding of dog-friendly destinations must be grounded in a multispecies perspective built on equal terms. Multispecies place branding can foster more sustainable, respectful, and inclusive tourist practices.

Keywords: Multispecies place branding; Dog-friendly destinations; Multispecies entanglement; Destination stewardship; Place inclusiveness.

16. Exploring the Solid and Jelly-Like Dimensions of Place: The Impact of Transformation on Place Identity, Branding, and Promotion

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Aims: This research explores the complex and evolving nature of place identity and branding. It aims to identify which aspects of place identity are fixed and which are malleable, and how various types of physical, cultural, economic, and/or social change can affect stakeholder perceptions, emotional connections, and the overall brand of a place. The study also examines the effects of these changes on both insiders (residents) and outsiders (visitors), as well as on the broader perception and image of the place.

Theoretical Framework: Drawing on theories of personal, social, and place identity, the study examines the extent to which places can change without losing their core identity. Influences such as historical continuity, cultural memory, urban development, tourism, and globalisation are analysed through the lens of identity resilience versus transformation (Tello et al., 2014; Cocola-Gant, 2023; Ünlü, 2025).

Research Approach: The research adopts a case-based, interdisciplinary approach, using examples from regions like Catalonia and cities such as Barcelona and New Cairo. Three main methods are used:

1. Comparative Case Studies of place transformations, comparing locations that have undergone change and examining the relative benefits or drawbacks on place identity.
2. In-depth Interviews with stakeholders to understand perceptions of change, potential identity loss, and emotional and cultural impacts.
3. Content Analysis of Social Media to capture public sentiment regarding transformation.

Key Arguments/Findings: This study distinguishes between “solid” components of place identity, such as history and culture, and more “jelly-like” elements, including physical form and individual experience, which are more susceptible to change. Catalonia, with its distinct language, traditions, and independence movement, illustrates how cultural and political legacies endure despite significant physical transformation (Tello et al., 2014). Even with evolving architecture (Bellesguard Gaudí, 2023), its core identity remains rooted in its historical and cultural foundation.

Another critical factor influencing place identity is the rise of second homeownership, particularly by foreign investors. In Barcelona, tourism-driven property buying has led to rising housing costs, displacement of locals, and emotional disconnection from place (Cocola-Gant, 2023). This “place loss” has prompted political action, such as Spain’s proposed 100% tax on properties bought by non-EU residents (Kassam, 2025).

Urban development also plays a key role in identity change.

New Cairo, created to relieve urban congestion, shows how large-scale development can depart from a place’s historical identity (Hafez, 2017). Though economically beneficial, such expansion often undermines cultural memory and local attachment. Ünlü (2025) argues for careful integration of new developments to preserve a place’s character. Without this, poorly managed growth risks may undermine residents’ emotional and experiential ties to place.

Conclusions: This study offers a holistic view of how change affects place identity and branding. While transformation is inevitable, the erosion of historically and culturally rooted elements can cause emotional and social disconnection. Aligning stakeholders and planning thoughtfully are essential to preserving place identity.

Practical Implications: The findings have significant implications for place branding, urban planning, tourism management, and policy development. Planners and policymakers must balance growth with identity preservation. Place branding strategies should incorporate both resident and visitor perspectives to create inclusive, emotionally resonant environments that retain cultural and historical continuity.

Keywords: Place branding; Place identity; Urban transformation; Cultural heritage; Stakeholder perception; Tourism impact; Identity resilience.

19. Communal Workouts and Digital Place Branding: Parkrun UK as a Catalyst for Inclusion and a Sense of Belonging

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1. MSA University, Egypt

2. University of Bedfordshire, United Kingdom

This paper explores how communal exercise events, such as Parkrun UK, contribute to inclusive place branding and foster a sense of belonging among diverse urban populations. Parkrun UK is a volunteer-led, free, weekly 5K running event that promotes physical activity, community spirit, and inclusivity across multiple locations in the UK and abroad. Luton Parkrun, hosted in Wardown Park in the diverse town of Luton, recently celebrated its 10th anniversary. Drawing on digital place branding concepts (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Avraham, 2020) and embodied experiences in place branding (Eshuis & González, 2025), this paper positions Luton Parkrun as an ideal case for examining the intersection of identity, place, and media practices.

The paper argues that Parkrun functions as an informal and organic place branding initiative rather than merely a running event. By mobilising below-the-line (BTL) media practices—including regular on-the-ground events, social media storytelling, volunteer-run photography, merchandising, digital newsletters, and word-of-mouth engagement—Parkrun fosters a participatory narrative that conveys inclusivity and authentic local identity. When circulated digitally, these narratives may serve as tools of micro-level place branding, particularly resonant with diverse groups such as international students arriving in the UK to study.

The interdisciplinary framework of this study draws on place branding and media studies, utilising a qualitative methodology. Data collection includes semi-structured interviews with two Luton Parkrun managers and event marshals, as well as a reflective ethnography by the authors, who have regularly participated in and observed the events over three years. This immersive approach aims to provide insights into the emotional affiliations formed through communal physical activity.

Preliminary findings examine the relationship between Luton Parkrun—as an informal, non-competitive, and open-access event—and perceptions of the town's identity and emotional attachment to Luton. The paper may also explore how participation in Parkrun events can serve as a means of reducing social isolation and enhancing identification with Luton as a 'home town'. It seeks to contribute to the empirical understanding of community workouts and media practices as tools for inclusive and sustainable place branding.

This study adds to the growing body of research exploring how everyday communal practices and grassroots initiatives inform inclusive and emotionally resonant place narratives. By positioning Luton Parkrun as a lived, participatory experience, the paper extends current understandings of place branding beyond institutional campaigns and top-down strategies. It highlights the significance of embodied engagement and digital storytelling in co-creating place identity from the bottom up. These findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, local authorities, and community organisations seeking more inclusive and authentic approaches to branding diverse urban spaces.

Keywords: Parkrun UK; Place branding; Digital storytelling; Inclusion; Sense of belonging; Community workouts.

28. Place branding of dog-friendly leisure spaces: conflicts and opportunities

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There are a growing number of dogs in society and globally every third household owns a dog. At the same time the perception of the dog is changing to being seen as a family member, labelled as multispecies families. This shift has led to a surge in dog-owners wanting to buy products and take part in leisure activities with their “family members”. You don’t leave family behind. Hence, businesses and destinations targeting the leisure visitors market has now started to market their premises to multispecies visitors. However, are dog-friendly place branding initiatives by tourism and leisure businesses appreciated by all or is it connected to potential risks and conflicts? The aim of this ongoing research project is to identify narratives related to the understanding of dog-friendly leisure and tourism place branding initiatives from a consumer perspective.

The research is based on a media analysis related to three shopping centres in the south of Sweden that allowed dogs inside their premises. This change garnered attention in local newspapers and on social media. The news led to a frenzy, and it generated 5 newspaper articles and 1200 comments on the news that forms the empirical materials analysed in this study. A narrative analysis based on Czarniawska (2004) different steps was conducted.

The identified narratives were associated with enthusiasm, as people could bring their dogs inside instead of, for example, leaving them in the car. However, there were also prevalent narratives concerning fear and the threat that dogs might bite or harm their children, as well as the high risks for individuals with allergies to enter the premises. Moreover, there was a significant antagonism toward dog owners. If dogs were permitted, then other animals should also be welcome; otherwise, it would not be fair. The narratives highlighted a strong polarisation between dog owners and non-dog owners.

This illustrates that the simple act of businesses launching new place branding initiatives to be more inclusive and dog-friendly can generate negative backlash. To prevent such conflicts of interest in the future, a clear brand communication strategy is necessary to bridge the gap between different interest groups. The study brings new knowledge about potential conflicts with multi-species place branding of leisure and tourism spaces.

Keywords: Multispecies place branding; Dog-friendly; Narrative analysis; Tourism; Leisure.

106. The Role of Student-Athlete Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) Partnerships in Regional City Branding: An Experimental Approach

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This study investigates how college athletes' Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) partnerships contribute to regional branding within college communities. On July 1, 2021, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) enacted a policy shift, allowing student-athletes in the United States to profit from their NIL. As a result, college athletes gained the right to sign endorsement deals and monetize their personal brand, often through social media posts promoting local businesses such as car dealerships, restaurants, or civic initiatives (Cocco, Kunkel, & Baker, 2023). Prior research suggests that NIL deals not only help athletes build their personal brands but also give regional stakeholders a new, effective promotional channel for place branding (Kian & Zimmerman, 2023).

However, relatively few studies have examined the role of NIL activities in the context of place branding. To address this gap, the present study examines whether NIL partnerships with regional branding initiatives can improve perceptions of a college community. Regional communities in the United States often face challenges in cultivating a distinct identity and attracting visitors (Meijers & Wouw, 2019). Focusing on regional college towns in the U.S., this study explores the potential of athlete-driven NIL initiatives to support regional development and enhance place branding. Specifically, grounded in theories of endorser credibility, parasocial interaction, and place branding through sports, this study examines how NIL partnerships leveraging sports resources for place branding, such as high-profile sports events and elite players, can shape perceptions of community vibrancy and foster regional pride.

RQ1: How does the type of sport represented by college athlete endorsers (e.g., high-profile vs. low-profile sports) in a regional branding initiative influence a town's perceived vibrancy, regional pride, and tourist appeal?

RQ2: How does the perceived reputation of college athlete endorsers (e.g., elite vs. non-elite athletes) in a regional branding initiatives influence a town's perceived vibrancy, regional pride, and tourist appeal?

The research questions are examined through an experiment conducted in a regional college town in the U.S. Participants will be randomly assigned to one of six experimental conditions in a 3 (event type: high-profile vs, mid-profile low-profile) × 2 (player reputation: elite vs. non-elite) between-subjects design. Each participant will view a regional branding campaign message endorsed by the town's college athletes through NIL partnerships. Following exposure to the stimulus, participants will evaluate their perceptions of the town and express their attitudes toward the campaign message.

Keywords: Place branding; NIL partnership; Regional city branding; Regional pride.

11. Connecting attractiveness and city branding governance: An institutional perspective

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2. Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium
3. Aix-Marseille Université, France

Abstract

International competition and resource attraction have turned city branding into a strategic imperative for most cities around the world. Place branding has been addressed in various research fields, and its increasing importance as both a subject of academic investigation and a political concern have mostly revolved around brand management, the role played by stakeholders, the relationship between place branding and success in attractiveness initiatives success, marketing-related issues, and the link with public policies. While most approaches have acknowledged the importance of networks supporting place branding, as well as the interrelations between actors involved, few attempts have been made to identify the related governance structures. For this reason, we aim here to: a) categorise the institutional structures that govern city attractiveness policies, and b) investigate the various advantages and disadvantages of these structures for place branding governance. We propose a typology of the structures put in place by cities to increase attractiveness. Then, we will prefer a qualitative approach relying on interviews with city brand managers to better understand the city governance structure and the paths for improvement identified by these managers. Therefore, this paper aims to respond to the three following research questions:

1. What are the main organisational structures supporting city attractiveness?
2. How is place branding perceived and organised in each structure?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each structure that supports city attractiveness?

Keywords: Place branding; Place marketing; Place promotion; Governance structures; Institutions.

70. Grassroots Activism and the Soft Power of Protests: When the Nation turns against the State

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2. London School of Economics, United Kingdom

Place Branding traditionally focuses on constructing versions of collective identity emphasizing harmony, and a supposed national 'essence', prioritizing state viewpoints and interests (Pamment, 2021). Protests, therefore, are perceived as unwelcome blemishes on reputation management. That has been the case, for instance, in Brazil, where demonstrations in 2013 created doubts about the country's capacity to host the FIFA World Cup; Chile, where unrest led to the APEC Summit being cancelled in 2019; or Colombia, which, following protests in 2021, lost hosting rights to Copa America, cancelling a nation branding campaign presenting Colombia as 'the most welcoming place on earth' (Jiménez-Martínez & Dolea, 2024).

The above examples are a reminder of the shifting and contested nature of national identities (Greenfeld, 2020). All countries have in fact 'identity fissures' (Durrani, 2025), with periodic disagreements manifesting into reversible 'image fractures' as part of their trajectories of nationhood. Crucially, protests are often portrayed positively by foreign news organisations, as expressions of the 'authentic' nation (Jiménez-Martínez & Dolea, 2024), making them a kind of 'grassroots' soft power, clashing with state-led endeavours (e.g. Shorbagy, 2023). Arguably, how and by whom protests are managed as a type of 'image fracture' can determine whether they become a 'grassroots' or a state-led type of soft power (Durrani, 2025).

Using Durrani's (2025) model of reputational vulnerability, the paper contrasts the historical interpolation of protest across nations in the Global North and South: United States, Chile, Colombia and Brazil. We use these cases to examine tensions and entanglements between dissent and place branding. Interrogating these dynamics is particularly important at a time when democracies are increasingly criminalising protests. In Australia, the UK, the United States and Latin America, governments are passing harsh anti-protest legislation, in order to protect corporate interests and/or avoid criticisms to political ideologies (see Bosacina & Kozacki, 2025; Monbiot, 2025; Watts, 2020). The paper therefore asks: How should scholarly approaches towards place branding account for grassroots activism? Should soft power gains by the state necessarily oppose those of the nation?

Keywords: Soft power; Protests; Place branding; National identity; Latin America.

79. Identifying the potential contribution of place branding and public diplomacy to the objectives of the African Union Agenda 2063

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2. Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa

Aims: To identify extent of existing and potential contribution to the aims and aspirations of the AU Agenda 2063 for a Continental Free Trade Area and related improvements in cross-border relationships between 54 countries.

Theoretical Framework: This investigation aims to highlight emerging relevant theoretical frameworks from place branding and regional studies which offer insight into the achievement of the aspirations underpinning agenda 2063.

Research Approach: A literature review of areas of place branding and public diplomacy research relevant to the key objectives of Agenda 2063 to assess and identify potential application at regional, national and transnational levels.

Key Arguments: The AU Agenda 2063 proposes an ambitious road map to the establishment of a continental wide free trade area in order to achieve more fully the potential of African material and human resources. It presents the significant challenge of negotiating this outcome across 54 nations with a significant range of sub national cultures and characteristics across a variety of climate zones and divergent post-colonial relationships with the global north all within the context of the previously agreed U.N. Sustainable Development Goals. A top-down approach is doomed to fail while bottom-up development of existing regional economic and political associations is under pressure, for example with the current fragmentation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and externally driven resource competition elsewhere.

The current international order, which in many respects disadvantages Africa in the wake of colonial boundaries and exploitation, is undergoing rapid transformation as a result of the accelerated dismantling of the post-war Bretton Woods institutions that have governed international trade and discourse since 1945.

Continuing disruptive actions from the United States government are simply accelerating a realignment already evident in the emergence of the BRICS association and increasing South-South collaboration which has been challenging the assumptions built into this post war consensus.

Place branding perspectives have been applied to African contexts at both city and regional levels. In particular the concept of brand portfolio can be used to characterise the challenge of building robust and sustainable relationships from existing regional economic and political arrangements within the continent towards a continental wide coherence and synergy.

Established regional policies beyond Africa involve cross-border issues at the level of macro regions and more local scales, for example within the European single market in which significant localised issues are addressed by the b-Solutions initiative. Successive Chinese five-year plans emphasise the objective of a harmonious society, their version of the social cohesion sought through European Union regional policy. Both are to some extent in conflict with the parallel requirement to perform at a global standard in key centres of development.

The technical turn in information, communication and financial technologies has already benefited both local and regional economies. While current AI promotion promises further disruption, African developments in fintech application to the foundation economy and engagement with indigenous knowledge offer an alternative to the electronic promotion of external agenda and the prospect of a degree of leapfrogging into the opportunities of so-called Industry 4.0 and beyond. In addition the soft power dimension of branding can be extended to relationships with the African diaspora in terms of capturing experience from beyond the continent in a form which can be more readily assimilated.

Conclusion / Practical Implications: The dual nature of place brands in both their external function in representing a location and their internal role in underpinning a sense of identity and purpose within locations provides a unique perspective to these challenges. This paper indicates how a place brand perspective can facilitate the development of indigenous narratives in support of Agenda 2063 at several levels.

Keywords: AU agenda 2063; Country brand portfolios; Cross-border regions; Sustainable development goals.

122. When should the private sector step into a traditionally public sector role? Developing a place brand for an economic region in politically volatile times

Amy Lewis¹ and Andrew Palmer¹

1. CTConsults, United Kingdom

In the UK, place brands are commonly commissioned by a local authority or other public sector agency. In Humber, when the public sector was focused on politics, the private sector stepped up. Humber is an economic region in the North of England, spanning the Humber estuary and comprising four local authorities in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, and soon-to-be two Mayoral Authorities. Within local politics, there is a long and complex history of distinct, separate identities and a rejection of 'Humber' as a place. Nevertheless, the estuary brings the region together through shared industry and commerce, and local business leaders champion regional cooperation and collaboration. Future Humber, the Bondholder business community, commissioned CTConsults, Hemingway Design and Pace Communications in 2024 to develop a shared place brand for the region. With a divisive devolution process underway, a regional place brand is vital to frame shared responses to regenerating this powerhouse economy. As consultants, we relished the challenge of working in a complex, sensitive and changing environment, to shape realistic but ambitious place values for the region.

Research approach:

- Deep-dive into the brief – ambitions, risks, opportunities.
- Local/regional context, priorities, needs.
- Identifying target clusters, e.g. green energy, cultural / creative industries, ports, manufacturing.
- Interviewing and consulting stakeholders.
- Primary / secondary research: economic & industrial plans, data, how target markets/audiences (local to global) perceived Humber; how they aligned with Humber's ambitions.
- 'Charrette': engaging creatively with leaders, influencers, change-makers through visits / tours / workshops, and a place brand masterclass. Drawing on (inter)national case-studies, it built a shared understanding of what place branding is, isn't, and what it can achieve for partnership-driven decision-making.
- Stakeholder workshops in multiple locations, targeting multiple sectors. Early insights informed 'provocations' about what is important to Humber.
- Insights Report: a critical evidence base which included emerging recommendations, a brief for brand design, and identified metrics to track impacts.
- Brand values development – working with a cross-sector steering group, we led an iterative process to agree the brand values for Humber, develop the toolkits and support its launch.

Conclusions: Our process differs from many consultancies. It delivers more than narrative 'storytelling' and visual identity-led practice, which too often has little/no long-term impact. We demonstrate that a place is a brand, which needs to have colour, energy and focus behind it. Place branding works when it focuses on adopting the behaviours of well-managed brands. Since launch in June 2024, Humber's place brand has galvanised and guided stakeholders through its shared values and partnership actions. Proposed activity is 'filtered' through the brand values, to assess to what extent it supports the Humber narrative. The better an activity expresses a core value, the more it will positively contribute to Humber's image. This is a planning tool that helps proposals and programmes be better for their enterprises and the region. Using these core values means that everyone can contribute to shape Humber's image in a common direction with a flexible, accessible toolkit to help deliver clear KPIs for diverse audiences.

Practical implications: The brand was launched at Humber Business Week to over 400 delegates, including a collaborative exercise with a real case study assessed against the brand values. Future Humber now works with businesses across the region to apply the place brand through their activities: devolution, inward investment, culture, infrastructure, education, environment and more. Early successes include influencing a £200m investment into Immingham port, supporting £1bn into Humber Freeport sites, and helping to frame the transformation of the UK's largest carbon-emitting cluster into a global exemplar for decarbonisation.

Keywords: Place brand; Economic development; Private sector; Inward investment; Devolution; Cross-sector; Long-term.

Panel Session 1: Creative and multi-sensory methods for place branding research (13:30-15:10)

Description

The purpose of this session is to explore and showcase the potential of an array of alternative methods for place branding research.

It will highlight the importance of:

- Expanding our research methodologies towards more creative, arts-based, alternative methods that can better capture the multi-sensory, emotional and embodied experience that people have in and of places and
- Using different creative methods for presentation and interpretation of research findings that bring these findings closer to audiences that are not familiar with traditional academic presentations.

Chair

Laura Ripoll Gonzalez – Griffith University, Australia

Participants

- **Mihalis Kavaratzis** – Manchester Metropolitan University, UK
- **Gary Warnaby** – Manchester Metropolitan University, UK
- **Jasper Eshuis** – Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands
- **Zafeirenia Brokalaki** – Queen Mary University, UK
- **Massimo Giovanardi** – University of Bologna, Italy
- **Chloe Steadman** – Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

113. Co-creating the experiential value of a destination: The key role of front-line tourism employees

Kalipso Karantinou¹, Markos Marios Tsogas², Marina Kyriakou², Maria Psimouli¹, Athanasios Gkaintatzis¹, Paraskevi Ntzoumanika¹, Katerina Papakonstantinou², Polyxeni Sardi¹ and Erifyli Benakopoulou¹

1. Athens University of Economics and Business, Greece

2. University of Piraeus, Greece

With the global tourism sector experiencing the shift to the era of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2011; Oh et al., 2007), optimizing the visitor/guest experience has emerged as a strategic priority across both academic research and business practice (Gartner, 2018; Mahr et al., 2019; Roggenveen et al., 2020). A superior visitor/guest experience can foster greater satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability (Berry et al., 2002; Grewal et al., 2009), while also serving as a critical determinant in achieving sustainable competitive advantage for both tourism enterprises and destinations (Gartner, 2018).

Drawing from the participatory place branding process (Kavaratzis, 2017) and the co-creation theory (Eletxigerra et al., 2018), the importance of stakeholders' interaction and satisfaction emerges as crucial for place brand sustainability. Tourism industry employees is a key stakeholder group that can influence visitors' experience in a destination, representing the facet of the People dimension of a place brand that visitors interact with on a regular basis. Thus, places need to compete to attract the most talented employees (Barkun et al., 2021), who will shape the optimal emotion-laden visitors/guests' experience.

Previous research in the tourism and hospitality domain has demonstrated the importance of employee satisfaction as a prerequisite for visitor/guest satisfaction and optimization of the visitor/guest experience in a destination (Batat, 2022; Plasko, 2017). Managing, therefore, the employee experience requires particular attention, as it substantially co-determines the visitor/guest experience (Gustafsson et al., 2024). Employee experience encompasses employees' overall perceptions of their employer and work, formed through interactions across all organizational touchpoints (Plasko, 2017), including all aspects of the physical work environment (Batat, 2022), the available technological tools (Malik et al., 2023), job tasks, workplace culture, human resource and leadership practices (Pangallo et al., 2022; Panneerselvam & Balaraman, 2022).

This research looks into the aspects that influence employee satisfaction and retention, focusing on the working and living conditions of hospitality employees, and explores the degree to which the overall employee work experience impacts upon the visitor/guest experience. To shed light onto the employee experience aspect, a large-scale survey has been conducted with hospitality industry employees of six hotels in one destination: a large and very popular Greek island. To examine the consumer perceptions and experiences with the selected hotels in the destination and investigate the impact employees have on their visitor/guest experiences, online reviews have been utilized, sourced from Booking.com and TripAdvisor, offering spontaneous and rich feedback (Guo et al., 2017) based on guests' lived experiences (Banerjee et al., 2016). Findings confirm the importance of employee-customer interaction for both parties' satisfaction; underline the importance of place (location); and shed light on those parameters that shape a destination's attractiveness and competitiveness for both employees and visitors/guests, thus safeguarding sustainability.

Keywords: Destination stakeholders; Place branding; Employee experience; Living and work environment; Visitor/guest experience.

23. Co-creation in Place Branding: Systematic Review of Concepts, Actors, and Practices

Xingyi Cao¹, Laura Ripoll González², Jasper Eshuis¹, Emma Björner³ and Martin de Jong¹

1. Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands

2. Griffith University, Australia

3. University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Aims: To synthesize how co-creation has been conceptualized and empirically investigated in place branding, and to identify gaps and opportunities for more coherent, inclusive, and context-sensitive frameworks.

Theoretical framework: Building on stakeholder theory and participatory governance, this study views place branding as a collaborative brand-building process (Rebelo et al., 2020; Ripoll González & Lester, 2018; Stoica et al., 2021). It situates co-creation within a shift from top-down brand management toward inclusive, multi-actor engagement (Casais & Monteiro, 2019).

Main research approach: A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted following Snyder's (2019) guidelines—protocol development, comprehensive database search (Scopus; Web of Science), transparent selection, rigorous data extraction, and thematic synthesis. Eighty-four peer-reviewed documents (78 from databases; 6 via snowball sampling) were analyzed across six dimensions.

Key arguments/findings: Currently, analysis is still in progress. The full paper will present findings regarding:

1. Conceptualization: Variation and commonalities in the Definitions of co-creation
2. Actor Involvement: Analysis will present how studies view the involvement of different actors in terms of the stages they participate in and the roles they play within the branding process. Preliminary finding is that studies focus on early-stage engagement of citizens, stakeholders, and businesses, with limited exploration of sustained collaboration.
3. Process Stages: Analysis will chart actor engagement across all branding phases. Early evidence suggests that participation is concentrated in ideation and design phases, while evaluation and maintenance phases are under-researched.
4. Methodological Approaches: Analysis will categorize research methods used to study co-creation. Initial review shows a predominance of qualitative, case-based studies; few longitudinal or mixed-method designs, indicating a methodological gap.
5. Frameworks and Practices: Analysis will compare the use of co-creation frameworks across contexts. Early findings reveal inconsistent application of co-creation frameworks across regions.
6. Research Gaps: Analysis will identify areas lacking sufficient study. Preliminary results point to the need for definition harmonization, methodological diversification, longitudinal inquiry, multi-actor models, and cross-regional comparisons.

Conclusions: The review will uncover critical disconnects between theoretical models and empirical applications of co-creation in place branding. Addressing identified gaps will strengthen the rigor and relevance of future research.

Practical implications: A roadmap for practitioners will be developed in the full paper; at this stage, the review highlights the need for:

1. Adopting clear, shared definitions of co-creation;
2. Engaging actors across all branding stages;
3. Employing mixed and longitudinal methods to track impact;
4. Customizing frameworks to local contexts.

Keywords: Place branding; Co-creation; Actor involvement; Stakeholder engagement; Systematic literature review.

130. Actors' roles in place branding in the context of place brand co-creation

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1. University of Bedfordshire, United Kingdom

2. Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom

Research Aims: The main aim of this paper is to examine and clarify the roles that actors play in place branding processes within the context of place brand co-creation, something that is not examined adequately in the literature.

Theoretical framework: The theoretical background of place brand co-creation is a useful background against which to study actors' roles as it allows for a wider and more open understanding of the roles that various actors could potentially play beyond a strict and prescriptive view of the roles of managers, politicians and residents. Co-creation also implies the dynamic character of the whole process, which helps account for the changes in roles that various actors undertake.

Research Approach: The context of the investigation is two separate studies that examined place brand co-creation in five European cities. The two studies employed in-depth interviews, netnography, participant observation and photo-elicitation to examine the ways in which various actors (place managers, campaign managers, campaign participants, residents) play in the co-creation of the place brand in conscious/purposeful as well as sub-conscious /non-purposeful ways.

Main findings: The findings lead to a classification of actors' roles into a typology of seven intertwined actors' roles. These will be outlined in the presentation along with illustrative examples from the empirical studies. These findings contribute to further understanding of the required circumstances that allow place brand co-creation to occur and the potential ways in which in this might be influenced in the framework of place brand management.

Keywords: Place branding; Stakeholder roles; Place brand co-creation.

25. Role-play in place: a study of public officials' roles in place branding

Lisa Källström¹, Laura Ripoll Gonzalez² and Janina M. Schaumann³

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2. Griffith University, Australia

3. Universiteit Twente, Netherlands

Stakeholders such as residents, visitors, entrepreneurs, workers, public, private, and non-profit organizations are central to place branding, as they play crucial roles in the development and communication of place brands. While most research to date has focused on the roles residents play, little attention has been given to the roles of other stakeholders. To address this gap, this study focuses on how public officials, who often lead these processes, shape the branding process and the resulting place brand. Since places are public spaces managed by local governments, public officials hold significant power and resources that are critical to the effectiveness of place branding activities. This study explores public officials' perceptions of their multiple and fluid roles (both formal and informal) in place branding, with a focus on factors driving them to engage in supportive behaviours. The empirical material is drawn from six municipalities in southern Sweden collaborating through the Skåne Nordost (SKNO) cooperation committee. Based on 18 semi-structured interviews with senior public officials, including municipal directors and elected council leaders, we develop a classification of public officials' roles in place branding. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the complexity of public officials' role adoption, emphasizing how motivations and perceptions of the objective of place branding shape their engagement.

Keywords: Inclusive place branding; Place stakeholders; Public officials; Roles; Brand citizenship behaviour.

21. Are smart city brands inclusive? An empirical investigation of city branding in the digital transition

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1. Griffith University, Australia
2. Complutense University of Madrid, Spain
3. Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands

Aims: This paper aims to address the issue of citizen inclusion in smart city branding, focusing on how vulnerable citizen groups are framed within digital, intelligent, smart and associated city discourses and associated policies.

Theoretical Framework: The study is grounded in theories of strategic communication, place branding, digital transition and urban equity, examining the disparities in access and benefits among different citizen groups (digital divide), particularly the elderly, migrants, and people with disabilities.

Main Research Approach: The study's main research question is 'How inclusive are smart city brands?' To answer this question, we conduct a comparative analysis of smart city branding and communication strategies and practices in four European cities (Amsterdam, Barcelona, Madrid, and Rotterdam). This includes document analysis and in-depth interviews with branding and communication officials (expected completion June 2025). The results will be validated through an expert workshop with representatives across the four cases.

Key Arguments/Findings: The findings to date reveal that, despite a strong vocation to deliver inclusion by communications and branding professionals (a core value), their efforts are hindered by a lack of strategic communication framework. These findings signal significant inequities in the benefits of smart city initiatives, highlighting the disadvantages faced by vulnerable groups, often excluded from smart city narratives and associated policies.

Conclusions: we conclude that while some cities have shifted from 'smart city' to more inclusive concepts like 'digital city' or 'digital agenda,' and focused efforts in foster inclusion (e.g. participation in the branding process and increased representation in the brand outcome of vulnerable groups) there is a need for an overall inclusion strategy in order to deliver equity in the digital transition.

Practical Implications: The insights provided a series of recommendations to support the development of more inclusive smart city branding frameworks, promoting greater participation and representation of vulnerable citizen groups in urban life.

Keywords: Smart city; Inclusion; Citizens; Strategic communication; Vulnerable groups; Digital transition; City branding; Digital divide.

33. Leveraging AI Performance for Nation Branding: The Mediating Role of National Competitiveness

Geeho Jeon¹

1. IPS (The Institute for Industrial Policy Studies), South Korea

This study investigates the relationships among artificial intelligence (AI) performance, national competitiveness, and nation brand, grounded in creative destruction, social capital, and techno-economic paradigm theories. We hypothesize that AI performance, measured by the Tortoise AI Index and Oxford AI Readiness Index, enhances NBI nation brand indirectly through IMD national competitiveness (Tortoise) and directly (Oxford). Using SPSS Process Macro Model 4 and normalized scores, we analyzed data from 46 countries (Tortoise) and 47 countries (Oxford), confirming significant indirect effects for Tortoise (complete mediation) and direct effects for Oxford (no mediation). 3×3×3 K-means clustering identified 15 countries with high potential for AI-driven nation brand enhancement, offering tailored policy recommendations based on economic contexts. The findings validate AI's role as a general-purpose technology that reshapes economic structures and global perceptions, providing a strategic roadmap for policymakers to leverage AI for competitiveness and nation branding.

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of AI's socioeconomic impacts and offers actionable insights for global recognition.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI); National competitiveness; Nation branding; Mediation analysis; K-Means clustering.

42. The Application of Artificial Intelligence in Place Branding Research: A Systematic Literature Review

Sara Seifallah Abdelrahman Ibrahim¹ and Sara Vinyals-Mirabent¹

1. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

This investigation aims to identify and map the integration of AI technologies into the academic progress of place branding. Within the ongoing digital revolution, artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have emerged as transformative tools for place branding research and practice (Keegan, 2021). Integrating AI into research can support analysis of massive volumes of data, offer insights and sentiment in public perceptions, and detect emerging trends at entirely different scales than using traditional methods (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2020).

The authors proposed a systematized scoping review (i.e., a mapping review) (Paré et al., 2015), of all articles indexed at the database SCOPUS until March 2025. To take stock of the previous research on the topic, we structured our review into three phases: 1) identification and selection of relevant studies; 2) charting the data; and 3) reporting the results. First, the authors included all papers containing the Keywords “Place Branding” (or, alternatively, city or destination branding and “Artificial Intelligence” (or, alternatively, deep learning, natural language processing, and nine other concepts linked to AI). After removing duplicates, the study sample identified 56 relevant papers on topic. Second, to ensure the reliability of the study, two coders systematically analyzed the key features of the use and application of methods and tools linked to AI such as scope/methodology/algorithm/etc. Complementary to this, we utilized AI, specifically OpenAI- GPT 3.5, to assist in analyzing key features and assessing its usefulness and accuracy in this analytical process.

The authors have engineered a prompt asking GPT3.5 Large Language Model to analyse the 56 papers’ abstracts and extract the details needed for this review study for result validation and accuracy. The prompt used was:

“Based on the 56 article abstracts pasted below, extract the:

1. Type of Article: Is it Theoretical, Methodological, or Empirical?
2. AI Tool Usage: Does the methodology involve AI tools ? If yes, name them.
3. AI Tool Function: How are these AI tools used ?
4. Context Variables: What are the contextual settings or variables used in the study?
5. Case Study Objects: What is/are the main object(s) of study“

The analysis by the authors reveals significant growth in AI adoption in place branding research, with 73.2% of the reviewed studies integrating AI techniques in methods. The other 26.8% of papers are not employing AI tools in their methodology but rather integrate AI themes through theoretical discussions of AI’s role in tourism branding. Other papers used traditional research methods examining stakeholder perceptions of AI adoption, and framework development proposing future AI implementation strategies in destination marketing.

Predominantly sentiment analysis and natural language processing represent 84.8% of AI-Method Integrated Studies. Tourism emerges as the dominant application domain (49.2% of studies), with social media platforms serving as the primary data source (39.3%). Key findings indicate a strong empirical orientation (76.8% of studies) and concentration on brand perception analysis (28.6%).

The authors identified several research gaps that can guide the future research agenda, including the limited integration of multimodal data types, geographical biases toward European and Asian contexts, temporal limitations with the lack of longitudinal studies, and narrow stakeholder perspectives predominantly focused on tourists, among others.

Keywords: Place branding; Artificial Intelligence; Destination branding.

Panel Session 2: How Do We Teach Nation/Place Branding? Innovations in Pedagogy (15:30-16:50)

Description

The field of Nation Branding/Place Branding is relatively new, mostly developing as an area of scholarly research after September 11, 2001. The field is broad, encompassing many academic and professional domains (e.g., diplomacy studies, strategic communication, marketing, branding, tourism, public relations, international relations, cultural communication, media studies). Approaches to teaching the field are equally varied. Because the field is new and broadly defined, courses that focus specifically on nation branding/place branding are few. For these reasons, the education and training of place branding practitioners has received little attention in research and practice. However, many professors who study the field are likely interested in teaching it. As students are drawn to the practice of place branding, demand is growing for focused coursework.

This panel brings together professors who teach nation branding/place branding to discuss innovations in teaching and learning. The panel will address issues such as: What kind of students are interested in a course on nation branding? How do you structure a course in nation branding and/or place branding? What is the breadth of the field? What should a syllabus look like? What materials/textbooks are available? What sort of learning outcomes are appropriate? At the graduate level, what readings are considered seminal? Are there innovative ways of teaching nation branding/place branding outside the typical academic course, such as study abroad, internships, workshops, practical training, etc.?

Chairs

- **Jami Fullerton** – Oklahoma State University, United States of America
- **Lori McKinnon** – Oklahoma State University, United States of America

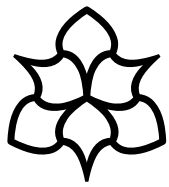
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