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**Success factors of place branding of  
European cities**

Master's thesis

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Year of the defence: 2022

## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 02 August, 2022

Dinara Zakharova

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## **Abstract**

The thesis is devoted to determining the factors influencing the success of place branding implementation in European cities. The involvement of stakeholders in the city branding process, the focus of city branding strategy on citizens and life quality increase, the inclusion of the EU-level stakeholder represented by the "Eurocities" network, management of digital identity, and the inclusion of the rhetoric of sustainability and "greenness" into the place branding strategy are considered as factors that can influence the success of city branding implementation in European cities. The analysis proved that city branding is a complex process that cannot be influenced by only one factor. The study outlined three elements necessary for the success of city branding of European cities. These factors include the involvement of stakeholders in the city branding process, digital identity management, and the inclusion of the rhetoric of sustainability and "greenness" into the place branding strategy. Also, the combination of factors sufficient to produce place branding was identified. Thus, for place branding to be successful, the place branding strategy should simultaneously involve citizens, focus on the citizens and life quality increase, and include management of digital identity and the rhetoric of "greenness" and sustainability into its agenda. The membership in the "Eurocities" network was not proved to produce significant results based on the cases chosen for study. To conduct the analysis, the author turns to the practice of city branding of sixteen medium-sized European cities (100,000-250,000 citizens). The successful cases chosen for study are Eindhoven, Innsbruck, Groningen, Maastricht, Magdeburg, Braga, Prato, Kiel. The unsuccessful cases considered in the study are Esbjerg, Aalborg, Odense, Limassol, Cottbus, Győr, Pescara, and Heerlen.

## **Abstrakt**

Práce se věnuje určení faktorů ovlivňujících úspěšnost place brandingů evropských měst. Za faktory, které mohou ovlivnit úspěšnost implementace city brandingů v evropských městech, jsou považovány zapojení zainteresovaných stran do procesu tvorby značky města, zaměření strategie city brandingů na občany a zvýšení kvality života, zapojení zainteresovaných stran na úrovni EU reprezentované sítí "Eurocities", řízení digitální identity a zahrnutí rétoriky udržitelnosti a "zelenosti" do strategie place brandingů. Analýza prokázala, že budování značky města je komplexní proces, který nelze ovlivnit jedním faktorem. V průběhu analýzy byly nastíněny tři faktory, které jsou nezbytné pro úspěch city brandingů evropských měst. Mezi tyto faktory patří zapojení zainteresovaných stran do procesu tvorby značky města, řízení

digitální identity a zahrnutí rétoriky udržitelnosti a "zelenosti" do strategie tvorby značky místa. Rovněž byla identifikována kombinace faktorů postačující k vytvoření place branding. Aby byl tedy place branding úspěšný, měla by strategie place branding současně zapojit občany, zaměřit se na občany a zvýšení kvality života, zahrnout do své agendy řízení digitální identity a rétoriku "zelenosti" a udržitelnosti. Na základě případů vybraných ke studiu se ukázalo, že členství v síti "Eurocities" nepřináší významné výsledky. Pro provedení analýzy se autor obrací k praxi budování městských značek šestnácti evropských měst střední velikosti (100 000-250 000 obyvatel). Úspěšnými případy vybranými ke studiu jsou Eindhoven, Innsbruck, Groningen, Maastricht, Magdeburg, Braga, Prato, Kiel. Neúspěšnými případy, které byly ve studii zohledněny, jsou Esbjerg, Aalborg, Odense, Limassol, Cottbus, Győr, Pescara, Heerlen.

## **Keywords**

City, place branding, city development, economic geography, identity-based approach, digital identity management, sustainability, stakeholders' involvement, life quality increase

## **Klíčová slova**

Město, značka místa, rozvoj města, ekonomická geografie, přístup založený na identitě, správa digitální identity, udržitelnost, zapojení zúčastněných stran, zvýšení kvality života

## **Název práce**

Faktory úspěchu z "brandingu místa" v evropských městech

**Institute of Political Studies**  
**Master thesis proposal**

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**Proposed Topic:**

**Success factors of place branding of European cities**

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**5 Keywords:** city, place branding, policy factors, city development, economic geography.

**Topic characteristics / Research Question(s):**

My thesis will focus on the following **general research question**: What are the factors that influence the success of place branding implementation in European cities?

A new discourse on competitiveness that has emerged in economic geography examines the cornerstone role of cities and regions in improving a country's economic situation, growth, and productivity (Martin, 2006). According to experts, we are witnessing the re-emergence of cities as centers of wealth production and economic governance in the global economy, and conceptualization of city competitiveness is essential to this re-affirmation of cities (Ibid.). Empirical evidence strongly suggests that some cities do well in terms of average wealth, employment, living standards, growth, while others do not, leading to spatial inequality and uneven development. Thus, the issue of competitiveness of cities arises. The valuable instrument of the increase in city competitiveness is place branding. Using the competitive advantages of a place, place branding helps create an image of the city that attracts the main stakeholders (tourists, citizens, investors) and, thus, contributes to economic development. Place branding is also considered an important policy tool. Its use can neutralize poor governance at the national level, reduce regional disparities, and help improve the relationship between the branding unit and the capital. Even though place branding strategies are gaining momentum, and many European cities are already using it, according to statistics, 86% of city branding projects fail (North, 2014). Using the theory of place branding, the work will attempt

to study which factors may influence the success of place branding implementation in European cities.

### **Working hypotheses:**

1. Political support of place branding by local Government in terms of implementing safety, cultural and environmental programs promote place at the local, federal, and international level and thus contributes to the creation of a successful city brand.
2. The inclusion and interaction of the main stakeholders (political authorities, business sector, citizens) contributes to the creation of a successful city brand.
3. Hosting global events contributes to the success of a city brand.
4. Management of digital identity contributes to the creation of a successful city brand.
5. Creation of a long-term, sustainable branding concept that ensures its continuity, contributes to the creation of a successful place brand.

### **Methodology:**

The literature review will be used in the thesis to find out which factors are important in the place branding creation and development. The main method that will be used in the thesis is a regression analysis. Using the sample of 20 cities (10 cases of successful city brands and 10 cases of unsuccessful city brands), one could compose a dataset with the variables “successful city brand” (0 - if a city brand is evaluated as unsuccessful, 1 - if a city brand is evaluated as successful), “political support” (0 – if city does not implement programs aimed at increasing life quality, 1 – if it does), “political authorities initiative” (0 – if the political authorities did not take the initiative to create a place brand, 1 – if they did), “inclusion of main stakeholders” (0 – if the business sector and citizens were not included into place branding creation, 1 – if they did), “global events” (0 – if the city did not host global events, 1 – if it did), “digital identity” (0 – if place brand is not maintained through digital platforms, 1 – if it did), “sustainability” (0 – if the place branding concept is not sustainable and not aimed at long-term vision, 1 – if it is). As the “success” of a place branding is a fuzzy concept, I am going to operationalize it in the following way: as the main goal of a place branding is the attraction of investments, tourists, new citizens, talented people, and, ultimately, economic development, the success of a place branding will be measured by dynamics of investments, local GDP, migration, tourism. If the



indicators have increased for the period of place branding implementation, then we classify a city as a successful brand. If not, the city brand will be treated as unsuccessful.

## **Outline**

1. Introduction
2. Theoretical background and literature review
  - a. Placing place branding in the framework of economic geography
  - b. Place Branding: the content of the concept and economic and political significance of the practice
  - c. Place branding of European cities
  - d. Outlining the characteristics of successful brand
3. Empirical part
  - a. Formulation and justification of the hypotheses
  - b. Operationalization of the “success” of the city brand
  - c. Explanation of cases choice, procedure of composing a dataset
  - d. Regression analysis
  - e. Discussion of the results, formation of possible strategies for applying the results obtained in practice
4. Conclusions
5. References/bibliography

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

With the beginning of the era of globalization, a new discourse on competitiveness examining the cornerstone role of cities and regions in improving a country's economic situation, growth, and productivity has emerged in economic geography (Martin, 2006). According to the experts, we are witnessing the re-emergence of cities as centers of wealth production and economic governance in the global economy. The conceptualization of city competitiveness is essential to this re-affirmation of cities (Ibid.). Besides this, there is a tendency of increasing the population living in the urban areas observed. Following the UN projections, 68% of the world population will live in urban areas by 2050 (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018). Such a tendency requires a rethinking of sustainable development, particularly urban governance, to meet the needs of a growing urban population. Ensuring that the benefits of urbanization (including access to infrastructure and social services for all citizens) are fully shared and inclusive is one of the main objectives of urban growth management policies (Ibid).

Taking the above mentioned into consideration, it becomes clear that the struggle of urban areas, especially cities as the large metropolitan areas with higher population and population density, for resources and the government's attention is becoming increasingly intense. Therefore, the use of place branding can become a tremendous competitive advantage. Initially created for a place promotion within a tourism domain (Hankinson, 2010), place branding performs many other vital functions nowadays. It is used as a tool for strategic planning (Petrea, Petrea, et al., 2013), social consolidation (via "reinforcing local identity and identification of the citizens with their city) and activating the social forces to avoid social exclusion and unrest" (Kavaratzis, 2004, p.70). Moreover, by attracting inward investments and aligning internal stakeholders (Zavatarro, 2014), place branding is vital for economic development.

Therefore, the increased use of place branding, especially at the city level, is not surprising. Following Lucarelli and Berg (2011), European cities spend from £130,000 to £10 million to place marketing activities, with the average per capita city marketing budget equal to €400,000. At the same time, the CityMetric reports that 86 percent of city branding campaigns fail (North, 2014, as cited in Ločmele, Mousten, 2016). **The thesis aims** to understand the main reasons for place branding failures in European cities. The study is focused on the European cities, as they are facing an accelerating pace of change in the global economic, political, and technological environment, an increasing number of competitors in their efforts to attract

limited resources, and a growing reliance on their local resources in an increasingly competitive environment (Kotler et al., 1999, as cited in Kavaratzis, Ashworth, 2006). Moreover, due to the intensifying spatial interaction between the European cities in terms of goods transport, business, leisure, and social traffic, European cities have to offer even more incentives for capital to secure development and growth (Kavaratzis, Ashworth, 2006), that makes the use of place branding even more relevant.

The **research question** of the thesis is “What are the factors that influence the success of place branding implementation in European cities?”. To answer this question, the following **hypotheses** were designed:

**H1:** The involvement of stakeholders (citizens, businesses, city organizations) into the city branding process is a necessary component for city branding success.

**H2:** The focus of the city branding strategy on citizens and life quality increase is necessary for successful city branding.

**H3:** The inclusion of the EU-level stakeholder presented by the “Eurocities” network is necessary for the success of city branding.

**H4:** Management of digital identity is a necessary component of the place brand success.

**H5:** The direction of the branding concept “to the future” in terms of using the rhetoric of “greenness” and “sustainability” is necessary for the successful branding of a city.

The **crisp-set QCA analysis** will be used in the thesis to test the hypotheses. This method allows making generalizations taking into account within-case complexity. Also, QCA patterns’ examination considers the diversity and heterogeneity of cases concerning their different causally significant conditions and contexts by comparing cases as configurations (Ragin, 1984). It seems to be especially important while studying place branding, as the cases are unique, and the success or failure of a place branding results from the interaction of several, rather than one individual factor. The use of the QCA enables to answer the research question better than with the usage of the regression analysis suggested in the Master Thesis proposal, as it allows to understand which present and absent conditions and their combinations lead to

the success or failure of place branding across the chosen cases. Moreover, it helps identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for an outcome.

The study analyzes sixteen successful and unsuccessful city branding practices of medium-sized European cities with a population of 100,000-250,000 citizens (with exception of Heerlen with the population of 93,084). The successful cases are Eindhoven, Innsbruck, Groningen, Maastricht, Magdeburg, Braga, Prato, Kiel. The unsuccessful cases are Esbjerg, Aalborg, Odense, Limassol, Cottbus, Gyor, Pescara, Heerlen. The sample was decreased compared to the Master Thesis proposal due to the lack of data for medium-sized cities and the lack of information regarding the failed city branding attempts.

The study's theoretical significance lies in the attempt to contribute to the field's generalization. Several experts mention the lack of coherent theoretical framework and integrated research approaches in the place branding research domain (Anderson, 2014; Vuignier, 2017; Acharya, Rahman, 2016; Kumar, Panda, 2019). So, in the research conducted by N. Kumar and R. Panda (2019), only 25 (14%) out of 188 reviewed place branding studies proposed conceptual/theoretical/models/frameworks, while only five were empirically tested. Also, the current place branding research domain consists primarily of case studies (Lucarelli, Berg, 2011). While quantitative methods are becoming more widespread in the field, qualitative research methods still strongly predominate over quantitative research (Ibid.), complicating the ability to generalize. The thesis will consider the existing studies to find which factors and their combinations may be crucial for place branding outcomes. Then, using the QCA analysis, I attempt to perform generalization. Also, most current studies on place branding concentrate on studying large cities and capitals. In contrast, the focus of this study will be on exploring medium-sized cities with a population of 100,000-250,000 citizens that need to put in more effort to create a successful place brand. Hence, the study aims to contribute to the underdeveloped field of study in place branding.

The practical significance of this work lies in the fact that the factors considered in the thesis are aimed at their practical application for the successful use of place branding to develop medium-sized European cities by policymakers.

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows. **Chapter 2** introduces the concept of place branding, and gives a brief overview of its development, approaches to its consideration, and

functions that place branding performs. Special attention in the chapter is given to considering the model of effective, or identity-based approach to place branding. **Chapter 3** is concerned with the methodology used for this study. **Chapter 4** deals with the empirical analysis and discusses its results. **Chapter 5** provides a conclusion, practical recommendation for implementing place branding practices in European cities and discusses a field for possible research extensions. **Chapter 6** is the list of appendices.

## Chapter 2. Place branding: theory and practice

### 2.1. Defining and understanding place branding

While the place branding has appeared in the focus of specialists of a wide range of disciplines at the end of the twentieth century (the 1980s-1990s), some place branding specialists claim that the pure idea of place branding can be traced back to the history at the times of the Alexander the Great, when it was believed that the success or failure of places depended mainly on the image they projected outside the borders (Vela, 2013). Due to the multidimensionality of the concept of “place”, it became the subject of study by marketers, sociologists, geographers, political scientists, and specialists from other fields that expanded its application to achieve different goals.

First attempts to construct a place branding were made in the 1970-1980s by marketers and managers that claimed that the marketing approach to urban planning is a promising new avenue to explore” (Ashworth, Voogd, 1988, as cited in Vuignier, 2016, p. 12). In the 1990s, the interest in marketing places was reinforced by the number of works considering the application of marketing concepts to places (Ibid.). In these studies, “place” was understood as an ordinary marketing object without significant adaptations (Vuignier, 2017). Philip Kotler, who in 1993 published the book “Marketing Places: Attracting Investments, Industry, and Tourism to Cities, States, and Nations” can be called one of the founders of place branding. In his book, which became one of the first guidelines for developing places, the author highlighted the necessity of drawing attention to places, as almost all European places face difficult times due to several reasons (Kotler, Asplund, et al., 1999). The internal causes of it mentioned by the author are a general cycle of growth and decline accelerated by changes in the economic climate. The external factors include the rapid technological development, globalization of competition, and political shifts. (Ibid.). Following the authors, places should be considered the quintessence of local culture, historical heritage, population, and local opportunities to develop the chosen location and promote its goods and services (Ibid). Thus, there is a need for a place marketing that should consist of four components: development of an attractive positioning and image; creating incentives for existing and future buyers and users of goods and services; delivery of products of the territory in an efficient and accessible form; promotion of the valuable qualities of the place for informing users about its distinctive advantages (Ibid.). The other works of that period consider mostly the necessity to promote the place to attract

tourists (Fainstein, Judd, 1999; Buhalis, 2000; Walsh, Jamrozny, Burr, 2001; Morgan, Pritchard, et. al, 2002), and sell the products and services (Libery, Kneafsey, 1998; Westerbeek, Shilbury, 1999). Generally, the marketing and managerial studies highlight the significance of building an attractive brand with a clear brand concept supported by marketing activities to increase brand awareness and recognition (Klijn, Eshuis, Braun, 2012). As M. Kavartzis mentioned, place marketing studies consider “different ways of relating marketable products to real geographical points on the earth’s surface” (Kavartzis, 2008, p. 152). The logic that many place marketers follow is “for marketing efforts to succeed, there is a need to improve the respective images of a place, which is often understood as a destination brand, appellation d’origine, or investment brand” (Govers, 2011, p. 227).

The different perspective on place promotion was suggested by Simon Anholt, who first applied the term “place branding” at the beginning of 2002 (Dinnie, 2004). Focusing on nation branding, the author argued about the insufficiency of applying marketing tools to places and the need to create a new approach, as marketing tools cannot change places’ fortune (Anholt, 2005). While some national assets, such as tourism, culture, and exports, can be sold, country, city, or region cannot be due to the absence of a single target market, making the application of marketing instruments pointless (Ibid.). Unlike place marketing, place branding is aimed at the positioning of the place, creation of a complete picture of the culture, politics, and other features of the selected territory, i.e., creating mental associations, which then appear in any commercial interaction with a place (Govers, 2011). As R. Govers (2013) mentions, the places are complex, and apart from being an environment for economic activity, they also present environments in which people live, move, develop, bring up children, and become engaged in social, cultural, sports activities and NGOs, that cannot be treated only by creating logo or slogan. Hence, place branding is about managing brand equity. (Ibid.).

In essence, place branding is about constructing a competitive identity, that is “the synthesis of brand management with public diplomacy and with trade, investment, tourism, and export promotion”, increasing its competitiveness on federal and international levels. The competitive identity consists of six main elements: tourism promotion (including experience from visiting a place), export brands (acting as ambassadors of a place’s image abroad when the place of origin is explicit), policy decisions of a place government (both foreign and domestic policy if reported in international media), investments (the way the place attracts inward investments, talents, students), culture (cultural exchange, cultural activities), and people (both high-profile



leaders and general population behavior) (Anholt, 2007). The leading role in creating a competitive identity should be devoted to the Government, which should have a clear and positive understanding of the place and manage and coordinate the actions, policies, and communications of all six components (Ibid.). Many studies are also devoted to stakeholders' involvement in the place brand creation process. The involvement of stakeholders is essential, as the interactive character of the modern governance process makes governments dependent on other actors in many policies implementation (Klijn, Eshuis, Braun, 2012). Hence, the inclusion of businesses, governmental organizations, infrastructure and transport providers, academic, religious organizations, and other relevant stakeholders is important for creating an effective place brand (Stubbs, Warnaby, 2015).

With the development of the place branding discipline, more attention became devoted to its consideration by political scientists. These studies focus on political issues of place branding, political stakeholders included, and sociological aspects of the research area (Vuignier, 2017). Many studies in this domain are related to using place branding of national units in international relations. As an American political scientist J. Nye wrote, the “soft power”, the ability to achieve your goal through attraction rather than coercion, is gaining momentum, and it should arise from the attractiveness of a country's culture, its political ideas, and its policies (Nye, 2004). So, nowadays, the art of politics has been shifting to image and reputation management, and place branding can be considered an effort to manage the soft power of a location (Van Ham, 2008). Following S. Anholt (2005), ministries of foreign affairs over the world must practice “public diplomacy”, which is defined as the presentation of government policy to other publics, including non-state actors (Anholt, 2006). Place branding, being a subset of public diplomacy (Ibid.), is aimed at creating, monitoring, and evaluating a nation's image to “enhance the country's reputation among the international audience” (Fan, 2010). Overall, at the international level, place branding helps increase a country's competitiveness and global political influence, restore international credibility and investor confidence, increase currency stability, and encourage closer international partnerships (Stock, 2009). The implementation of place branding is also essential internally, as it contributes to the nation-building (Ibid.), acts as a public indicator of political identity, and performs several critical political functions: an expression and satisfaction of social interests; integration of the territory based on the coordination of social interests, and business and society; socialization of the individual as a bearer of territory branding; creation of conditions for the competitiveness of territories; and ensuring the continuity and innovativeness of the development of places (Nagornyak, 2013).

Thus, the implementation of place branding is helpful from the point of view of political science. It helps to manage the political units (both on international, national, and local levels) and contributes to society consolidation, which results in efficient place development.

To sum up, we can observe that place branding is a process of creating an attractive image of a place at the local, national, and international levels aimed at attracting main stakeholders: investors, companies, tourists, and residents. The overall scheme of the place branding development was depicted comprehensively by G. Hankinson (2015), who connected the modern approaches to place branding (including city branding, destination branding, nation branding, retail center branding) with the three main initial research approaches: urban policy, tourism, and marketing (See **Figure 1**).

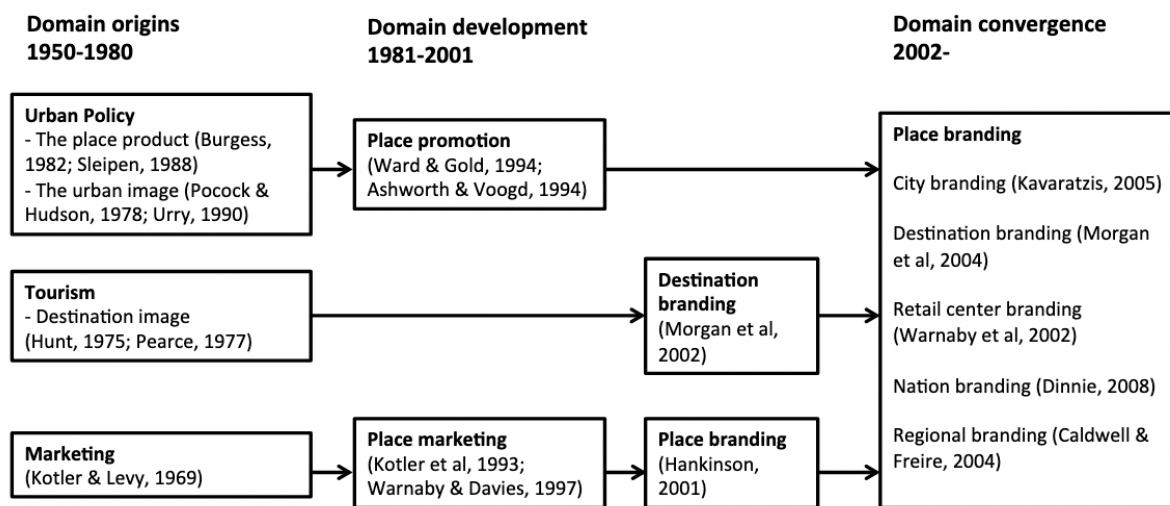


Figure 1. The development of place branding – timeline. Source: Hankinson, 2015, as cited in Andersson, 2015

Based on it, place branding can be stated as an “umbrella concept” that focuses on different scales of place branding of “different geographic connotations” rather than the set of conflicting perspectives (Andersson, 2015, p.29). Despite the variety of place branding functions followed by different interpretations of place branding, the main are the increasing place’s attractiveness and creation of its positive reputation, economic development, and consolidation of society, and its increased interaction with business and government. Considering this, the increased interest of practitioners and political authorities, especially at the local level, in a place branding becomes anticipated. According to S. Anholt, place branding is “potentially, a new paradigm for how places should be run in the future” (Anholt, 2005, p.119). Following the Eurocities Questionnaire conducted for 12 European countries, the average per capita budget allocated

for city branding was €400,000 per city (Lucarelli, Berg, 2011). Over time, the amounts spent on these activities rise. However, according to the CityMetric, 86% of city branding campaigns fail (North, 2014, as cited in Ločmele, Mousten, 2016). Considering that taxpayers mainly fund these campaigns, such a failure rate raises issues that should be addressed.

## **2.2. Place branding: the identity-based approach**

Though place branding is studied by specialists from a wide variety of fields, in its essence, place branding is based on the place character – its features, both physical (climate, rivers, mountains) and human (culture, inhabitants' interactions), that make the place unique and allow it to be differentiated. The central concepts on which the place branding is based, the concepts of space and place, are the cores of geographical studies. A rising number of studies on place branding is performed by human geographers, studying “how people make places, ... organize space and society, ... interact with each other in places and across space, and ... make sense of others and ourselves in localities, regions, and the world” (Fouberg, Murphy, et.al, 2010). As defined in human geography, space is “a product of interrelations” that is always under construction and thus can never be finished or closed (Massey, 2005, p. 9). Hence, space cannot be defined solely by the territorial domain. In its turn, the place is considered in the human geography as a unique entity, having history and meaning and incorporating the “experiences and aspirations of people” (Tuan, 1979, p.387). An interesting definition of the place was also provided by geographer E. Relph (1976, p. 29), who stated that places are sensed as “chiaroscuro of setting, landscape, ritual, routine, other people, personal experiences, care and concern for home, and in the context of other places”, rather than “independent, clearly defined entities that can be described simply in terms of their location and appearance”. Following D. Massey and P. Jess (Massey, Jess, 1995, as cited in Fouberg, Murphy, De Blij, 2010), while space can be considered as “social relations stretched out”, the place is a “particular articulation of those social relations as they have come together, over time, in that particular location”. These two concepts constitute what S. Anholt (2008) called a place substance or place identity. According to the author, the place substance consists of the innovations, structures, legislation, reforms, investments, institutions, and policies aimed at implementing the strategy, that is, understanding what the community is, where it is now and where it is going (Ibid., p. 4). The substance is created and shaped by the residents, local private and public actors, and civil society (Ibid.). The particular part of the substance are symbolic actions having communicating power: these are structures, legislation, innovations, reforms,

investments, institutions, or policies that are particularly “suggestive, remarkable, memorable, picturesque, newsworthy, topical, poetic, touching, surprising or dramatic” (Ibid., p. 3). These actions are a component of a community story and the means of telling it (Ibid.). S. Anholt defines these three elements (substance, strategy, and symbolic actions) as the cores of place branding that can provide an effective place branding implementation. Based on the above mentioned, we can consider place identity as a process of constructing “sameness” and “distinctiveness” of place based on the complex network of place elements and including all the place aspects. Such aspects, as stated by J. Agnew (Agnew, 1987, as cited in Warnaby, Medway, 2013), include “location” (the physical geographical settings), “locale” (the conditions under which the informal and institutional social relations are set up and developed), and “sense of place” (reinforcement of social-spatial dimension from inside, creating an identification between the individual and place). Taking into account that place branding is built on the unique characteristics of a place (such as location, climate, history of the place, its population and size, the well-being of the inhabitants, the cultural traditions of the local community, political environment, cultural codes of behavior of residents, significant events, significant personalities, etc.) (Vizgalov, 2011), it can be claimed that place branding acts as the display of place identity. Place brands, as was stated by J. Gnoth (2007, p.346, as cited in Mayes, 2008), “support and portray” the place culture via promoting values that “reflect the essence of the place” (Ibid., p. 355). Under these settings, place branding is considered a way of identity communication to the entire world.

However, some authors claim the impossibility of considering the relationship between place identity and place branding as a one-way relationship. Instead, while place identity influences and directs place branding, at the same time, place branding reinforces the identity of the place (Kavaratzis, Hatch, 2013; Warnaby, Medway, 2013) via "the association of the place with stories about it" (Warnaby, Medway, 2013, p. 346). As a result, these stories assist in constructing the identification with place and the attachment to it among both external and internal audiences, and, consequently, "some form of place competitive advantage is achieved" (Ibid.). For M. Kavaratzis and M. Hatch (2013, p. 82), effective place branding "expresses the place's culture, leaves impressions on others, mirrors these impressions on the identity, and reflects the changes evoked back into the place culture". Supplementing the geographical concept of identity with the idea of organizational identity developed by M. Hatch and M. Schultz (2002), the authors suggest the effective place branding model, or identity-based place branding model (Kavaratzis, Hatch, 2013). Based on this model, place identity is understood

as the complex process of interaction between place culture (internally informed aspect of identity) and place image (externally disclosed aspect of identity), implicating the interplay between four subprocesses (expressing, impressing, mirroring, reflecting) that happen simultaneously (Ibid.). Thus, place identity should be considered as the continuous interplay between the internal and external components rather than the utterly internal process that implies the dynamics of place identity. In turn, place branding plays a vital role in all the aspects of identity formation. It should be considered as a set of processes that facilitate the entire process of identity formation (See **Figure 2**). As claimed by the authors, the effective place branding model simultaneously performs four functions. First, place branding should be an instrument for locals to *express* the cultural features that are a part of the place's identity (Ibid.). According to M. Kavaratzis, the place branding components that are especially relevant for this function are "local communities", "internal culture", "opportunities", and "communications" (Ibid, p. 80). The "local communities" component of place branding means the involvement of internal stakeholders (citizens, businesses, organizations) and prioritizing local needs (Kavaratzis, 2009). The "internal culture" component consists of "spreading a brand orientation through city management and marketing itself" (Ibid., p. 34). "Opportunities" part of place branding implies the provision of the opportunities signifying the potential of a place for "targeted individuals" (urban lifestyle, provision of good services, education, etc.) and companies (Ibid.). The "communications" component of place branding includes "fine-tuning all intentionally communicated messages" (Ibid.). The second function of the effective place branding model is *impressing* others. While in most studies on place branding, this function is considered the main one, in the model presented by the authors, it is only a part of the effective

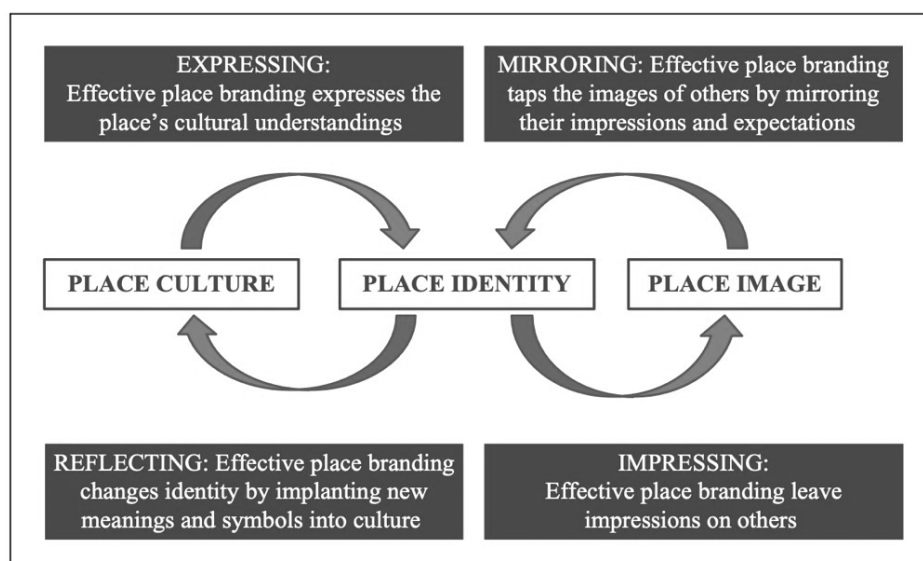


Figure 2. Model of effective (identity-based) place branding. Source: Kavaratzis, Hatch, 2013

place branding process. Following M. Kavaratzis, the important elements of place branding for this function are "cityscapes and gateways", "Opportunities", and "Communications" (Kavaratzis, Hatch, 2013). While the content of "communications" and "opportunities" components was explained above, the "Cityscape and gateways" component refers to the "ability of the built environment to represent itself and reinforce or damage the city's brand" (Kavaratzis, 2009). The third function of effective place branding is *mirroring* the external images to bring them back into the identity construction process. Place branding should "pick up changes in external views and work them into the other parts of the branding process" (Kavaratzis, Hatch, 2013, p. 81). The fourth function of effective place branding is *reflecting*. As claimed by the authors, the changes in external images of identity will be reflected in the conversation about place identity, which will result in new cultural understandings (Ibid). These four functions, performed contemporaneously, construct effective place branding.

Such an understanding of place branding entails some crucial conclusions. First, it redefines the role of stakeholders in place branding construction. According to the model, place branding stems from the place identity, and this identity is constructed through a continuous dialogue between the stakeholders (Ibid.). Hence, the stakeholders (residents, private and public actors) should be the core of place branding construction. At the same time, the political authorities should act as a mediator, initiating and stimulating the process of place brand creation (Ibid.). The inclusion of the stakeholders may be performed in the form of surveys of their needs and wants, consultations, or structural participation via a resident organization or other representative body (Eshuis, Klijn, Braun, 2014). Second, it opens the discussion about shifting the focus of place branding internally toward citizens. While most studies on place branding mainly focus on attracting investment and tourist development (Kavaratzis, 2012), relegating residents to the background of place brand development, the approach suggested by the authors stresses the importance of putting internal stakeholders (citizens) and their "sense of place" at the first place, as they define and redefine the place identity. Thus, the improvement of the internal environment of the place, improved infrastructure, and provision of services should be an important part of the place branding process. Third, the model shows the dynamics of the place branding concept. It suggests considering the vision of a place as a variable that should be permanently revisited and redefined rather than constantly guiding the whole process of place branding (Kavaratzis, Hatch, 2013). Therefore, effective place branding should be dynamic and should address the changes in the identity and external environment in which it exists.

The model presented by the authors portrays the complexity of the place identity concept and allows us to trace the mutual relationship between the place identity and place branding. Such an approach, depicting place branding not only as a way of communicating identity but also as an instrument of its shifting, admits avoiding considering place branding as the promotion of the place via communication tools (logo, slogans, media, etc.) that is often viewed as one of the most common mistakes in place branding process (Anholt, 2010; Govers, 2013; Kavartzis, 2012). Instead, such an approach considers the complexity and multidimensionality of place branding. This thesis uses the approach to the place branding suggested by M. Kavartzis and M. Hatch (2013) as a theoretical framework. So, we can refer to place branding as a long-term strategic process of creating and communicating a place's competitive identity to attract the main stakeholders: tourists, companies, investors, and residents. It is done by creating a reasonable place brand essence based on the unique and existing attributes of a place by including the main stakeholders and its further communication via primary communication (place offerings, government agencies, and residents), secondary communication (formal communication using advertising, public relations, graphic design, use of logos and slogans), and tertiary communication (“word-of-mouth” communication reinforced by media and city users) (Kavartzis, 2004, 2008, as cited in Braun, Eshuis, Klijn, 2014). Also, while the terms “place marketing” and “place branding” are often used interchangeably, in the thesis, “place branding” is used to refer to the process of creating and communicating competitive identity and building a multi-component place reputation aimed at both internal and external place development

To sum up, for place branding to be effective, the following core components should be met. First, place branding should be two-tailed, i.e., be directed both externally and internally. The improved provision of services, infrastructure, and focus on locals' needs are part of identity construction and, thus, should be depicted in the place branding process. At the same time, providing an attractive image of a place externally is also essential. Second, place branding should include the internal stakeholders (citizens, local businesses, organizations) in all parts of place brand creation. The local government should act as an initiator, mediating place branding processes and facilitating place brand implementation. Third, place branding should be dynamic and address the changes in the place's identity and external environment. Having established a theoretical framework and understood the main parts that must be present for branding to be effective in theory, let us consider how these factors perform in constructing place brands of European cities in practice.

### 2.3. Place branding of European cities: empirical evidence

Whilst in the beginning of studying place branding the focus was mostly on the nation branding, a new discourse on competitiveness has stimulated interest of researchers in regions and cities (Martin, 2006). A phenomenon of glocalization, when global flows get local meaning, and local identities receive wider attention (Govers, Go, 2016), has also contributed to shifting the focus towards cities. So, the cities have become full-fledged economic and political players and become engaged in the race to compete for resources. The process of European integration, transition to a knowledge-intensive society, and the growing importance of the life quality and location environment in European cities are forcing cities to offer even more inducements on capital, including the improving cities' economic attractiveness or improving their image (Kavaratzis, Ashworth, 2006). Place branding has become an effective tool for localities to fight for scarce resources and get wealth (Rainisto, 2010). Nowadays, Europe is considered the region most actively using place branding practices (TBPO, 2017). Similar to product or service branding, the city branding is aimed at creating preferences and building loyalty to the city among the various segments it serves, such as business owners, investors, non-profit organizations, residents, students, communities of interest, tourists and visitors, etc. (Dinnie, 2011).

Most existing empirical research on place branding is focused on the studying place branding practices of megacities, large cities, and capitals (Andersson, 2014), while the place branding practices of medium-sized cities are understudied (Anderson, 2014; Lazzeroni, Bellini, et al., 2013; VanHoose, Hoekstra, 2021). Also, most studies on city branding focus on single case studies (Vuignier, 2017; Hanna, Rowley, Keegan, 2021), that does not allow to make generalizations. The well-known and recognized examples of such city brands are “**I Amsterdam**”, “**OnlyLyon**”, “**COPENhagen**”, “**Be Berlin**”, etc. In 2010, the interest in city branding was raised internationally. So, the Eurocities, the network of more than 200 European cities in 38 countries aimed at improving life quality in European cities (Eurocities, 2022) has established a working group on Brand Management and Attractiveness of European cities (Eurocities, 2010). “Eurocities” network is aimed at sharing the international expertise, representing the “urban voice” in the EU high-level, provision of the access to funding, and delivering support on wide range of issues (Ibid.). Since then, some city branding projects started to be funded by the EU, and more medium-sized cities (such as Bergen, Bonn, Genoa, Rennes, Tampere, Ghent, to name just a few) became involved in the process. However, many



cities still struggle to apply place branding. As E. Braun (2012) mentions, with reference to some experts, there is still confusion about the place branding concepts, their application, anticipated effects, and political and organizational responsibility exists. Following J. Heeley (2011, as cited in Berrada, 2018), the application of city branding practices has met with only limited success. Thus, there is a need to bridge the gap between theory and practice, understanding why some city brands become successful while others do not.

One of such attempts to bridge the gap between theory and practice was made by S. Rainisto in 2003. Studying the place branding practices of Northern Europe and the USA (Helsinki, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Chicago), the author has outlined nine success factors of place branding (Rainisto, 2003). The first group of factors includes the cornerstones of successful place branding, such as the presence of a planning group responsible for the process of planning and executing the place branding process, developing a vision and strategic analysis to differentiate the brand, building place identity and place image, exploitation of the public-private partnership to stimulate place development, and the presence of talented leadership to implement the place brand effectively. The second group of factors contains the elements meeting the challenges in the network and in the macroenvironment in which the place branding practices are performed. These factors include the establishment of political unity regarding the public affairs, the presence of the global marketplace for a place to compete, enhancing local development to manage the place change and survive in the competition, and the presence of process coincidence (i.e., “a remarkable concurrence of events” that may influence the process of place branding). The presence and the interaction of all the factors, following the author, support the process of successful place branding (Ibid.). While the author provided a valuable framework for building a successful place branding, the study has limitations. First, the study focuses on the practices of the large cities that are a priori known that can enhance the process of place branding creation. Also, while the cornerstone elements can still be considered relevant, the modern place branding process can require more recent techniques, such as the inclusion of media in the process or considering new actors that may influence the process.

Another contribution to exploring the success factors of place branding, though focused on destination branding, was made by N. Morgan, A. Pritchard, and R. Pride. The authors claimed that although place branding is a unique process for every locality and there is a rising number of approaches, some common elements are crucial for place branding success (Morgan,

Pritchard, et al., 2004). Such factors, according to the authors, include the vital role of inclusive and comprehensive market research to identify the brand values, the need to build alliances and partnerships between the stakeholders, considering existing “brand champions” practices, and considering the politics, as it often plays a destructive role in place brand creation (Ibid.) Disregarding politics in place branding leads to failures, as it is essential in determining the environment in which the processes happen. The necessity of considering politics and decisive leadership was also highlighted by B. Baker, who wrote that if the leadership takes a passive role, the branding will “almost certainly fail” (Baker, 2007, as cited in Dinnie, 2009). Besides, the author mentions the need to engage all the key stakeholders as a critical success factor, especially for the smaller cities (Ibid.). According to B. Baker, the list of potential participants in place branding process in smaller cities is not limited and should include the executives, business sector, Chamber of Commerce members, community leaders, governmental and local media, developers and investors, opinion, political and religious leaders, sports and tourism representatives, and volunteers (Ibid.). These findings are consistent with the model suggested by M. Kavaratzis and M. Hatch (2013).

However, the evidence by T. Moilanen based on the study of ten challenging city branding practices of European cities (Athens, Berlin, Copenhagen, Dublin, Geneva, Hamburg, Madrid, Munich, Stockholm, and Zürich) suggests that the inclusion of many stakeholders hinders place branding implementation (Moilanen, 2015). In his article, the author writes that nine out of ten cases of city branding practices under study had many stakeholders that complicated the communication due to the conflicting interests. (Ibid.). Another problem connected with the stakeholders found in eight out of ten cases is the stakeholders' limited understanding of place branding. Many public sector stakeholders in practice consider place branding as foreign, have a narrow view of branding (lying in the logo planning), or do not understand the process and purpose of the branding at all, which makes it challenging to convey all the relevant stakeholders their role in the city branding process (Ibid). This problem results in a different understanding of the place branding goals and potential means to achieve them. The problem of misunderstanding of place branding by actors involved in its creation was also noted by other authors. So, Anholt (2005, as cited in Cleave, Arku, Sadler, et.al., 2016) and Kavaratzis and Hatch (2005, as cited in Cleave, Arku, Sadler, et.al., 2016) criticize the place branding implementation by local officials, claiming that the funds are often misused, as local governments emphasize the slogans and logo developments rather than “substantive policies” (p. 1140). Eshuis and Edwards (2013, as cited in Cleave, Arku, Sadler, et.al., 2016) and

Greenberg (2008, as cited in Cleave, Arku, Sadler, et.al., 2016) also claim that place branding initiatives are used by local governments as a “decoy to prevent public from knowing what their governments are doing” (p. 1140). The third problem related to the stakeholders found in nine out of ten cases is difficulty obtaining sufficient internal support from public sector organizations, the private sector, and citizens, especially from the public sector and city hall. Another severe problem of place branding practices identified in nine out of ten cities is ensuring sufficient funding. Limited financing entails finding compromises, ruling out necessary action, and conducting little or no market research (Ibid.). Other problems associated with place branding practices in the cities under investigation were the slowness of the brand management process, poor organization of the place branding implementation procedure, insufficient skills in operational brand management, weak formulation of city brand strategy, and the absence of monitoring and poor situational awareness (Ibid.). The results of the study presented by E. Braun (2012) reinforce these findings. So, the factors that positively influence the place branding implementation in European cities include a shared view on the interpretation of city branding among the political leadership and other stakeholders; the inclusion of city branding into the long-term development strategy; clear political responsibility for city branding; adequate stakeholder management (including involvement of right stakeholders at different stages); place branding credibility; a combination of an umbrella branding with sub-brands oriented for particular city customers; utilizing co-branding with city's successful brands (companies, institutions, events, people); and keeping a balance between the focus for city brand and broader support in the city communities (Ibid.). Thus, one of the main factors that hinder effective place branding implementation is poor brand management by public sector in terms of financing, processes understanding, and stakeholders' involvement. Hence, as was stated by the model of Kavartzis and Hatch (2013), a strong motivated leadership, understanding the essence of place branding and its purpose, acting as a mediator between the stakeholders, is a key to place branding success. Also, including too many actors in place branding at the initial stage may hamper place branding implementation, so adequate stakeholder management is essential.

Despite the number of stakeholders should be reasonably limited, the inclusion of the citizens in the process of place brand development is a cornerstone. So, K. Dinnie highlighted the necessity of targeting brand at citizens as a crucial factor of success of a city branding, as the ultimate outcome of the place branding is the satisfaction of its residents, who act as brand holders and ambassadors (Dinnie, 2011). As noted by the author, economic, social, cultural,

and environmental performance of cities depends on their citizens, and maintaining a diverse, skilled, and satisfied citizenship is vital to a city, as their frustration can lead to the reduction in the place attractiveness. The low level of residents' satisfaction is negatively perceived by potential business migrants, who evaluate the well-being and satisfaction of residents in comparison with competing places, company executives, management, and their families in their decision to move and invest (Ibid.). Thus, the participation of citizens in place branding is necessary, as they act as a target audience of place branding, create the "content" of place brand via their characteristics, behavior, and reputation, act as place brand ambassadors, and provide a political legitimization of the place branding activities (Kavaratzis, Braun, Zenker, 2010). These studies reinforce the idea of necessity of targeting locals presented by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013). The necessity of bringing the citizens and the quality of life at the center of city's policies, including city branding, was also highlighted by X. Ginesta, J. Vela et. al (2020). A. Dastgerdi and G. De Luca (2019) wrote that in the process of city branding, special attention should be devoted to activities enhancing the city image in terms of human health, life quality, jobs creation, development of public spaces and environmental innovations. In turn, the study of G. Riecken and U. Yavas (2001), based on the survey of 10,000 residents of several regions, showed that the most important factors for choosing a place to live are crime (low crime incidence, reasonable property insurance, personal safety feeling, etc.), economy, health, infrastructure, education, and housing. Therefore, quality of life seems to be one of the most important factors in increasing place brand attractiveness and building a successful place brand.

As was stated in the model of effective place branding, presented above, the expressing of place image to external audience is an essential part of place branding process. There is an emerging field in the place branding literature devoted to the expression of place image by managing digital identity. Internet development has changed the way cities can and should communicate and build their brands to the external audience (Florek, 2011). Now, cities are strongly encouraged to join the global digital arena to become a part of new connections that link them across national borders and drive the process of recentralization (Sassen, 2006, p.63, as cited in Paganoni, 2012). Managing digital identity is understood in the thesis as taking actions to increase the city's presence on the Internet, increasing the reputation formed within the online environment. Having an official web presence is considered an essential city branding tool, and cities are increasingly using social media in their branding efforts (Paganoni, as cited in Bjorner, 2013). It is especially crucial taking into account that the Internet is often considered

a first contact point for stakeholder audiences, especially those located abroad (Florek, Insch, et. al, 2006).

While at the early stages of the Internet, it was enough to replicate offline marketing efforts via creating static and “brochureware” websites (Bjorner, 2013, p. 207), nowadays, online brand management practices include other essential factors. So, according to S. Hays, S. Page et al. (2013), the critical steps for successful social media place marketing are attracting users, engaging users’ interest and participation, retaining users and building loyalty, learning about user preferences, and providing relevant information to users. Other authors, M. Florek, A. Insch et.al (2006), identifies three main tools for managing digital place brand identity: place brand design, place brand behavior, and place brand communication. Place brand design consists of the visual presentation of a brand (logo, coat of arms, flag, distinctive colors, etc.) aimed at increasing recognition and popularity. Place brand behavior is related to the decisions and actions that express the formulation of place products (e.g., events, activities, decisions, projects). Place communication is considered at two dimensions: the communication between a place and the external environment (e.g., foreign tourists, potential residents, foreign investors) and the communication within the internal environment (e.g., inhabitants, local entrepreneurs, local students) (Ibid.). Based on the study of sixteen New Zealand city council websites, the author notices that while the brand communication items are represented in practice most frequently, brand design and place brand behavior are most diverse. Generally, the possibility of the Internet providing the users with potentially unlimited sources of information about the place made the active monitoring and coordination of these sources paramount (Ibid.). Another vital function of managing digital identity and performing online branding is the possibility of including a vast number of stakeholders in place for brand creation. So, using the social networks for managing digital identity in Izmir has created synergies between various stakeholders, from residents and investors to the government and civil society, resulting in increased brand awareness and recall (Uzunoglu, 2017). The main instruments for managing digital identity are websites (passive and active transfer of information), blogosphere, social networks, placement of the image in the virtual reality (using platforms such as Second Life), and e-mail newsletters for relevant actors (Florek, 2011). Thus, while the necessity of managing digital identity for successful city brand development became a focus of studying recently, we can consider it as an essential factor that provides the inclusion of stakeholders, raises brand awareness both internally and externally, attracts users, and constructs place brand reputation, especially for foreign users.

With the growing concern regarding climate and sustainability, the cities need to include these issues into their plans. Nowadays, cities with environmental concerns that provide green initiatives (such as green spaces) have a competitive advantage in a global economy characterized by increasing corporate and workforce mobility (Braiterman, 2011). Also, as was highlighted by I. Andersson (2016), more and more cities include the sustainability agenda into their identities, as the establishing the identity of the greenest city can provide a competitive advantage both politically and economically. At the same time, a strong local identity encourages the growth of sustainable development models, as sustainable development tends to be based on the promotion of local characteristics (Miani, 2010). It happens because the sentimental attachment to the place motivates its preservation (Ibid.). Based on the model of M. Kavaratzis and M. Hatch (2013), place branding should mirror and reflect these changes, depicting them in place branding implementation. Thus, the place branding should include this component for place branding to be successful.

Both established and emerging cities can support low-cost but high-return initiatives such as greening the city, which increases place image, and thus stimulates job growth, reduces the cost of maintaining infrastructure and attracts domestic and foreign visitors (Ibid.). The local governments, supported by private stakeholders, should focus resources on improving air quality, reducing infrastructure costs, reducing waste, and accessing green spaces (Braiterman, 2011). Bringing the “green” component into city branding helps revive the brand and fill it with new meanings. So, the branding Copenhagen as the “green city” has opened new prospects in city branding besides the orientation on historical places (such as the statue of the Little Mermaid, castles, and churches), and now Copenhagen is considered “the Greenest European city” and is called **HOPE**nghagen (Ibid.). Including “green component” into city branding provides multidimensional benefits from the point of view of residents, tourists, visitors, business investors, talents, professionals, creative class, and government because it improves the life quality, increases city sustainability, enhances city competitiveness, and helps to avoid city decline (Chan, Marafa, 2014). The inclusion of sustainability and “greenness” rhetoric may increase the city's brand awareness through the inclusion in different rankings. Europe has several “green city” schemes and rankings, including the famous EU-granted “European Green Capital Award” that provides a vision of health and sustainability that adds value to residents and attracts new stakeholders (Gulsrud, Gooding, et al., 2013). Thus, taking into account the overall world shift towards sustainability and rise of green initiatives, effective place branding

should mirror and reflect these changes and add them into the place branding process. Besides, the inclusion of the rhetoric of “sustainability” and brand direction to the future may be a significant competitive advantage.

## **2.4. Success factors of place branding of European cities**

As was discussed in previous paragraphs, place branding is a multidimensional and multifunctional concept that has been studied from different perspectives. Globalization and its accompanying processes shape the place branding practices and shift accents from the branding of large geographical units to smaller ones. This thesis attempts to contribute to bridging the gap between theory and practice by considering the influence of several factors on the outcome of place branding implementation and understanding which combinations of factors result in the successful place branding implementation. Also, this study attempts to understand which factors are necessary and sufficient for successful place branding implementation. Based on the model of M. Kavaratzis and M. Hatch (2013) and empirical evidence, we can outline five main factors that may influence the successful place branding implementation. These factors are:

1. The active inclusion of local stakeholders in the process of place branding in the form of consultations with citizens and local companies and organizations, surveys of their needs and wants, or structural participation via representative bodies.
2. Putting citizens into the center of place branding process, making them one of the most significant beneficiaries of place branding. This may include the implementation of the policy programs aimed at the increasing life quality, such as safety, cultural, environmental, economic programs, provision of better services and improved infrastructure.
3. Adequate place brand management, provision of sufficient funding, and processes understanding. This range of issues, identified by T. Moilanen (2015) during the study of challenging city branding cases, was found in most cases. One of the ways to solve these issues stated in the thesis is the inclusion in the place branding process an external actor, who would provide support, and to exercise control to avoid money misusing. It is suggested to consider the “Eurocities” network as such an actor, as it addresses these

problems as part of their usual activity. So, “Eurocities” can solve these problems by providing an expertise regarding place branding of European cities based on the benchmarking, providing help with funding for the place branding projects, assisting in place branding implementation, and sharing experience.

4. Management of digital identity. While the identity management and communication are essential parts of effective place branding process, nowadays it is important to manage digital identity to provide communication between internal and external environment, and communication within the internal environment, as the use of technologies and Internet are integral parts of everyday life.
5. The inclusion of the rhetoric of “greenness” and “sustainability” into the city branding and direction the brand to the future. As the effective place branding should mirror and reflect the changes in external environment, the overall shift toward sustainability should be reflected in place branding process.

Based on the above mentioned, the following hypotheses were identified:

**H1:** The involvement of stakeholders (citizens, businesses, city organizations) into the city branding process is a necessary component for city branding success.

**H2:** The focus of the city branding strategy on citizens and life quality increase is necessary for successful city branding.

**H3:** The inclusion of the EU-level stakeholder presented by the “Eurocities” network is necessary for the success of city branding.

**H4:** Management of digital identity is a necessary component of the place brand success.

**H5:** The direction of the branding concept “to the future” in terms of using the rhetoric of “greenness” and “sustainability” is necessary for the successful branding of a city.



## Chapter 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Case selection

The study focuses on the place branding practices of medium-sized cities for two reasons. First, while the place branding domain is full of research devoted to the city branding practices of large cities and capitals, it lacks comprehensive research on place branding practices of medium-sized European cities. Second, due to the size, the number of agents in smaller cities is lower, allowing us to easily identify the linkages between the agents compared to the large cities and capitals (Andersson, 2015). Following the statistics, roughly 260 million Europeans live in the cities with population of more than 100,000 inhabitants, and 44 percent live in cities of less than 500,000 inhabitants (Giffinger, Fertner, et. al., 2007). Thus, on a European scale, the category of cities with the population 100,000-500,000 citizens can be considered as “medium-sized cities” (Ibid.). At the same size, the range of 100,000-500,000 can provide huge differences for place branding practices. Thus, to provide the comparability of cases, the study will use the range of 100,000-250,000 citizens to define a city as medium-sized.

Based on the academic and expert articles on studying local failed and challenging place brand practices and place brand rankings (such as “Brandmeyer Stadtmarken-Monitor”, Anholt-Ipsos City Brand Index, Bloom Consulting Portugal City Brand Ranking, Saffron City Brand Barometer), sixteen cases were chosen for study and analyzed for place branding success or failure based on the procedure described in detail in the next paragraph. The chosen successful cases include Eindhoven, Innsbruck, Groningen, Maastricht, Magdeburg, Braga, Prato, Kiel. The unsuccessful cases are Esbjerg, Aalborg, Odense, Limassol, Cottbus, Győr, Pescara, Heerlen. It should be noted that the study's number of cases is limited due to the absence of available information for unsuccessful place branding cases. When place branding is unsuccessful, the process is usually stopped, and the information about it becomes unavailable. Due to this reason, the study includes one city of the population of 93, 084 citizens (as of 2021) to provide the equal number of successful and unsuccessful cases under consideration. Thus, using the sixteen cases mentioned above, the influence of the above factors on the outcome of city branding of medium-sized European cities will be investigated.

### **3.2 Measuring the success of place branding of European cities**

As success is a fuzzy concept, it is necessary to operationalize it for further use in the study. There is no widely used approach for measuring the success of place branding. Following G. Soydanbay, the primary goal of a place brand is to survive (TBPO, 2020a). Being not a success criterion, without survival place branding project cannot achieve any of its objectives (Ibid.). According to S. Rainisto (2003, p. 54), the success of place branding is the “fulfillment of some explicit or implicit goal, evaluated with criteria set at a certain time”. Hence, success can be measured as a relationship between goals and results. As mentioned previously, the main aim of place branding is the provision of city development. Though some scholars note that it is usually hard to set up a cause-effect relationship while measuring place branding due to the presence of other factors (TBPO, 2020a), combined with experts’ opinions on place branding cases' success or failure, the analysis can provide us with a relevant understanding of the place branding outcome. Another important indicator of place branding success, as mentioned by the experts, is the acceptance of place branding by the main stakeholders (citizens, companies), and brand representation of the city in whole, and not some of its groups (Ibid).

Thus, in this study, the procedure of the place branding (un)success if performed in the following way. First, the survival of place branding during the 5 years is considered. If the place branding did not survive during this period, the place brand will be counted as unsuccessful. However, as the survival of the brand is not the indicator of its success per se, the survived city brands will be evaluated on the producing the city economic development. To define it, the city GDP growth rate will be calculated two years before the city branding implementation and two years after place branding implementation. The range of two years is chosen as it is mentioned by experts as enough time for place branding to start producing the results (TBPO, 2020b). This thesis assumes that the place branding stimulates the GDP growth rates that influences the city's development. Hence, if the growth rates have increased compared to the growth rates before the city branding campaign start, the criterion for success of place branding is met. The use of GDP indicator is due to the fact that it is highly correlated with the dynamics of investments, tourism, the number of companies, etc., the increase of which is one of the main aims of place branding implementation, and there is no raw data available for all the cities’ separate indicators.

As there is no city GDP data available for medium-sized cities, the indicator was calculated manually. For the computing city GDP, the widespread top-down approach was used, considering city level GDP “as a proportion of the national or sub-national GDP” (Kumar, 2019). GDP indicator used in the calculations was measured in the million purchasing power standards to avoid the influence of inflation. Thus, using the data on the GDP of NUTS-3 region, population of the NUTS-3 region and the population of a city, the city GDP was calculated based on the following formula:

$$GDP_{city} = \frac{POP_{city}}{POP_{region}} GDP_{region} ,$$

Where  $GDP_{city}$  – city GDP,  $POP_{city}$  – population of the city as of the year 2021,  $POP_{region}$  – the population of NUTS-3 region in which city is included, and  $GDP_{region}$  – the GDP of NUTS-3 region in which city is included.

For the computation of the growth rates, the calculations are performed in two stages. First, the city GDP growth rate will be calculated two years before the start of the place branding implementation. Second, the indicator’s growth rate will be calculated two years after the beginning of the place branding implementation. The city GDP growth rate is calculated using the following formula:

$$G_i^c = \frac{\Pi_{last} - \Pi_{first}}{\Pi_{first}},$$

where  $G_i^c$  – indicator’s growth rate,  $\Pi_{last}$  – value of the variable in the last year,  $\Pi_{first}$  – value of the variable in the first year.

Besides, to capture the acceptance of the place branding by the stakeholders (companies, citizens, government), such indicator as the usage of place branding is used. If the branding of the city is used (in terms of brand identity appearance in the media, the architecture, city signs, usage by local companies), place is considered as the one that is accepted by the stakeholders, thus, successful.

The calculations' results are presented in **Table 1**. According to the results of the calculations, it can be stated that Eindhoven, Innsbruck, Groningen, Maastricht, Magdeburg, Braga, Prato, Kiel can be considered as the successful city branding cases, while Esbjerg, Aalborg, Odense, Limassol, Cottbus, Gyor, Pescara, Heerlen failed. For further analysis, the Qualitative Comparative analysis (QCA) will be used.

*Table 1. Brand survival, city GDP growth rate and brand usage calculated for cases under consideration. Source: Author's calculations*

<b>City</b>	<b>Population (2021)</b>	<b>Starting year of city branding campaign</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Value before the start of city branding campaign</b>	<b>Value after the start of city branding campaign</b>
Eindhoven	235,923	2013	Brand survival	Yes	
			City GDP growth rate	-0.0002	0.0634
			Brand usage	Yes	
Innsbruck	131,059	2009	Brand survival	Yes	
			City GDP	-0.0302	0.0524
			Brand usage	Yes	
Groningen	235,287	2016	Brand survival	Yes	
			City GDP growth rate	-0.0512	0.0169
			Brand usage	Yes	
Maastricht	120,227	2014	Brand survival	Yes	
			City GDP growth rate	0.0248	0.0439
			Brand usage	Yes	
Magdeburg	228,910	2010	Brand survival	Yes	
			City GDP growth rate	-0.0034	0.0244
			Brand usage	Yes	
Braga	182,924	2016	Brand survival	Yes	
			City GDP growth rate	0.0335	0.0522
			Brand usage	Yes	
Prato	201,410	2016	Brand survival	Yes	
			City GDP growth rate	0.0367	0.0386
			Brand usage	Yes	
Kiel	246,794	2015	Brand survival	Yes	
			City GDP growth rate	-0.0001	0.0401
			Brand usage	Yes	
Esbjerg	115,000	2010	Brand survival	Yes	
			City GDP growth rate	0.0824	-0.0007
			Brand usage	No	
Aalborg	142,937	2005	Brand survival	No	
			City GDP growth rate	-	
			Brand usage	-	
Odense	172,512	2016	Brand survival	No	
			City GDP growth rate	-	

			Brand usage	-
Limassol	101,000	2011	Brand survival	No
			City GDP growth rate	-
			Brand usage	-
Cottbus	100,219	2009	Brand survival	No
			City GDP growth rate	-
			Brand usage	-
Gyor	128,902	2011	Brand survival	No
			City GDP growth rate	-
			Brand usage	-
Pescara	118,766	2017	Brand survival	No
			City GDP growth rate	-
			Brand usage	-
Heerlen	93,084	2015	Brand survival	No
			City GDP growth rate	-
			Brand usage	-

### 3.3 Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)

Studies on the methodologies used in place branding research domain show that the field is dominated by qualitative analysis (Gertner, 2011; Lucarelli, Berg, 2011; Chan, Marafa, 2013). According to the analysis conducted by C. Chan and L. Marafa, in roughly 60 percent of all studies on place branding, qualitative research methods are used, with the use of qualitative methods prevalent while studying cities and regions (Chan, Marafa, 2013). These methods include an in-depth interview, focus groups, content analysis, SWOT analysis, or site observations (Ibid.). Among the quantitative techniques used in this research domain, the usage of questionnaire surveys, correlation analysis, or regression analysis, used primarily for identifying significant causations between factors and their perception of place brands, is widespread (Ibid.). Despite the dominant usage, the qualitative method of studying place branding is often criticized for being subjective and interpretive (Gertner, 2011). Moreover, one of the main weaknesses of such qualitative studies based on the single or few case studies is their excessive descriptiveness and little explanatory power (Lucarelli, Berg, 2011). Several authors (see Lucarelli, Berg, 2011; Chan, Marafa, 2013; Andersson, 2014; Vuignier, 2016) wrote that place branding as a research domain lacks conceptual clarity and integrated research framework. Thus, there is a need to provide “higher comparative and integrative power” (Chan, Marafa, 2013, p. 245) for place branding research and implement a combination of different methods (Zenker, Braun, 2015). The issues mentioned above may be addressed using the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA).

This thesis aims to understand which factors influence the success of place branding implementation in medium-sized European cities. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) is a methodological approach developed by C. Ragin in 1987 that combines qualitative and quantitative methods and allows to generate findings that can be generalized to broader populations (Simister, Scholz, 2017). QCA helps explain why change happens in some cases but not others (Ibid.). Essentially, QCA is a set-based theory interpreting “relationships between the social phenomena in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions” (Mello, 2017, p.126). The QCA method is based on two main assumptions. First, it assumes the frequent insufficiency of some individual factor to produce a change. Hence, the change often results from a combination of factors (Ragin, 1984). Second, QCA assumes equifinality, meaning that different combinations of factors can produce the same outcome (Ibid.). Thus, the method captures the complexities of place branding.

In this thesis, the QCA analysis is used for the following reasons. First, the usage of this method is suitable for the intermediate number of cases (usually from ten to fifty cases) (Simister, Scholz, 2017). The use of other methods for sixteen cases selected for the study is irrelevant: the sample is too large for deep qualitative analysis but, at the same time, is too small to use the traditional quantitative methods (such as regression analysis). Second, QCA allows making generalizations taking into account within-case complexity. One of the main difficulties in studying place branding is the complexity of the place branding process and several factors that may influence place branding implementation (Messely, Dessen, Rogge, 2015; Ntounis, Kavaratzis, 2017). The set-theoretical approach used in the QCA that allows analyzing causal complexity (Ragin, 1984) addresses this issue but produces moderate generalization. Third, using the QCA allows considering the diversity and the heterogeneity of cases concerning their different causally significant conditions and contexts. Following B. Rihoux and C. Ragin (2008, p.21), though the cases chosen for the study should be comparable, “a maximum of heterogeneity over a number of cases should be achieved”. In this study, the size of the cities, their location within the European Union, and their attempts to create place brands are used as similarities, while the processes happen within cities, different approaches to place branding and different city branding outcomes provide heterogeneity. Fourth, the choice of the QCA for the study admits identifying necessary and sufficient conditions for place branding implementation that can provide deeper insights into place branding research.

Thus, the thesis will perform the QCA to understand why the outcome (the place branding success) happens in some cases but not in others. Based on the theory, the factors that influence will be analyzed are the involvement of stakeholders into the city branding creation, focus of the city branding strategies on the citizens and life quality increase, the inclusion of the “Eurocities” as the fourth EU-level stakeholder, management of digital identity, and the presence of the rhetoric of “greenness” and “sustainability”. To perform the QCA analysis, the procedure consisting of six stages suggested by B. Rihoux and C. Ragin (Ibid.) will be used.

1. Building a data table. Using the case knowledge and information gathered from primary (official websites, official documents) and secondary sources (media), the membership scores will be assigned to cases. In this study, the crisp crisp-set QCA will be used. Thus, the membership will be assigned to the cases in the following way: 1 – the case is in the set, 0 - the case is out of the set. The calibration rules for assigning membership to each factor under study are based on the literature review and are presented in **Table 2**.
2. Constructing a “truth table”. Transformation of the created data table into the binary table of configurations indicating which combinations of present and absent conditions lead to the outcome.
3. Resolving contradictory configurations. Resolution of the configurations having different outcomes based on the case knowledge. The resolution can be done by three ways: changing the calibration rules, removing the case from the study, or adding the additional condition.
4. Boolean minimization. The systematic comparison between the factors’ combinations with the Boolean algebra adoption. This step results in the creation of a “minimal formula” indicating which present and absent factors and their combinations lead to the outcome across cases.
5. Bringing the “Logical Remainders” cases. The inclusion of the non-observed configurations (logical remainders) into consideration to achieve greater parsimony.
6. Interpretation. The interpretation of the “minimal formula” in the context of cases chosen for study.

While the steps one, three and six will be done manually, the other steps will be performed using the fs/QCA 3.0 software, widely used for these purposes.

Some scholars criticize the QCA method for including a high degree of sensitivity to coding and ignorance of the relative strengths of independent variables (Liebersohn, 2004, as cited in Krook, 2010). However, others claim that these objections result from misunderstanding the core QCA features. First, the calibration of variables requires in-depth case knowledge, making the coding decisions unarbitrary (Ibid.) and providing internal validity (Thomann, Maggetti, 2020). Second, strong case orientation and the purposive selection of cases used in the QCA allows for modest generalization that ensures external validity (Ibid.). Sensitivity, in terms of giving equal weight to all combinations of causes leading to the outcome, is another advantage of the QCA (Rihoux, Ragin, 2008). Unlike statistical methods focusing on the mainstream findings supported by the majority of cases, QCA allows to consider all possible explanations of the phenomena (Ibid.), not considering whether they are frequent or not, and “employing all potential causes makes it less likely that QCA results will be misleading” (Amenta, Poulsen, 1994, p.26, as cited in Rihoux, Ragin, 2008). Besides, considering all cases, including the rarely observed ones, can provide interesting insights into the phenomena research and removes the researcher’s temptation to present only “convenient” cases (Rihoux, Ragin, 2008). In turn, the sensitivity in terms of getting different paths to the outcomes depending on cases’ inclusion or exclusion can be addressed by the homogeneity of cases’ background and the diversity of their conditions’ combinations and by using logical remainders that make “minimal formula” more stable (Ibid.).

To sum up, using the QCA is relevant for the study's aims and may provide interesting insights into the study of place branding of European cities. However, the main limitation of the QCA method should be mentioned here: using the QCA can provide only modest generalization, which does not produce highly robust results. Thus, despite the purposeful and accurate selection of cases to achieve the generalizable results, the study will deliver the first results on factors that may influence the success of place branding implementation in medium-sized European cities. Further research using other techniques is needed to analyze and check the study results on a broader number of cases. To make the research transparent, all the steps of the QCA will be depicted in the study, and all the intermediate and final results will be included in the analysis part.



Table 2. Calibration rules for assigning membership to the cases under study

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Rule</b>	<b>Membership scores</b>
The involvement of stakeholders in the process of city branding	Government involves stakeholders in the process of place branding	1
	Stakeholders are not involved in the process of place branding implementation, top-down approach to city branding is used	0
The focus on citizens and life quality increase	City government puts citizens into the center of place branding initiative and/or mentions them as one of the main place brand beneficiaries	1
	The government does not mention citizens in the place branding strategy and/or life quality increase agenda is not included into place branding agenda/mentioned as a secondary one	0
The inclusion of the “Eurocities” network as the EU-level stakeholder	The city is a member of the “Eurocities” network	1
	The city is not a member of the ‘Eurocities” network	0
Management of digital identity	Place branding initiative has its own website, or has an umbrella website, and include at least two elements: place brand design (logo, flag, distinctive colors), place brand behavior (public notices, projects, plans, policies, news, events calendar), and place brand communication (feedback tools, use of social networks, contact information, general information about city/city overview, information for targeted audiences)	1
	Place branding initiative does not have its own website but has a page at the official city website with one or no elements included, or is not explicitly mentioned at the city official website	0

The presence of the rhetoric of “greenness” and “sustainability	The place branding initiative makes an accent on “sustainability” and “greenness” and includes it into the part of place branding construction (e.g., “the greenest city” positioning) and/or place branding documents mention the city commitment to sustainable development as a part of overall place branding concept	1
	Place branding does not include the rhetoric of “greenness” and ‘sustainability”	0
City branding outcome	The place branding has survived, is used and provides development to a city The place branding did not survive	1 0

# Chapter 4. Success factors of place branding: a QCA analysis of European cities

## 4.1. Performing the QCA analysis

Much of the knowledge regarding the factors influencing the success of city branding comes from single case studies and expert evaluations. Based on the most common factors identified in the literature, the study attempts to provide a moderate generalization of factors influencing the outcome of place branding implementation. The eight successful and eight unsuccessful cases were chosen to understand the trends in the group of cases by analyzing the presence and absence of the five factors. The factors include the inclusion of the stakeholders into the place branding process (SI), the focus of the city branding on the citizens and life quality increase (LQI), and the inclusion of the EU-stakeholder represented by the “Eurocities” network (EUS), management of digital identity (DI), and the presence of the rhetoric of “greenness” and “sustainability” in the place branding positioning (SUS). The factors are expected to contribute to the analysis when they are present. Thus, the model looks in the following way:  $OUTC = f(SI, LQI, EUS, DI, SUS)$ . The raw data for all the cases under study is assembled in **Table 5**.

Based on the calibration rules for assigning membership to cases discussed in the previous Chapter (see **Table 2**), the dichotomized data table was created (see **Table 3**) for performing the QCA analysis. The data was next imported to the fsQCA 3.0 software (Ragin, Patros, et.al, 2017). Although the program is primarily used for the fuzzy-set QCA analysis, it is also possible for the crisp-set data (Ibid.).

Table 3. Dichotomized data table for cases under study. Source: Author’s calculations

CITY	SI	LQI	EUS	DI	SUS	OUTC
Eindhoven	1	1	1	1	1	1
Innsbruck	1	1	0	1	1	1
Groningen	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maastricht	1	1	0	1	1	1
Magdeburg	1	1	0	1	1	1
Braga	1	0	1	1	1	1
Prato	1	1	0	1	1	1

Kiel	1	1	1	1	1	1
Esbjerg	0	0	0	0	1	0
Aalborg	0	1	0	1	1	0
Odense	0	1	0	0	0	0
Limassol	1	0	0	0	0	0
Cottbus	0	1	0	1	1	0
Gyor	0	1	0	0	0	0
Pescara	0	0	0	0	0	0
Heerlen	0	1	0	0	1	0

After the data was imported, the truth table algorithm was performed in the fsQCA 3.0 software, showing all the possible configurations of the chosen factors. Besides, the truth table algorithm assesses the distribution of cases across these combinations and shows consistency, i.e., the proportion of cases that share the outcome (Ibid.) The threshold of frequency, classifying the configurations as relevant or irrelevant, was set as 1, as the number of cases under study is small. The threshold for differentiating between the configurations that are the subsets of outcome from those that are not set as 0.75 for crisp-set studies (Ibid.). Thus, the values below 0.75 are substantially inconsistent and will be given 0 in the outcome. After the general analysis, the threshold will be set at 0.8 to check the study for sensitivity and robustness. The resulting truth table is presented in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Truth table. Source: Author's calculation in fsQCA 3.0

SI	LQI	EUS	DI	SUS	number	OUTC	cases	raw consist.
1	1	0	1	1	4	1	Innsbruck, Maastricht, Magdeburg, Prato	1
1	1	1	1	1	3	1	Eindhoven, Groningen, Kiel	1
1	0	1	1	1	1	1	Braga	1
0	1	0	0	0	2	0	Odense, Gyor	0
0	1	0	1	1	2	0	Aalborg, Cottbus	0
0	0	0	0	0	1	0	Pescara	0
1	0	0	0	0	1	0	Limassol	0

0	0	0	0	1	1	0	Esbjerg	0
0	1	0	0	1	1	0	Heerlen	0

Once the truth table was done, the fsQCA ran the standard analysis and performed the Boolean minimization process. There were no contradictory configurations that appeared during the analysis. The research carried out shows the factors and the combinations of factors that are sufficient for the outcome to occur. The standard analysis results provide three solutions: complex, parsimonious, and intermediate. The complex solution provides the solution without logical remainders included. The parsimonious solution provides the explanation with the “difficult counterfactuals” included. The intermediate solution presents a mediation between the two, including some logical remainders and “easy counterfactuals”. While the complex and parsimonious solution will be included in the study for the sake of transparency (See **Appendix**), the entire analysis will follow the common QCA practice and focus on the analysis of the intermediate solution as it “strikes a balance between the parsimony and complexity, based on the substantive and theoretical knowledge of the investigator” (Ragin, 2008, p. 175).

Table 5. Raw data for cases under study

City	Stakeholder involvement	Citizens and life quality increase	“Eurocities” membership	Digital identity management	Sustainability and “greenness” rhetoric
Eindhoven	<p>The government initiated a place branding process and provided financial support and endorsement (TBPO, 2018).</p> <p>“The technology, design, and knowledge (TDK) pillars of the brand were democratically chosen by the people of Eindhoven and their representatives (city council). These three pillars are represented in public policy and city management decisions” (Ibid.)</p>	<p>“We outline in five lines what our contribution will be to Eindhoven as the most human innovative city in the next four years: 1 – activation of residents; 2 – sustainability of tourism; 3 – connecting talents; 4 – integration of newcomers; 5 – involvement of design professionals” (Eindhoven City Marketing, n.d.)</p> <p>The place branding strategy aims to raise the self-esteem of our inhabitants (TBPO, 2018)</p>	Yes	<p>The city branding initiative has its website “Eindhoven 365”. It provides the information regarding the city branding campaign and is linked with other websites: “ThisisEindhoven” – is aimed at an external audience. “Eindhoven.nl” – communication with residents. All the websites contain a common brand identity and similar design. The website has all three elements included.</p>	<p>Positioning of the city as one of the Netherlands’ greenest cities and highlighting that “greening will help us promote Eindhoven as an attractive alternative for a sustainable city trip” (Eindhoven City Marketing, n.d.)</p>
Innsbruck	<p>Place brand initiated by Government, Mayor as a place brand ambassador and one of the central place brand initiators (Innsbruck Brand, n.d.)</p> <p>"Convincing work has been done with potential</p>	<p>“As part of the creation of the brand process in Innsbruck, seven success models crystallized. They create the brand of Innsbruck, generating a positive response from citizens and guests and</p>	No	<p>An umbrella website “Innsbruck.at” leading users to the three websites: “Innsbruck.gv.at” – government website, containing official information regarding politics, housing,</p>	<p>Ecological excellence as one of the core Innsbruck’s success models (Innsbruck Brand, n.d.)</p>

	<p>partners. City authorities have been included at the political and administrative levels, from Innsbruck tourism, the Economic Chamber, non-profit organizations, human rights organizations, universities, technical schools, and cultural and sports organizations.</p> <p>Professional support in the creation process brand was provided by the consulting firm Institute of Brand Logic" (ibid.)</p>	<p>presenting the brand to success", "The Innsbruck brand aims to strengthen the identification of people, societies, companies, etc. with "their" city and to enhance Innsbruck as a destination in the long term". (Innsbruck brand, n.d.)</p>		<p>education, culture, business; "innsbruck.info" – tourism website, "innsbrucktermine.at" – website containing upcoming events. The website has all the three elements</p>	
Groningen	<p>The Government is initiated the place branding initiative and is involved in the city branding process</p> <p>"So that you, too, can tell the story of Groningen correctly, we provide a variety of toolkits from our campaigns and projects" (Groningen city, n.d.)</p>	<p>"As an entrepreneur, you can fully pioneer here with the transition issues of the future. You can change the world as a student and scientist with your talent here. Here you can recharge and reinvent yourself as a resident and visitor. A bustling city and the space of the surrounding countryside. It is our power of combination that makes us so strong. It makes</p>	Yes	<p>An umbrella website "Groningen.nl", providing information for new residents and businesses; This website is linked with other websites: "groningenlife.nl" – website for students containing the information about living in the city; "athomegroningen" – website for potential residents and newcomers helping with adaptation in Groningen;</p>	<p>Positioning as the "greenest city in the Netherlands" (Ansel, 2021)</p> <p>"Making green energy your profession" in Groningen (Groningen City, n.d.)</p>

		Groningen the perfect testing ground for the challenges of the 21st century: for a better life and a better world” (Groningen city, n.d.)		“visitgroningen.nl” – website for tourists; “citycentral.nl” – website for both foreigners and locals containing information about activities in Groningen. The website contains all the three elements	
Maastricht	Government is the driver of the place branding process, the mayor as the place brand ambassador (North, 2015)  “In addition to defining a clear strategy and engaging key stakeholders, successful city branding also requires the faith, commitment, and active participation of the city's residents. The people of this place should “live under the brand” (Ibid.)	“Maastricht. City of the good life. Entrepreneurs, organizations, and institutions. Small next to big. Old next to new. Together we ensure that life is cherished and celebrated. Maastricht Marketing is building on the (sustainable) positioning of Maastricht” (Maastricht Marketing, n.d.)	No	An umbrella website “Maastrichtmarketing.nl” – information about city branding campaign; linked with other websites: “Maastrichtportal.nl” – information for residents and foreigners about live in Maastricht and different services; “bezoekmaastricht.nl” – tourism portal; “makemaastricht.nl” – information for current and potential students. The website contains all the three elements	Maastricht positions itself as “the first city in Limburg to opt for ZES (Zero Emission Solutions)” (Maastricht Bereikbaar, n.d.), municipality is working on an attractive city center with clean air, lots of greenery and space (Ibid.)
Magdeburg	The Mayor, city-manager and the government as place branding initiators and ambassadors	“The "Ottostadt" is not only a synonym for Magdeburg's unique and exciting history. It also reflects an attitude towards life. With the new	No	An umbrella website “Magdeburg.de” linked with narrowed portals: “Bürger + stadt” – information for current and potential residents	“Awareness of sustainability in the economy, ecology and society has established in our city” (Made in Magdeburg, 2021);



	<p>(Ottostadt Magdeburg Marketing, n.d.)</p> <p>“You can also support this work as a member of our city marketing &lt;...&gt; Because everyone can help ensure that our city conveys its positive charms to the outside world - in conversations, in letters, on every occasion. Become an ambassador for Magdeburg and promote your hometown (Promagdeburg, n.d.)</p>	<p>campaign, Otto now also stands for a hands-on, innovative population in a lively city. Because the fact is: the people of Magdeburg have a special courage that has allowed the city to rise from total destruction twice” (Ottostadt Magdeburg Marketing, n.d.)</p>		<p>regarding the city and services it provides, “Magdeburg-tourist”- tourist information; “Wirtschaft-Arbeit” - economic and business information for current and potential businesses, “Wissenschaft-Bildung” – information about science and education in Magdeburg; “Kultur-sport” – information about sport and culture activities in the city. The website contains all the three elements</p>	<p>“We are now setting the course for the future. But we are already benefiting from sustainable development practices today - when the air is cleaner, nature is untouched, and our Ottostadt becomes even more livable” (Ibid.).</p>
Braga	<p>City Mayor as the place brand initiator and ambassador, government leads the city branding strategy.</p> <p>“The strategy developed by Bloom Consulting for the city brand of Braga consists of several stages: studying internal and external perceptions from local stakeholders and international standards,</p>	<p>“Braga’s Municipality and Braga’s Commercial Association worked together with Bloom Consulting to create a City Brand strategy that combines the two facets that represent its identity, and that will make Braga a new tourist destination: a historical past and an innovative future” (Bloom Consulting, n.d.)</p>	Yes	<p>An umbrella city website, divide on four portals: “City Council” – Information about the city, laws and documents; “Living” – the information for residents regarding the services, “Visit” – tourism portal; Investing – information for potential investors, and new businesses; “Communication” - information for locals and</p>	<p>“The vast natural and environmental heritage of the Municipality is a source of pride for all Braga's citizens” (Braga City Council n.d.).</p> <p>“The municipality is committed to raising the environmental awareness of the population, especially children and young people, who are</p>

	assessing the actual status of the city brand, organizing workshops to determine the global positioning, and finally implementing an action plan with the team municipality, which includes two programs and 15 projects” (Bloom Consulting Journal, n.d.)			foreigners regarding the live and events in Braga. The website contains all the three elements.	able to change behavior and habits” (Ibid.).  “Natural landscapes, Cavado and East riverbanks, gardens and green spaces of Braga are increasingly becoming a hallmark of the city and municipality” (Ibid.).
Prato	The Government as the place brand initiator and ambassador  “In order to bring out the image of the city and, above all, its potential, we want to attract simply and directly those who know it, live, visit it, those who always know it, and those who spend only short periods there. Because who better than you can tell us what makes the meadow special and what you dream about for your city?” (Prato Sifa Brand, n.d.)	“It is important to create a specific identity of Prato, which is perceived by tourists, investors, visitors and in which the citizens recognize themselves” (TVPrato, 2016)  “If Prato attracts visitors, tourists and investors, the benefits will be there for everyone: for businesses, for traders, for citizens” (Ibid.).	No	An umbrella website “cittadiprato.it” containing several portals: “Pratoturismo” – tourism portal, “Portale Giovanni” – information for youth regarding study, work opportunities, activities in Prato; “local services” – information regarding services provision for locals and foreigners; “Pratomigranti” – information for migrants; “Pratomusei” -information regarding cultural activities in Prato. The website contains all the three elements.	Positioning of the city as “one of the greenest cities in Tuscany” (Prato City, n.d.)  “Prato is also one of the first cities in Italy to take steps to improve road traffic and air quality’ (Ibid.).
Kiel	Government as the city branding initiator and	“Kiel should be perceived as a strong international		An umbrella website “Kiel.de”, having several	“Green Kiel, mobile Kiel, climate-neutral Kiel - the

	<p>ambassador. The city branding is managed by the company “Kiel Marketing”</p> <p>“Are you part of this city? Are you doing business here? Do you like the quality of life in Kiel? Do you want the keel to keep sailing forward? There is no better platform than keel marketing to help with this!” (Kiel Marketing, n.d.)</p>	<p>brand in the north and the image of the business location should be strengthened. With its umbrella brand Kiel.Sailing.City, the state capital stands for dynamism and balance by the sea. The aim is to expand the Kiel.Sailing.City brand for all of Kiel's position areas defined in the branding process (quality of life, education and opportunities, north and new work culture)” (Kiel Sailing City, n.d.)</p>	Yes	<p>portals: “Kiel and future” – information about city branding and city projects; “Society and health” – the information about social services provision both for locals and foreigners; “Culture and sport” – information regarding city activities for tourists and residents; “Environment and Traffic” – information regarding Kiel’s way to sustainability; “Education and Science” – information about education for residents and foreigners; “Politics and Administration” – information about laws, documents and official news of Kiel city; “Economy and Work” – information about Kiel economics and businesses both for residents and foreigners. The website has all the three elements.</p>	<p>city is working to ensure that these goals work well together” (Kiel Sailing City, n.d.-b);</p> <p>“Quality of life, climate protection, relieving roads, improving air quality and more space for city dwellers - a new public transport system in Kiel is making a significant contribution to this” (Ibid.).</p>
Aalborg	<p>The city branding process was initiated and implemented by the three stakeholders: “Branding</p>	<p>“Aalborg is first and foremost us who live here. The way each of us thinks and acts in everyday life.</p>		<p>City branding initiative does not contain own website but contains a page at the city official website.</p>	<p>“Aalborg is on the way to sustainable supply. For energy, water/wastewater and waste, the</p>

	<p>Aalborg” Secretariat (placed under the Mayor’s Office), Tourism Board “VisitAalborg”, and “Invest in Denmark” organization, top-down approach was implemented (Therkelsen, Halkier, et. al., 2010)</p>	<p>Our view of each other and of the world around us. Our dreams. Our habits. And attitude towards life. And Aalborg is the given physical framework. The city's diverse space - after all, Aalborg extends beyond just the city limits and in a few years Hals, Nibe and Sejlflod will also count - and the opportunities for development that these give us” (Aalborg Commune, 2005a)</p> <p>“Aalborg will be a counterpoint to the traditional big city. Bigger in heart, smaller in scope – and with higher to the sky. We want to cultivate contrasts and create space for diversity. Grab the world. And through knowledge, cooperation, and action, secure the framework for a life in development” (Aalborg Commune, 2005b.)</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>The website lacks brand design component. The website has three portals: “visiting” – Tourism portal; “living” – information about living in Aalborg and services provision both for locals and migrants; “Business” – information about Aalborg economics and businesses for both residents and foreigners. The website contains 2 elements</p>	<p>municipality has come a long way in relation to international and national goals. This is shown in the report of communal services on the development of the municipality of Aalborg, approximately from 1990 to today”. (Aalborg city, 2005)</p>
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Esbjerg	<p>The place branding development and construction was shifted by the government to the Business Council. The city council oversaw the place branding process and its initiatives, business council was responsible for external communication, and Esbjerg municipality oversaw internal communications (Dragin-Jensen, Lenholdt, 2021)</p> <p>Residents were not included into the process of place brand creation and “lacked initiatives from which to contribute to the brand after its launch” (Ibid.)</p>	<p>“Under the joint name, EnergiMetropol – Esbjerg &lt;...&gt; intends to expand its unique, national position within energy and energy technology. The offensive will take place both internationally towards potential customers in the energy sector and nationally towards businesses and decision-makers, and the marketing process will take place in close cooperation with the city's companies, knowledge institutions and universities” (Esbjerg Commune, n.d.)</p>	No	<p>Place branding initiative does not have own website but contains a page at the website of the official city website (esbjergcomune.dk). The website lacks common brand design. The city brand page consists of information aimed at two stakeholders: potential investors and businesses, and potential workers only. The website contains only one component</p>	<p>“By investing billions of dollars in roads, railways, businesses, education and research, Esbjerg Municipality will capitalize on the huge growth opportunities in marine energy and bioenergy systems”. (Esbjerg Commune, n.d.)</p>
Odense	<p>City branding was initiated by government and managed by the public administration held company “Odense&amp;Co” (Fisk, 2016).</p>	<p>"Making Odense a great place to live, think and work, bringing together people with the best ideas, and new inspirations from across the world” (Fisk, 2016)</p>	No	<p>Place branding initiative did not have own website and did not have explicitly expressed information about it at the official city website.</p>	<p>No rhetoric of “greenness” and sustainability included into the place branding agenda</p>

	No other stakeholders actively involved into the place branding process	<p>“Odense City is all about creating a support infrastructure, which ranges from the very best resources in areas such as new technologies (robots, drones, and artificial intelligence), through to leading edge education in aspects such as design thinking, business models and more in a virtual business school” (Ibid.).</p> <p>“New strategy for growth – to attract the world’s best companies to Odense, and to help them and existing businesses to grow” (Ibid).</p>			
Limassol	The place campaign initiative was initiated by the Limassol business leaders and supported by the Limassol Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Board. The city branding project was managed by the member of the global strategic brand consulting firm Peter Economides (Economides, 2011).	“Establishing Limassol as one of the top destination cities in the Mediterranean (internal and external tourism, conventions, businesses, financial investment” (Economides, 2011)	No	The project had its own website. The website lacked any information about internal and external communication, and place brand behavior elements. The website contains only one element	No rhetoric of “greenness” and sustainability included into the place branding agenda

	<p>“The Limassol branding project is unique. For the first time, an entire city is invited to participate, via Facebook and Twitter, and in a unique interactive forum. Everyone can share their point of view, contribute and shape the future of Limassol” (Ibid.)</p>				
Cottbus	<p>Place brand was initiated by the city government and managed by the “Association of Urban Marketing and Tourism of Cottbus” the leader of which was the city Mayor (Cottbus StadtMarketing, n.d.).</p> <p>The top-down approach was implemented, no stakeholders being actively involved</p>	<p>Cottbus city marketing “represents a holistic city marketing approach and is involved in all areas from leisure and cultural activities to economic development and support for tourist activities” (Cottbus StadtMarketing, n.d.)</p>	No	<p>The city branding campaign had its own website that lacked brand design. The website contained tabs “Intern” registration to the website portal, “home page” – information about news and upcoming events, “My Cottbus” – information regarding city sites, “Press” – information about Cottbus in media sources, “Association” – information about the company implementing city branding. The website contained 2 elements.</p>	<p>The city positioned itself as one “improving efficiency through the integration of renewable energy sources” (City of Cottbus, n.d.)</p>
Gyor	<p>City branding was initiated by the Gyor municipality</p>	<p>“Health. Culture. Innovation. The</p>		<p>Place branding initiative did not have own website</p>	<p>No rhetoric of “greenness” and sustainability included</p>

	and was managed by it, top-down approach is used (Kardos, Rechnitzer, n.d.)	future is being built in Győr” (Kardos, Rechnitzer, n.d.)	No	and did not have explicitly expressed information about it at the official city website	into the place branding agenda
Pescara	Place branding was initiated by the government together with a Tourism and Major Events Advisor, advertising agency “Ecomood”, graphic designer, and the presidents of the Board of the Commission for Commerce, Tourism and Territory Management, top-down approach is used (Spinelli, 2017, AbruzzoNews, 2017)	<p>“There is a reality of the Middle Adriatic in which “urban emotions are experienced: for infrastructural accessibility, for the environmental context, for the events it feeds” (Grandoni, 2017)</p> <p>“The brand will be used for advertising campaigns and promotional activities designed to increase the tourist recognition of the city and its territory.” (Ibid)</p>	No	Place branding initiative had its own website lacking brand design and aimed mostly to foreigners (tourists). Despite the city branding initiative was aimed at both internal and external audience (Abruzzo News, 2017), the website contained mostly information for tourists regarding the events happening in the city. The website had one element	No rhetoric of “greenness” and sustainability included into the place branding agenda
Heerlen	Place branding campaign was initiated and managed by the city Government, top-down approach implemented (VanHoose, Hoekstra, et.al, 2021)	“We are faced with the challenge to open the center of Heerlen to be further developed as the center of Parkstad Limburg, in a more compact form given the outlined developments. The city center of Heerlen as an urban living room,	No	Place branding initiative did not have own website and did not have explicitly expressed information about it at the official city website.	“The threat of climate change obliges everyone to contribute to a more sustainable world with every physical intervention” (Heerlen Municipality, 2017), the vision of Heerlen city includes such elements as the focus on



		<p>economic engine, cultural focal point and entrance gate of Parkstad with all its amenities. This can only be done successfully by formulating from a development perspective based on the existing qualities, by forging alliances with the government partners in order to become stronger together and by forging alliances with entrepreneurs, residents and the owners and developers of the real estate in the city, so that new perspectives arise for them too” (Heerlen Municipality, 2017)</p>			<p>economy/employment, sustainability, creativity, accessibility, stability, futureproofing, and complementarity with respect to other cities (Ibid.).</p>
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## 4.2. Results and interpretation

The intermediate solution performed in the fsQCA 3.0 software is presented in **Table 6**.

*Table 6. Intermediate solution for the model. Source: Author's calculations in fsQCA 3.0.*

frequency cutoff:	1		
consistency cutoff:	1		
Assumptions:			
SI (present)			
LQI (present)			
EUS (present)			
DI (present)			
SUS (present)			
	raw coverage	unique coverage	consistency
SI*LQI*DI*SUS	0.875	0.5	1
SI*EUS*DI*SUS	0.5	0.125	1
solution coverage:	1		
solution consistency:	1		

The intermediate solution of the conducted QCA analysis reveals the two pathways of achieving success of city branding initiative not excluding each other. First, the combination of the stakeholder involvement, focusing of place branding on citizens and life quality increase, management of digital identity, and the usage of the rhetoric of sustainability and “greenness” in place branding are sufficient to produce successful city branding. The raw coverage of the solution term is equal to 0.875, meaning that the solution term explains 87.5% of cases. The unique coverage of the solution term is 0.5, which means that 50% of cases are explained solely by this solution term. The consistency, displaying the degree of membership of the solution term in the outcome subset, is equal to 1. The cases that fall under this solution term and have a membership greater than 0.5 in the solution term are Innsbruck, Groningen, Maastricht, Magdeburg, Prato, and Kiel. The second solution term suggests that the combination of stakeholder involvement, the inclusion of the EU as the fourth stakeholder (represented by the “Eurocities” network), management of digital identity, and the inclusion of the rhetoric of sustainability and “greenness” into the place branding process results in the success of city branding initiative. The raw coverage for this solution is 0.5, signifying that this solution term covers 50% of cases. The unique coverage equals 0.125, indicating that this solution term solely explains 12.5% of cases. Groningen, Braga, and Kiel are the cases that fall under this term and have a membership greater than 0.5. The solution term’s consistency is equal to 1. The overall

solution, consisting of the two solution terms, has a consistency of 1, which makes the data description by two solution terms valid.

The analysis of the necessary conditions was performed as the next step of the analysis. The results are in **Table 7**. The condition is considered necessary if its consistency equals or exceeds 0.9 (Schneider, 2018). Following the analysis, the factors essential for city branding success are stakeholders’ involvement, management of digital identity, and the inclusion of the rhetoric of “greenness” and sustainability into the place branding concept.

*Table 7. The results of the necessity conditions analysis. Source: Author's calculations in fsQCA 3.0*

Outcome variable: OUTC		
Conditions tested:		
	Consistency	Coverage
SI	1.000000	0.888889
LQI	0.875000	0.583333
EUS	0.500000	1.000000
DI	1.000000	0.800000
SUS	1.000000	0.666667

To check the results on the sensitivity and robustness, the design of the analysis was slightly changed. If the threshold for the differentiation between the configurations being subsets of outcome and those being not subsets of the outcome is raised from the usual for crisp sets value 0.75 to 0.8, the results of the model remain the same.

Some findings can be drawn from the performed analysis. First, place branding is a highly complex process requiring several components to be included. No single component might be sufficient to create a successful city branding. Even the elements that proved to be crucial during the single case studies, such as the stakeholders’ involvement, cannot provide the success of place branding without accompanying components. So, four elements needed to be included for the cases under investigation to deliver a successful city brand. The first solution term suggests that stakeholder involvement, putting citizens and life quality increase into the center of the place branding, digital identity management, and the inclusion of the sustainability and “greenness” agenda provides successful city branding.

According to the second solution term, the combination of the stakeholders' involvement, the membership of the city in the "Eurocities" network, the digital identity management, and the usage of the sustainability and "greenness" rhetoric can be sufficient to provide a successful city branding. Though both solution terms are acceptable in statistical terms, the first solution is statistically more significant for explaining the cases. Thus, it seems that putting citizens and life quality into the center of place branding concept is more significant than participation in the "Eurocities" network as regards the production of the city branding success. However, we cannot discount the impact of cities' participation in the "Eurocities" network, as it provides the explanation for some cases under study. Further research on the influence of this factor on city branding outcomes is needed. For now, the third hypothesis (**H3**) cannot be accepted based on the cases under study.

Concerning the focus of the place branding concept on citizens and life quality increase, this factor seems to contribute to the success of the city branding process, but only with the presence of the other three necessary components. These components are stakeholders' involvement, digital identify management, and the usage of the agenda of sustainability and "greenness" in place branding concept. On its own, the factor is neither sufficient nor necessary to produce the results. However, the consistency of the factor is 0.875, while the threshold for considering the factor as the necessary one is consistency equal to 0.9. Thus, the second hypothesis (**H2**) regarding the focus of the place branding concept on citizens and life quality increase cannot be accepted based on the conducted analysis but can be investigated further with the increased number of cases.

Three factors of the model are the necessary ones and produce consistency equal to 1. The first essential factor identified in the analysis is the stakeholders' involvement in the process. All the cases that were defined as successful in the study include the citizens and local businesses as the primary stakeholders in place brand creation in different forms. Some cities prefer the more traditional ways: surveys, conferences with the stakeholders, consultations, open-source voting at the local popular websites, and competitions on the brand vision among citizens. Such strategies were used by Magdeburg, Maastricht, Braga, Innsbruck, Kiel. The interesting practice was implemented by Innsbruck, which included in the brand creation process not only the main stakeholders (citizens and businesses) but also the non-profit organizations, sports, and cultural organizations, and universities and schools. Such a practice allows for collecting various opinions regarding the place brand vision and creates an inclusive place brand concept.

However, it is essential to remember the problem reported by T. Moilanen (2015) regarding the stakeholders' management. Sometimes the inclusion of a large number of stakeholders can hinder place branding implementation due to the complicated communication between them. Thus, adequate stakeholders' management is essential. Some cities under study use innovative ways to include citizens in the place brand creation process. So, Eindhoven and Prato used digital platforms to collect and study city perceptions and evaluate the city image of both internal and external audiences. Groningen implemented another practice that might be interesting to consider. Groningen's stakeholders are included in the city branding process via the campaigns and toolkits suggested by the government and city marketing organization "Merk Groningen". It is worth mentioning that the inclusion of the citizens into the process of city branding creation is essential even if the branding concept is aimed chiefly at the tourists or new businesses attraction, as citizens are the "holders" and place brand ambassadors. However, in reality, most place branding strategies that aim to increase tourism and attract new businesses into the city neglect it, implementing the "top-down" approach. Though the inclusion of the stakeholders in the place branding is proved to be a necessary factor and, thus, the first hypothesis (**H1**) can be accepted, the factor is insufficient to produce the place branding success on its own. A bright illustration of it is the Limassol city branding initiative, whose main idea was the creation of the brand from scratch by citizens via expressing their opinions on social networks. The strategy was unsuccessful, and place branding stopped existing after three years, never taking formal shape. In all the successful cases studied, the government actively participated in the city branding process, being the initiators and the place branding drivers.

The second necessary condition identified during the analysis is the management of digital identity, presented in all the successful cases. Thus, the fourth hypothesis (**H4**) can be accepted: indeed, digital identity management acts as a necessary condition in city branding. It seems that the type of website (interactive vs. brochureware) is not essential for digital identity management. However, the website should include all the three digital identity management elements defined by Florek (2006): place brand design (logo, flag, distinctive colors), place brand behavior (the information about plans, projects, policies, news), and place brand communication (contact information, general information regarding the city, information for targeted audiences, feedback tools). The common practice used by the cities with successful city branding is to use the umbrella website with different portals targeted at different audiences. It is essential to mention that in case there are several websites, all were connected

through the place's brand identity (e.g., the presence of a city branding logo, usage of distinctive colors). Though little attention has been paid to digital identity management in the literature on place branding and in reality, this factor seems to be crucial for place branding success in the modern digitalized world.

The last necessary factor identified in the study is the inclusion of sustainability and “greenness” rhetoric into the city branding process. Given the consistency of 1, this factor was present in all the cases defined as successful in this study. The role of sustainability and the usage of “green” rhetoric in the world increases. Its use can attract the attention of businesses, citizens, and tourists and improve the city's image, being a valuable asset for city branding construction. However, few studies consider its role in place branding construction. The performed QCA analysis has proved the necessity of including this component in place branding. Thus, the fifth hypothesis (**H5**) can be accepted. In the cases chosen for study, the usage of the rhetoric of “greenness” and sustainability comes in three two main ways. First, the cities that have been known to deal with polluting industries try to implement the logic of “sustainable” production, “circular economy”, and “usage of renewable sources” (Groningen, Prato, Aalborg, Esbjerg). Second, cities that are not connected with such activity make an accent on the “care for the future” and improving the life quality through landscaping, participating in sustainability increase programs (e.g., Maastricht as the first city in Limburg to implement ZES (Zero-Emission City Logistics)), provision of the “ecological excellence” (Innsbruck), or raising awareness regarding the sustainability and ecology in the society (Magdeburg, Braga). Thus, the usage of the rhetoric of sustainability and “greenness” is available for each city and should be included as a necessary component of place branding strategy. However, as can be seen in the cases of Aalborg and Esbjerg, it is not sufficient and should be supplemented by other components (the inclusion of the citizens into the place branding process, focusing of place branding on the citizens and life quality increase, and management of digital identity). Thus, the inclusion of all the components is necessary to build a strong successful city branding.

## Chapter 5. Conclusion

Nowadays, more and more cities try to create their brands, and city branding has become a popular way to improve the city's image and develop its competitiveness in the subnational, national, and international arena. Besides, the city branding helps to enhance the communication between the stakeholders, provide territory integration, and ensure the city's economic development. European cities are among the most prominent users of city branding: the accelerating pace of change in a political, economic, and technological environment, together with the intensifying spatial connections between the European cities, make city branding an integral part of territory management. However, following the statistics, 86% of city branding campaigns fail (North, 2014, as cited in Ločmele, Mousten, 2016). This study aimed to understand the factors influencing the success of place branding implementation in European cities. Gathered data from sixteen medium-sized European cities, the crisp-set QCA analysis was performed to understand why in some European cities place branding is successful, while in others it becomes a failure.

Though it was proved that city branding is a complex process that one or two variables cannot explain, the analysis has defined three necessary factors that influence the success of city branding implementation. The first identified factor is the inclusion of the stakeholders in the city branding process. The involvement of the stakeholders, even in the strategies aimed at tourist and business attraction, is crucial, as the citizens act as place brand ambassadors and place brand holders. The second necessary factor identified during the analysis is digital identity management. Though little attention is paid to it in the place branding literature and by the government, this factor is becoming more critical in the era of globalization and digitalization. Thus, proper management of digital identity helps to reach both internal and external audiences and contributes to the city's image construction. The third factor that proved to be necessary for city branding success is the inclusion of sustainability and “greenness” rhetoric into the place branding strategy. With growing concerns regarding sustainability worldwide, using such rhetoric can attract stakeholders and improve the city's image.

The analysis also found the two combinations of factors providing successful city branding. The first combination consists of the stakeholders' involvement, focusing the city branding strategy on citizens and life quality increase, the management of digital identity, and the usage

of the rhetoric of “greenness”, and sustainability. The focus of the place branding strategy on the citizens and life quality increase seem to contribute to the success of the city branding but are neither necessary nor sufficient factor for achieving city branding success. Another combination of factors sufficient to produce the success of city branding includes the stakeholders’ involvement, the inclusion in the process of the EU-level stakeholder represented by the “Eurocities” network, the digital identity management, and the usage of the rhetoric of “greenness” and sustainability. Though there were cases with this combination of factors present to achieve the place branding process, this combination was not included in the further analysis due to the lower percentage of cases covered by this explanation (50%).

Thus, the goal of the thesis was achieved: three factors influencing the city branding outcome were revealed, and the combination of factors sufficient to produce successful city branding was found. Three out of five hypotheses stated at the beginning of the thesis were accepted, while two were rejected. The focus of the city branding concept on citizens and life quality increase and the inclusion of the fourth stakeholder represented by the “Eurocities” network did not significantly affect the outcome of city branding in the cases selected for the study.

The most important limitation of the study lies in the fact that the usage of the QCA allows for performing a moderate generalization only. Due to the accurate and purposeful selection of cases and the necessary proportion of homogeneity and heterogeneity within and between them, the study sets a moderate generalization. It provides an insight into the factors influencing the success of place branding in European cities. However, a more extensive study including more cases and another method of analysis (e.g., regression analysis) is needed to prove the influence of these factors and their combination on the city branding success of European cities in general. Another study limitation is the lack of information on the unsuccessful city branding initiatives. Thus, only sixteen cases were chosen for the analysis.

The field for further research on the chosen topic is vast since factors influencing the success of place branding are changing rapidly, and more factors have become substantial over time. So, only a few studies consider the role of digital identity management and inclusion of the sustainability and “greenness” rhetoric into the place branding agenda. However, these factors are proved to be crucial for the modern city branding process. Moreover, little research on place branding focuses on the study of branding of small and medium-sized cities, making this topic interesting. This would be a fruitful area for further work. The current study may be extended



to provide a generalization of factors influencing the success of city branding of European cities using the regression analysis. Another topic for further research may consider the role of life quality increase programs on the outcome of the city branding process. The role of the EU in place branding of European cities in terms of the provision of expertise can be continued and extended by the influence of the funding of the place branding initiatives by the EU on the city branding outcomes.

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**Table 2.** The parsimonious solution of the model  $OUTC = f(SI, LQI, EUS, DI, SUS)$  performed in the fsQCA 3.0 software

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**Table 1.** The complex solution of the model  $OUTC = f(SI, LQI, EUS, DI, SUS)$  performed in the fsQCA 3.0 software. Source: Author's calculations

	raw coverage	unique coverage	consistency
frequency cutoff:	1		
consistency cutoff:	1		
SI*LQI*DI*SUS	0.875	0.5	1
SI*EUS*DI*SUS	0.5	0.125	1
solution coverage:	1		
solution consistency:	1		

**Table 2.** The parsimonious solution of the model  $OUTC = f(SI, LQI, EUS, DI, SUS)$  performed in the fsQCA 3.0 software. Source: Author's calculations

	raw coverage	unique coverage	consistency
frequency cutoff:	1		
consistency cutoff:	1		
SI*DI	1	0	1
SI*SUS	1	0	1
solution coverage:	1		
solution consistency:	1		