

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

Department of Marketing Communication and Public Relations

**Master's Thesis**

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**Beyond Tourism: Development of Place Branding  
in the Context of the City of Prague**

Master's thesis

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Study programme: Strategic Communication

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Year of the defence: 2023

## **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 31. 7. 2023

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## References

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## **Abstract**

In today's global landscape, cities and regions are increasingly competing for investments, tourists, and talent, prompting the adoption of multi-dimensional branding strategies beyond tourism promotion. City branding has emerged as a means to enhance the overall image and attractiveness of cities. Despite growing academic interest in city branding, a research gap exists, specifically in the case of Prague, where the international perception does not align with the progressive transformation of the city. The case study of the City of Prague is explored to examine its city branding efforts, uncover the most pressing challenges and provide possible solutions through a combination of content analysis of key strategic documents and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. Findings reveal a discrepancy between Prague's desired image and its branding efforts, hindered by a lack of clear leadership, political interest, coordination and long-term strategic vision. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for Prague to build a distinctive and successful city brand. Establishing clear leadership, engaging political stakeholders early in the process and defining clear and measurable objectives are among the potential solutions to bridge the gap between Prague's desired image and its branding efforts.

## **Abstrakt**

V dnešním globálním prostředí města a regiony stále více soupeří o investice, turisty a talenty, což je důvodem k využívání nejen strategií propagace cestovního ruchu, ale i dalších strategií budování značky ve více rovinách. Branding měst, neboli city branding, se stal prostředkem ke zlepšení celkové image a atraktivity měst. Navzdory rostoucímu zájmu akademiků o city branding existuje mezera ve výzkumu v případě Prahy, kde její mezinárodní vnímání neodpovídá probíhající transformaci tohoto města. Na případové studii hlavního města Prahy si tato práce klade za cíl prozkoumat snahy města o budování značky, odhalit nejpálčivější problémy a poskytnout možná řešení prostřednictvím kombinace obsahové analýzy klíčových strategických dokumentů a polostrukturovaných rozhovorů s hlavními stakeholdery. Zjištění odhalují nesoulad mezi žádanou image Prahy a jejími snahami o budování značky, čemuž brání absence jednoznačného leadershipu, politického zájmu, koordinace a dlouhodobé strategické vize. Řešení těchto problémů bude pro Prahu klíčové pro vybudování výrazné a úspěšné značky města. K možným řešením, jak překlenout rozdíl mezi požadovanou image Prahy a jejími snahami o budování značky, patří stanovení jasné vedoucí úlohy, zapojení politických aktérů v rané fázi procesu a definování jasných a měřitelných cílů.

## **Keywords**

Place branding, city branding, Prague, reputation management, strategic communication

## **Klíčová slova**

Place branding, city branding, Praha, reputační management, strategická komunikace

## **Title**

Beyond tourism: Development of place branding in the context of the City of Prague

## **Název práce**

Za hranice cestovního ruchu: Vývoj place brandingů v kontextu hl. m. Prahy

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## List of Abbreviations

ABSL	Association of Business Service Leaders
AFI	Association for Foreign Investment
AMSP	Association of Small and Medium Enterprises and Tradesmen
DMO	Destination Marketing Organisation
IPR Prague	Institute
OICT	Operátor ICT
RIS	Regional Innovation Strategy
PII	Prague Innovation Institute
PCB	Prague Convention Bureau
PCT	Prague City Tourism

## Introduction

In recent years, cities and regions have become the primary actors on the geopolitical map of the world. According to the UN, up to two-thirds of the world's population will live in urban areas by 2050 (United Nations, 2018). With globalisation, cities and regions are increasingly competing for better access to investments, the presence of multinational companies, tourists and talent. Cities have begun to realise that in order to increase their competitive brand value on the international scale, a shift from marketing strategies focused solely on tourism to a multi-dimensional branding strategy is necessary.

City branding is the process of using marketing techniques to improve the reputation and image of a city in the minds of different target groups, making a destination economically and culturally attractive. Even though city branding is a relatively young academic discipline, it is gaining the attention of scholars, practitioners and policymakers alike. Many municipalities worldwide are increasingly utilising city branding strategies to improve their position in the global hierarchy and showcase their various characteristics (Govers and Go, 2009). Case studies of various cities with different contexts, including Hamburg, London, Lyon, and Edmonton (TBPO, 2017), offer relevant examples.

Despite the growing interest in city branding, there is a research gap in the specific instance of Prague. While examples from other cities provide useful insights, a case study of Prague is required to address this gap and help to a better understanding of the city's unique context. Prague has undergone a dynamic transformation in the last few years. From a cheap tourist destination, it is gradually becoming a city where the main focus is on improving the quality of life of the citizens, refining the public space and supporting sustainable development. However, there is a discrepancy between this shift and how the city is perceived abroad. While Prague may be evolving into a more progressive and livable city for its residents, its international image and branding efforts have not yet effectively communicated this change.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the place branding dimensions of the City of Prague in recent years, identify the key stakeholders, analyse the current situation and propose solutions for the city to adapt in order to build a distinctive brand for itself. The thesis seeks to examine Prague's city branding from 2018 to 2022 with the main focus on a non-touristic brand. It aims to provide a better understanding of the foundations of its city branding concepts and strategies,

as well as identify challenges encountered during its development and implementation. The goal is to contextualize the city's recent branding activities and provide managerial implications for developing Prague's future city branding strategy.

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the subject under discussion, the first chapter of the thesis outlines the field of place branding from an academic perspective. It describes the genesis of the development of this discipline and examines its importance in the present day. The concept of place branding is defined with particular attention on the branding of cities and urban areas. City branding will be analysed in the context of strategic communication, highlighting the concepts of brand image, identity, equity and stakeholder management. Next, the theoretical part of this thesis examines the challenges municipalities face during the process of developing and sustaining a city brand.

The thesis follows the qualitative methodology of a single case study research. Prague serves as an exemplary case in this regard, being able to offer a good quality of life and a friendly environment for expats (TimeOut, 2022; Internations, 2022), but at the same time having only officially branded itself as a tourist destination. The analytical part of this research is based on in-depth insight into the branding processes within Prague's local government and municipal organisations. Its aim is not only to describe the specific challenges the city representatives face but also to look for possible solutions. Both these goals should be achieved through a combination of qualitative analysis of strategic policy documents and semi-structured expert interviews.

The practical part of this thesis presents the case analysis of Prague's branding efforts and the challenges faced during this process, followed by a discussion of the findings that provide answers to the research questions. The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of the discussed matter and provide new insights into the practice of city branding, which can serve as a basis for further discussion and application in future research. By examining Prague's branding efforts during its dynamic shift, the research can shed light on the challenges and opportunities faced by cities undergoing similar transformations. Furthermore, a case study of Prague will provide practical implications and recommendations tailored to its specific context, guiding policymakers and practitioners in developing effective and sustainable city branding strategies that align with the city's vision for the future.

# 1 PLACE BRANDING

## 1.1 Place Branding and Its Importance

Throughout history, places have been marketing themselves as they always needed to attract and bring in new settlers, customers, visitors, traders, and investors. As the marketing field started to professionalise with the consumer boom that followed the Second World War, the promotion of places gradually advanced into place marketing that progressed simultaneously with the marketing of products and services (Anholt, 2010). Place marketing as a subject for academic scholars came to the fore in the 1980s, however only with a small number of fragmented and incoherent writings, frequently taking the promotion of places as a given while focusing primarily on the communicative practices that underpinned marketing efforts (Vanolo, 2017).

Whereas branding has been used to promote consumer products for many years, the systematic approach of destinations and places developing a brand strategy in practice only began to appear in the 1990s, first introduced at a national level. According to Baker (2007), the first countries to utilise place branding to gain competitive advantage, create a strategic framework for decision-making processes and respond to the demands of their stakeholders were Australia, Hong Kong and Spain, followed by the major American cities such as Las Vegas, Seattle or Pittsburgh. However, place marketing was still viewed essentially as a tool for more effective promotion of the goods, services, and attractions of the location, and not as a means of directly addressing the location's overall reputation or image (Anholt, 2010).

Since the second half of the 1990s, the notion of place branding and place marketing has been widely utilised in tourism studies, defined as 'destination branding' and 'destination marketing'. Both Anholt (2010) and Vanolo (2017) point out the strong connections between these two disciplines and the pivotal role of tourism studies in developing place branding literature. Tourist marketing organisations (known as 'DMOs' or 'destination marketing organisations') typically implement marketing and branding strategies to maximise the value of their services. The importance of strategic branding as an essential component of DMOs has been evident by the fact that developing a branding strategy is now one of the critical components needed for accreditation with Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI), the world's largest official destination marketing organisation (Baker, 2007).

Yet, Anholt (2010) emphasises the existing confusion, since the term destination marketing is often wrongly interchanged with place branding or nation branding. As the World Tourism Organisation states, “*a place brand is not a substitute for a destination brand*” (UNWTO, 2009, p. 15) and the difference is distinct. While destination brands aim to appeal to the target group of tourists, the aim of place brands is actually to target different segments of the market and inspire a shared vision for the place (Vanolo, 2017).

In the years following the 1990s, the interest in the topic only increased. According to Gertner’s research (2011), there have been 212 published articles related to the topics of ‘place branding’ or ‘place marketing’ in the period between 1990 and 2009; while Kumar and Panda (2019) identified 370 authors published across 67 different academic and scholarly journals. The reason for the growing relevance of the field of place marketing is simple and agreed upon within academic circles: place branding has become a crucial part of the policy agenda due to the post-industrial cultural shift and globally competitive environment where cities regardless of size need to differentiate themselves to be able to attract tourists, international students, qualified workers and engaged citizens, and create investment opportunities to attract foreign direct investment (Kotler, 1993; Baker, 2007; Warren & Dinnie, 2017; Govers, 2020 and others).

## **1.2 Definition and Conceptualisation of Place Branding**

One of the first concepts of strategic place marketing for attracting investment, industry, and tourism to cities, states and nations, was developed by Kotler et al (1993). The authors argued that to be able to respond adequately to the threats of global competition and technological changes, especially in times of crisis, places must start acting like market-driven businesses and promote themselves accordingly. Strategic marketing of places - which involves redeveloping infrastructure, producing a skilled labour force, encouraging local entrepreneurship, forging public-private partnerships, identifying and attracting companies and industries suitable for the specific place, generating distinctive local attractions, cultivating a service-friendly culture, and effectively communicating these special qualities to their target markets - is assumed to be the secret to robust economic development.

Furthermore, Kotler et al. highlight the need for a deeper understanding of the decision-making processes of the target groups of tourists, new residents, factories, corporate headquarters and investors, now characterised as so-called 'place buyers'. This perspective has been further elaborated by Vanolo (2017, p. 28), stating that "*the migration of business concepts to discourses on the urban may be interpreted as a trait of our neoliberal times, characterised by the pivotal role of economic rationales in all the spheres of human and social life*", which the author identified as the classic hypothesis of the commodification of places. Simply put, places - nations, cities or regions - are increasingly functioning as products and services that are packaged, advertised, sold and consumed.

In broad terms, place branding can be defined as enhancing the brand image of a place. Anholt (2010) believes place branding to be a way of making places famous; which is supported by Johansson's (2012) definition that argues that at its core, branding is about developing an image of a place. This means constructing and communicating a certain vision of a place and formulating concepts that resonate with a selected audience, be it visitors, potential investors, or the residents themselves. If a place brand is an image and a set of associations in people's minds, then place branding can be described as conscious actions taken to alter or enhance this image (Hildreth in Baker, 2007).

Govers and Go (2009) refer to place branding as a multiplicity of approaches that go beyond mere advertising, in order to improve the position of a place in the market and enhance various characteristics of places. The authors emphasise that this implies the use of not only marketing and advertising techniques but also the mobilisation of other branding-related practices, such as informing and engaging local stakeholders, researching and promoting local identities, instilling a sense of pride among the residents or creating recognisable visual symbols for the place, including logos.

The difference between marketing and branding activities in the context of places is also highlighted by Boisen (2015). He argues that marketing practices are about creating positive communication and creating economic value by balancing supply and demand, whereas branding techniques are oriented toward creating, sustaining and shaping related presence in people's minds and hearts. Vanolo (2017) elaborates on this notion, arguing that place brands are complex and cannot be created from scratch. On the contrary, they must be consistent with the traditions and, ultimately, the local identity of the place, as they evolve over time, through



the strategies of selective storytelling and narration. He draws attention to the fact that place brands need to be created in line with the local culture and atmosphere, while still being fluid and taking into consideration the various stakeholders such as tourists and inhabitants, but also journalists or bloggers, who despite being outside of the control of the promotional institutions, still influence place brands on a daily basis.

Vanolo (2017) summarises the concept of place branding into three main generally agreed-upon characteristics. First, the premise for the discussion of branding of places revolves around the idea of increasing competition between cities, regions or nations. Secondly, the author argues that place branding is not merely about promoting an image, attracting tourists, and attracting investment, it is more than just 'selling' a place. It includes pursuing a reputation that instils trust among residents, creating a strong local identity, soft power, and much more. Therefore, place brands can be considered as a strategic tool providing guidance for economic and urban development policies. Lastly, several studies suggest that branding goes far beyond the realm of discursive and intangible interventions. It can be created through the physical transformation of places, or alternatively encourage these changes. Furthermore, the production and promotion of a place are largely shaped by its architecture, the behaviour of local people, various forms of official advertising, mass events and word of mouth that can be reinforced by both the media and the residents themselves. All of these different forms of communication form the basis of a perception of a place in the mind of the consumer and, ultimately, loyalty and attachment to the place.

However, despite decades of academic debate, place branding remains in some ways a vaguely defined and ambiguous academic concept. The first argument why, is based on the fact that place branding is generally considered a practice- and policy-focused research area. According to Gertner (2011), most of the studies do not refer to any theoretical background, and neither do they advance testable hypotheses. The underlying reason for this might be attributed to the individual nature of place brands, which are built upon the distinctive attributes of specific cities, regions, or nations. Consequently, challenges arise when attempting to formulate universally applicable theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, the multidisciplinary nature of place branding allows scholars to transform and adopt concepts and approaches from other fields, such as cultural sociology, place making, urban planning and development, business and economic development, economic and cultural geography, tourism, destination management, marketing or PR.

## **2 PLACE BRANDING IN THE CONTEXT OF CITIES AND REGIONS**

### **2.1 Cities as Key Actors in the Globalised World**

In recent years, cities have become one of the primary actors in the geopolitical map of the world. According to the UN, more than half of the world's population now lives in urban areas, and this proportion is expected to increase up to two-thirds by 2050. It is expected that this gradual shift of residence from rural to urban areas, together with the global population growth, could result in additional 2.5 billion people living in cities, with the majority located in Asia and Africa (United Nations, 2018). Importantly, cities can provide large efficiency benefits. OECD (2015) research shows that every doubling in the size of the population leads to unprecedented improvements in job distribution, education, entrepreneurship and the diffusion of ideas, resulting in a 2-5% increase in productivity levels in cities. That being mentioned, with over 80% of global GDP being generated in urban areas, cities have become the key agents of sustainable growth through increased productivity and innovation (World Bank, 2023).

Today, cities are the driving forces of economic development. According to the report by the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (2011), cities serve as centres of knowledge, innovation, and specialised production and services, making them essential catalysts for progress. By fostering an environment that encourages creative thinking and innovation, cities have become hotspots for intellectual growth. The concentration of people in urban areas creates a multitude of opportunities for interaction and communication, fueling the exchange of ideas and knowledge. This dynamic atmosphere nurtures the development of new concepts, ideas and technologies.

Moreover, cities have been found to be more productive than rural areas, especially because they provide more efficient infrastructure, better quality of services, a highly qualified workforce and a multitude of development opportunities and advantages. In addition to economic benefits, cities also wield significant influence as agents of social, cultural, technological and political transformation. They serve as breeding grounds for social progress, cultural exchange and economic advancements. With their capacity to foster innovation and facilitate the exchange of diverse goods and services, cities offer consumers a wide array of choices to enhance their quality of life.

That being said, the speed and scale of urbanisation pose challenges and create negative impacts, especially for the local residents. These include for example growing demands for housing, overcrowding, transport infrastructure or lack of services and job opportunities. In addition to these challenges, cities will increasingly face issues related to an ageing population, changing labour markets, lack of skilled workforce, migration, and environmental concerns. Given these complex challenges, the task of local governments, therefore, is to maximise the positive externalities and minimise the negative impacts on the city (USIP, 2020; European Commission, 2023; World Bank, 2023).

Anttiroiko (2015) contends that globalisation changed the context of local communities towards a worldwide interdependence and as the flow of resources across borders increased, city governments have been progressively inclined to strategically adjust to the new conditions. The revolutionary changes in the world economy and the rise of technological, social and institutional forces following the 1970s, resulted in a transformed attitude towards cities. Because deindustrialisation was seen as a problem affecting primarily Western cities, it became apparent that national urban policies should not focus on regulating deindustrialization and unemployment. Instead, they should aim to position cities as attractive destinations for economic activity, investment and residents, often relying on branding strategies. Recognizing the need for change, it became evident that cities should be entrusted with more responsibilities for expressing their unique identities and ultimately fostering their own development (Vanolo, 2017).

That is the reason why today, cities around the world are competing against each other seeking to attract the highest possible value from global flows of resources, with the aspiration of ultimately advancing urban development. The outcome of this competition has a direct impact on the roles and positions of cities within the global division of labour and, consequently, on their standing in the global urban hierarchy. Ultimately, this competition determines a city's potential to enhance prosperity and well-being within its urban communities.

The 'city attraction hypothesis', proposed by Anttiroiko (2015) and based on five main principles, finds its theoretical underpinning in this proposition. Firstly, the global competition of cities is based on how appealing a city is and its ability to attract valuable resources. Secondly, cities aspire to attract the best resources based on their goals, location and attraction

factors. Thirdly, attracting valuable resources requires a strategic city marketing approach focusing on the unique characteristics and economic city branding as a part of their place promotion activities. Moreover, the author proposes that the attractiveness of the city determines its role in the global labour market and its position among other cities. Lastly, cities that are more attractive and can draw in more resources, have better chances of creating local prosperity and ensuring the well-being of their residents. Therefore, cities are well advised to explore more viable approaches to supporting their existing economies and attracting new resources from the global value stream. Regional promotion, city marketing and city branding are strategic tools for such an approach.

## **2.2 Definition and Dimensions of City Branding**

The application of the concept of place branding to urban development began to get the attention of scholars in the 1990s. One of the first definitions was provided by Ashworth and Voogd (1990, p.11), who described city branding as a *“process whereby urban activities are as closely as possible related to the demands of targeted customers so as to maximise the efficient social and economic functioning of the area concerned in accordance with whatever goals have been established”*.

Place branding and city branding share a noteworthy degree of conceptual overlap in their definitions. Both concepts describe the strategic management and promotion of a location, whether relating to a city, region, or nation. The primary objective of both place and city branding is to enhance attractiveness, competitiveness, and overall reputation, thereby attracting investments, businesses, tourists, residents, and other stakeholders. Therefore, despite slight variations in emphasis, the fundamental objectives and strategic approaches of place branding and city branding align closely.

However, Anholt (2006) argues that cities are rather different from countries and we cannot use the same models and measurements for them. Unlike countries, cities exhibit a more technocratic approach to governance. Cities are smaller and more flexible to deal with specific practical aspects such as transportation, cost of living, public safety or climate and pollution. Following his quarterly surveys measuring global perceptions of nation brands, he created the ‘The Anholt-GMI City Brands Index’ hexagon based on 6 different dimensions: presence, potential, people, place, pulse and prerequisites.

First, the 'presence' dimension is based on evaluating a city's international status and recognition, including visitors' familiarity and the city's contribution to culture, science and governance over the past 30 years. The perception and associations connected to a city's name hold significant financial, political and social value. Yet, city leaders often overlook the impact of their city's image and reputation on various aspects of society, including the number of jobs, businesses, and other organisations that can benefit from the city brand. There is no doubt that the concept of a brand is relevant and valuable to places that can provide status and glamour to the local society as a so-called 'umbrella brand'. The level of esteem evoked by a city's name directly influences the city's tourism, economic development, prestige and respect (Baker, 2007). Moreover, a positive image of a place can help local producers get recognised abroad and attract customers (Anholt, 2010).

The 'potential' dimension explores the economic and educational opportunities that each city is believed to offer, including job prospects, business-friendliness and higher education. Anttiroiko (2015) asserts that the success of a city brand results from its ability to sustain valuable resources amidst intensifying competition. To address this challenge, cities often employ economic city branding strategies, utilising economic city profiling as a means to attract value. This perspective highlights the significance of attraction as a critical factor for urban development in an era characterised by the increasing mobility of resources.

Active city branding assumes particular importance for emerging cities struggling to gain recognition as global players. As the positions of cities within the global division of labour change over time, the interdependence and fluidity that characterise modern cities make attractiveness one of the key factors to be considered (Ibid.). As city branding is closely linked to economic realities, it can be utilised to emphasise industrial development and economic activities, particularly in the case of post-industrial cities. This perspective allows for a strategic alignment of city branding with local economic development policies, highlighting the city's role and economic profile. Malcolm Allan (in Baker, 2007) underscores the importance of strategic thinking in city branding, emphasising the need to identify and capitalise on the distinctive strengths of a city. By deliberately creating, developing and demonstrating the value of these attributes through appropriate on-brand actions, cities can differentiate themselves and create enduring value.

The 'people' dimension measures perceptions of warmth, friendliness, acceptance of outsiders, ease of finding a community with shared language and culture and the overall sense of safety. As suggested by Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2009), the essence of city branding extends beyond marketing strategies and revolves around the communities that form a shared sense of identity, belonging and purpose within a place. Building a strong image of a city should therefore start with understanding and nurturing these communities. Govers (2020) emphasises the importance of initiatives undertaken by communities, which reinforce and showcase their unique identity in original, creative, innovative, captivating and inspiring ways. These initiatives, which can take the form of policies, infrastructures, projects, investments, or events, serve to build a distinctive, relevant, authentic, consistent and memorable reputation for the city and establish a positive image in the eyes of the world.

The 'place' dimension examines perceptions of the city's physical attributes, including beauty and architecture, outdoor environment and climate. The pulse dimension assesses the appeal of a vibrant urban lifestyle, considering the exciting and interesting activities for both short-term visitors and long-term residents. The last dimension, 'prerequisites', examines the basic qualities of the city, including the perceived quality of life, ease of finding affordable accommodation and the standard of public amenities such as schools, hospitals, public transport and sports facilities.

In conclusion, city branding is conceptualised as a multifaceted strategy for both attaining competitive advantage in order to attract inward investment and stimulate tourism, and also for fostering community development by reinforcing local identity and the affinity of the local residents to their city.

### **2.3 The Principles and Practices of Strategic Brand Management in the Context of Cities**

Within the sphere of city branding, the principles of strategic brand management play a central role in shaping the reputation and success of cities. As the field of place branding often encounters scepticism from city officials, who believe it to be merely a trendy approach to traditional marketing and place-making techniques, Malcolm Allan (in Baker, 2007) emphasises the importance of a strategic approach to city branding. He offers an argument that the power of lasting brands lies in their ability to meet the needs of their stakeholders while

remaining true to their values and thereby providing a strategic guidance system within place branding endeavours. Recognizing that cities are dynamic entities with unique identities and aspirations, the strategic management of brand elements such as brand image, brand loyalty, brand identity and brand equity can propel cities towards enhanced recognition, attractiveness and competitiveness.

### **2.3.1 Brand Image**

Brand image is an important aspect of city branding and the most crucial factor influencing perceptions and attitudes towards the city. Anholt and Hildreth (2005) suggest that the fundamental characteristic of a brand is simply a positive reputation - *“nothing more and nothing less than the good name of something that’s on offer to the public”* (p. 164). There is a rich tradition of studies concerning the connection between urban city branding and the themes of brand image, the sense of place or the genius loci. Vanolo (2017) describes these concepts by stating that *“places exist only in the eyes (in the minds) of people, that is, through the development of a sense of place”* (p. 40). In other words, the sense of place is illustrated by having an intimate, intense relationship with a specific place, or a feeling of belonging to one place. He further advocates that for place branding practitioners, the development of a sense of place is a subject of considerable interest as it may be interpreted as loyalty to the city brand. Brand loyalty in the context of city branding develops on account of individual experiences and people’s understanding of places. Then the specific branding practices put these mental images and perceptions at the heart of activities designed to shape the image of the city (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). Establishing emotional connections, trust and consistent experiences can foster long-lasting bonds between individuals and the city brand, thereby cultivating loyalty and advocacy.

### **2.3.2 Brand Identity**

When it comes to brand identity, Kavaratzis and Ashworth further claim that *“all branding tries to endow a product with a specific and more distinctive identity, and that is, in essence, what most city marketing seeks to do for cities. A place needs to be differentiated through a unique brand identity if it wants to be, first, recognized as existing, secondly, perceived in the minds of place customers as possessing qualities superior to those of competitors and, thirdly, consumed in a manner commensurate with the objectives of the place”* (2005, p.189). Successful city branding requires a dedicated effort to realise a vision, where the expectations

communicated by the city align with the actual experience of its ‘customers’, both residents and visitors alike (Baker, 2007).

Place branding requires managing the images and reputation that are formed in the minds of people. Through understanding how they create shared values, purpose and identity, places need to formulate an aspirational strategic vision and subsequently translate this vision into a comprehensive strategy that formulates specific policies, partnerships and actions. To gain recognition, cities must differentiate themselves by creating a unique brand identity that surpasses competitors in the eyes of its target audience. Through a continuous stream of imaginative community initiatives, a place can establish the deserving reputation it aims to project (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Govers, 2020).

### **2.3.3 Brand Equity**

Hankinson (2004) characterises place brands as entities fulfilling different types of functions, ranging from communication with the consumer audience and evoking their senses and emotions, to generating economic value, generally referred to as brand equity. Brand equity is defined as a value attributed to a brand, based on the premise that products and services that are associated with a successful brand possess a competitive advantage over those with a less recognisable name. Within Hankinson’s conceptual framework, places are referred to as ‘relational brand networks’ that consist of central brand identity and various categories of brand relationships that are the foundation of the brand, including consumer relationships, primary service relationships, brand infrastructure relationships and media relationships (Vanolo, 2017). That is in line with Anholt’s (2010) perspective that advocates for experience as a key to place branding. Generating interest through marketing communications channels leads to sales, subsequently facilitating consumers' experience. If this experience proves satisfactory and is shared, it contributes to the development of brand equity. Furthermore, the notion of brand equity delves into the long-term value and competitive advantage that is the result of an effectively managed city brand.

### **2.3.4 Stakeholder Management**

According to Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005), the primary objective of city branding is to create a unique identity that distinguishes individual cities and creates a favourable perception in the stakeholders’ minds. Having said that, Moilanen (2015) claims that city branding



strategies that achieve success are characterised by a collaborative partnership approach that involves multiple stakeholders, who are united in projecting a clearly defined and mutually agreed-upon city brand positioning, regardless of the specific objectives of the branding campaign. This can be challenging given the extensive involvement of numerous stakeholders. A successful brand does not only build engagement with the outside world but also among its internal audiences and various stakeholders.

As has been discussed by Govers (2020), city brands should be rooted in a sense of belonging and shared purpose. Such a strategy requires a level of engagement that is difficult to replicate elsewhere. Places are characterised as mutually dependent and interconnected systems of stakeholders, in which the actions of one actor affect the others within the community (Jamal and Getz, 1995). By inspiring and motivating internal stakeholders, it is possible to encourage active participation and contribution towards the shared goals and objectives of the brand. Vanolo (2017) further contends that branding should not be a linear top-down process driven by marketing professionals and agencies. Instead, it should be a multifaceted social phenomenon that involves multiple intricate networks of social, cultural and political dynamics.

Henninger et al.'s (2016) classification of stakeholders offers a valuable framework that identifies and categorises various actors involved in shaping the branding strategies of cities. This classification divides stakeholders into four distinct categories, offering valuable insight into the diverse roles and influences of different stakeholders and their shared dynamics within city branding initiatives.

According to the authors, the first and most dominant group are primary stakeholders, who consist of governmental and municipal organisations, such as city councils, DMOs, chambers of commerce and so forth. Primary stakeholders assume the decision-making role within the branding processes and bear the responsibility for creating a strategy that aligns with the interest of all stakeholders. Moreover, they formulate a cohesive brand message that is communicated consistently throughout the city branding strategy.

To ensure the effective implementation of this framework, primary stakeholders select secondary stakeholders, who are either nationally or internationally well-known, to actively support and deliver this message. Among these are universities, business parks, museums,

theatres and festival organisations. As they are typically financially independent and have the potential to contribute to the economic growth of cities, secondary stakeholders are often utilised as consultants and executors of the branding strategy. Their active involvement in the branding process is a result of their reputation and their ability to improve the profile of a city as an attractive leisure destination. Unlike primary stakeholders, secondary stakeholders are associated with their cities, but consider them as a contextual backdrop that enables them to fulfil their own objectives. This suggests that they have their distinct agenda and identities that are intertwined with the respective cities.

Tertiary stakeholders are only partially involved in the branding process and are characterised by the *laissez-faire* approach of the policy of minimal interference. While some of them want to be actively involved, they are mostly dismissed by primary stakeholders as unimportant. This group consists of restaurants, hotels and sports clubs.

Lastly, quaternary stakeholders are seen as only brand ambassadors with a minimal part in the branding process. This group entails the residents of the city, informal groups, communities and other social actors. According to Braun, Kavaratzis and Zenker (2013), city residents are largely neglected as stakeholders within the place branding practices, even though they have an active role in co-producing policies, public goods and services, and could even be vital participants in the branding processes.

The authors identify three different roles that citizens play. First, their characteristics, behaviour and interactions are an integral part of the place brand, often used as an indicator for the evaluation of cities. Secondly, and in line with Henninger et al. (2016), they act as ambassadors and generate word-of-mouth for their cities, granting credibility and authenticity to the communicated messages. Finally, as citizens, they provide political legitimization of the place through active participation in political decisions and informal feedback.

Vanolo (2017) proposes the theoretical perspective of the ‘right to the city’, where residents should be involved in decisions and processes influencing their space, such as creating a new identity and images of the city, as these changes will have a direct impact on their lives. He further reaffirms that the identity of a place is tightly connected to its inhabitants and their social practices, narrations and connections with the local environment. Therefore, citizens should not be overlooked by the local authorities in the process of creating and managing their

city brands. The opinions, support and participation of local people in the place branding processes are necessary if the cities want to achieve coherence between the place brand, its values, propositions and measures. Furthermore, empowering residents as the ambassadors of the city is highly beneficial for the city branding process (Braun, Kavaratzis and Zenker, 2013; Moilanen, 2015).

## **2.4 Challenges Faced by Cities in Developing and Maintaining Successful Place Brands**

In 2015, Moilanen conducted a comprehensive multiple-case study of 10 European cities examining the challenges they face during the process of developing and sustaining a city brand. He identified 10 main challenges: a large number of stakeholders; limited understanding of branding; limited internal buy-in among the key stakeholders; difficulties in securing funding; time-related challenges; organisational issues; lack of authority; operational-level challenges in marketing communication campaigns; poor situational awareness and poor monitoring. For the purposes of this literature review, the challenges are summarised into three main categories: stakeholders, responsibility and operational issues.

The city brand creation and management involves numerous stakeholders with various concerns and levels of involvement. A challenge arises as some stakeholders may lack an understanding of branding processes and show limited commitment, potentially impeding the understanding of and catering to diverse stakeholder needs. Poor understanding of the concepts of city branding can often result in restricting these activities solely to logo planning (Henninger et al., 2016; Moilanen, 2015).

Govers (2020) supports this hypothesis by elaborating that place branding and public diplomacy are frequently overlooked and misunderstood by those who should be most invested in them. He asserts that strategic reputation management is destined to fail without the backing of senior government, yet it is often ignored by cabinets and councils and only considered a domain of communications and marketing departments or organisations. That is closely tied to obtaining sufficient funding and convincing the decision-makers in the public sector that city branding is worth investing money and effort in and can create actual revenue for the city.

Within this complex ecosystem, Moilanen (2015) recognises mobilising the private sector to participate as another major difficulty. All various stakeholders have unique perspectives and expectations for the city, and their needs must be taken into account for a successful branding strategy. However, for a city brand to succeed, stakeholders must share a common understanding of its vision, core values and benefits, and work together effectively to support its development, which might not always be the case. According to Moilanen (2015), conflicting and parallel activities of different stakeholders along with a lack of coordination can lead to difficulties with the inclusion of all parties in city branding processes. Vanolo (2017) points out that a city brand *“is always composed by a cacophony of voices because there are a number of formal and informal institutions branding themselves in strict relation with the city where they are based”* (p. 78). Moreover, a sheer number and wide variety of stakeholders increase the time that is needed for internal communication and coordination of the processes (Moilanen, 2015).

Another challenge is related to organisational issues and lack of accountability. The absence of clear leadership, the unclear structure of decision making and the insufficient coordination between stakeholders are identified among the main difficulties of assigning responsibility and the guarantor of the city branding (Ibid.). Due to the widespread perception of city branding as a simple advertising exercise, the typical top-down approach follows a structure where branding messages are created by advertising agencies based on input from local policymakers, without sufficient attention paid to the significant political implications for the city and its residents. However, this outsourcing to external branding companies may affect the key objectives and evaluation methods as their main objective is to deliver the service to the client (in this case, a city) but they often do not account for the long-term consequences of the branding campaigns for the city (Vanolo, 2017).

On the other hand, if the brand is managed within the structures of a city hall, the overarching goal can potentially be to please the residents so as to be elected again. However, Vanolo expresses his concern that city branding in the hands of local governments can be largely influenced by electoral cycles and campaigns, or lack of expertise and specific knowledge of place branding techniques.

The final category of challenges consists of difficulties connected to the formulation of a branding strategy, day-to-day management of marketing communications and transformation

of brand identity into a real experience of a place. Moilanen (2015) describes the process of formulating a strategy for city branding activities as a combination of smaller, intertwined challenges. These include struggles in identifying target audiences, establishing a clear brand identity, distinguishing oneself from competitors, avoiding misplaced focus on competitors, customising marketing messages for different markets and customer segments, defining the city's relationship with regional and national brands, or a lack of strategic thinking and dialogue.

The lack of appropriate measures for assessing the success of a brand has been described as a considerable challenge that can lead to a limited understanding of the market, inefficient resource allocation and difficulty in justifying actions and budget requirements to the local decision-makers. Operational issues include challenges such as integrating branding efforts with stakeholders, encouraging them to adopt the brand, insufficient marketing skills, conflicting activities, and inconsistent messaging.

Challenges related to brand identity mostly concern the issue of bridging the gap between marketing and the reality experienced by citizens and visitors. Baker (2007) has addressed this problem as well, arguing that the actual character of a city is created by a complex system of factors, such as location, economy, culture, history, climate or religion. He identifies the main issue by saying that while a city invests in infrastructure projects, revitalising the public spaces, urban design, events and promotions, the externally held perceptions of that city do not match the reality of the place and can often be outdated and inaccurate. Importantly, the inability to close this gap may lead to income losses, rising rate of unemployment, lost tax revenues and reputation.

### **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The general objective of this thesis is to contextually examine place branding efforts from the perspective of a local government. In this way, the thesis seeks to provide new insights into the practice of place branding in the context of cities and regions, drawing from the case of the City of Prague.

This research seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the motivations and expose the integrated policy and promotional decisions that occurred behind the scenes in the development of Prague's brand identity. The aim of the thesis is to analyse, interpret and discuss the state of Prague's city branding during the electoral term of 2018-2022. The focus is on understanding the foundation of its city branding concepts and strategies, as well as the challenges and problems encountered in the creation and implementation of these strategies. The purpose of this thesis is to put the city's branding efforts over the past years into context and provide managerial implications for how Prague should approach the creation and management of its city branding strategy in the future.

Accordingly, two following research questions have been defined:

- 1. How has the city branding of Prague evolved in the period of 2018-2022?**
- 2. What were the problems encountered in the efforts to create a city branding strategy for Prague, and how can they be overcome?**

Although the research questions provide a framework for discussing the results, they are not the sole focus of this study. The primary aim of this research is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and to uncover the contributions and limitations of the practice being investigated that can be explored and applied in future research.

The methodology of a single case study has been chosen for this thesis, specifically examining the case of the City of Prague.

#### **3.1 Case Study Research**

Qualitative research method in the form of a descriptive single case study was chosen as the most appropriate research design method for this thesis. Hancock and Algozzine (2017)

recommend the use of qualitative research methods in cases when there is an incomplete understanding of a certain topic and deeper knowledge is desirable. The goal of qualitative research is to understand and interpret examined circumstances, primarily from the insider's perspective, that being the perspective of the participants, not the researcher.

Case studies are a specific method of qualitative research. Robert Yin (2009), the leading advocate of case study research, describes a case study as an empirical analysis that explores contemporary phenomena in its real-life environment, particularly when the lines between the phenomenon and its context are unclear. Case study research design is used particularly when the purpose of a study is answering the "how" and "why" questions, the relevant behaviours cannot be influenced, and the investigator has little or no control over the events.

Hancock and Algozzine (2017) specify that case studies are intended to provide a deeper level of detail and understanding in the form of intensive and richly descriptive analyses based on various sources of information. The key contribution of the case study research emerges from its ability to conceptualise and generate theory, conclusions and practical applications on account of the analysis and interpretation of data (Gummesson, 2017).

Gaya and Smith (2016) argue that the use of an in-depth single case study research methodology is the most practical and appropriate approach within the domain of strategic management for the purpose of testing, extending or generating theory. A single case study, as defined by Stake (2010), is a type of research methodology that focuses on examining a unique phenomenon, aiming to uncover insights specific to that case. The advantages of single case study research are highlighted by Riddler (2017), who notes that it includes comprehensive descriptions and analyses that provide an in-depth understanding of the specific case and its particular circumstances. This approach can help create or validate concepts by identifying unexpected patterns and relationships.

Prague was selected as the research subject due to the limited existing research on the city's branding efforts, presenting an opportunity to contribute valuable insights to the field. The author's connection to the city administration played a crucial role in the research process, enabling easy access to key stakeholders and granting permission to examine strategic materials relevant to Prague's city branding initiatives. This access allowed for a more

comprehensive and in-depth examination of the city's branding concepts, strategies, challenges, and potential solutions, enriching the study's overall depth and scope.

### 3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

To advance the understanding of the concept of city branding, encourage its wider application and stimulate further research in this matter, this thesis' research methods include semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and content analysis of data pulled from a mix of relevant strategic materials and policy documents. The primary research period for the interviews was determined by the previous electoral period, marked by the 2018 and 2022 municipal elections.

#### 3.2.1 Content Analysis of Strategic Policy Documents

Six strategic documents of Prague's metropolitan government and municipal organisations were selected as the basis for the analytical part of the thesis. The documents are either publicly available from the official websites of these institutions or are internal documents provided for the purposes of this thesis. The analysed documents are summarised below in Table 1.

<b>Key Policy Documents</b>		
<b>Title</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Issue Year</b>
Strategic Plan for the City of Prague <sup>1</sup>	IPR Prague	2016
Economic Foreign Policy Strategy <sup>2</sup>	Economic Diplomacy Unit, Project Management Department, Prague City Hall	2018
Prague Regional Innovation Strategy <sup>3</sup>	IPR Prague	2014

<sup>1</sup> Strategický plán hl. m. Prahy

<sup>2</sup> Strategie ekonomické zahraniční politiky 2018

<sup>3</sup> Regionální inovační strategie hlavního města Prahy - RIS HMP



Putting Prague First: Strategy for Sustainable Tourism of Prague <sup>4</sup>	Prague City Tourism	2020
MICE strategy 2022+ <sup>5</sup>	Prague Convention Bureau	2021
Analysis of Prague's Innovation Ecosystem <sup>6</sup>	Petr Suška <i>et al.</i>	2020

Table 1: Key Policy Documents

### 3.2.2 Semi-structured Interviews

In order to gain a more detailed insight into perceptions and attitudes towards a given phenomenon from the perspective of individuals, in-depth individual semi-structured interviews were chosen as one of the data sources. The goal of in-depth interviews is to collect information from individuals about their behaviour, opinions, feelings and experiences, allowing for a better understanding of the mindset of the target groups and their perspective (Longfield, 2004).

According to Hancock and Algozzine (2017), semi-structured interviews are highly suitable for case study research. This approach involves asking predetermined open-ended questions with flexible wording, providing initial insights into the researchers' inquiries. Additionally, during these interviews, the researcher uses follow-up questions to delve further into subjects of interest of the interviewees. This method encourages respondents to express themselves openly and freely, in order to describe the world from their own perspectives as opposed to just the researcher's viewpoint. Moreover, the semi-structured interview format provides the researcher with a more flexible approach and a wider scope for reciprocity towards the interviewee. The ability to tailor the interview to the needs of the research during the interviewing process is an effective way to achieve more relevant data and penetrate into greater depth at the same time (Berg, 2007; Galletta, 2013).

For the objective of this research, participants were selected based on their suitability and ability to answer the research questions. This approach follows the purposeful sampling method

<sup>4</sup> Koncepce příjezdového cestovního ruchu hlavního města Prahy: Zájmy Prahy na prvním místě

<sup>5</sup> MICE strategie 2022+

<sup>6</sup> Analýza inovačního ekosystému Prahy

used in qualitative research to identify and select insightful and well-informed cases related to the examined phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). In addition to knowledge and experience, the authors emphasise the necessity of being available and willing to participate, as well as the ability to communicate experiences and ideas in a clear, expressive and reflective manner. All those prerequisites were fulfilled by the interviewees in the presented case.

In pursuit of the research objectives, the decisive criteria for participant selection were: professional involvement in the City of Prague or the municipal ecosystem in the period of 2018-2022, knowledge of the inner workings of the environment and involvement in strategic or marketing activities with the aim of presenting Prague to foreign audiences. Interviewees with comparable profiles were chosen to strengthen the comparison features, limiting the pool of eligible participants. A total of 11 participants were invited to participate in the research. However, three of them either did not respond to the invitation or, on the day of the interview, the interview did not take place due to personal reasons.

Finally, a total of eight participants were involved in the research, including representatives of the city government, public administration and municipal organisations, who had been working in their positions during the studied period and had been directly involved in the development of the strategic communication of the City of Prague. The list of participants is presented in Table 2.

<b>Interview Participants</b>	
MUDr. Zdeněk Hřib	Mayor of the City of Prague <sup>7</sup>
Mgr. Ing. Jaromír Beránek	Representative of the Prague City Assembly <sup>8</sup>
Mgr. Tereza Hrušková	Head of the International Relations Unit, City of Prague
Mgr. Lenka Kolářová	Economic Diplomacy Specialist <sup>9</sup> , City of Prague
Mgr. Jana Adamcová	Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors, Prague City Tourism

<sup>7</sup> Currently First Deputy Mayor of Prague

<sup>8</sup> Currently Chairman of the International Relations and EU funds Committee

<sup>9</sup> Currently Representative of the City of Prague to the EU

Roman Muška	Director, Prague Convention Bureau
Mgr. Ondřej Boháč	Director, Prague Institute of Planning and Development
Petr Suška, MSc.	Member of the Board of Directors, OICT a.s.

Table 2: Interview Participants

The interviews lasted approximately 30-40 minutes. The conversation began with a brief introduction of the course and the expected duration of the interview. Prior to the start of the interview, each respondent was informed of their right not to answer the questions and the possibility to request to terminate the interview if necessary. The research participants were then asked to sign an informed consent. The respondents were also assured that the interview would be processed for academic purposes only.

Each interview had a predetermined flow structure and a set of questions based on three thematic areas (Prague now, Problems, Solutions). A total of 15 core interview questions aimed to examine the branding efforts of the City of Prague based on the interviewees' position and tenure within the studied timeframe, particularly from the viewpoints of their divisions or bureaus. During the interviews, some of the questions were tailored to the course of the interview, and in some cases, as the chosen research method allowed to ask follow-up questions, the interview did not follow the intended question set. The three main thematic areas were, however, retained in each of the interviews. In addition, at the end of the interview, all participants were asked to add their own perspectives and clarify any gaps that they felt had arisen during the interview. The interviews were conducted in the Czech language, recorded, transcribed into text format and then translated into English.

### 3.2.3 Data Analysis Method

Case study research involves an ongoing examination and interpretation of collected information to develop preliminary conclusions and refine research questions. Most case study methodologies share a common process, involving repetitive and ongoing reviews of accumulated information to identify recurrent patterns, themes, or categories. The thematic analysis involves examining each piece of data in relation to a specific research question to identify patterns and construct themes supported by all available data. The themes must be purposeful, derived from a comprehensive analysis of relevant data, distinct yet connected,

adequately specific and explanatory, and of comparable complexity (Hancock and Algozzine, 2017).

The collected data sets from semi-structured interviews were extensive and offered valuable insights into the research questions set for this study. The data reached a point of natural saturation, with no new themes or patterns emerging from the information. The collected data was then cross-checked and triangulated into the key thematic areas. Subsequently, open coding was used to create basic categories for the chosen themes, representing the main characteristics of the phenomena, summarised in Table 3.

<b>Key Thematic Areas</b>	
<b>Prague now</b>	Perception
	Tourism
<b>City branding</b>	Definition
	Activities
	Goals
	Stakeholders
<b>Problems</b>	Political instability
	Interest
	Strategic vision
	Fragmentation
	Timing
	Financing
	Knowledge
<b>Solutions</b>	Guarantor

	Education
	Recommendations (others)

Table 3: Key Thematic Areas

## **4 CASE STUDY: PRAGUE**

The structure of the following case study is divided into six key subsections that will consist of a descriptive analysis of selected strategic documents and analysis of the individual interviews. First and foremost, an introduction to Prague will be presented to offer an initial insight and context of the case, followed by an analysis of primary stakeholders at the City Hall and municipal organizations. Next, a thorough examination of six key strategic documents will be presented. Lastly, the study will illustrate the main themes derived from interviews, encompassing the current perception of Prague, city branding activities, encountered challenges, and potential solutions.

### **4.1 Prague in Context**

Prague, or the ‘heart of Europe’, as locals like to call it lovingly, is the capital and largest city of the Czech Republic. It acts not only as the political centre of the country but also as a cultural, scientific, economic and educational one. By 2018, Prague has grown to accommodate close to 1,3 million inhabitants (approximately 12 % of the Czech Republic’s population), while an estimated further 300 000 people spent time in the city daily for various reasons. As its nickname suggests, Prague is well connected geographically to the rest of Europe and constantly ranks among the top EU performers when it comes to GDP per capita (IPR Praha, 2015; RIS HMP, 2014).

Prague profits from having a high concentration of academic facilities. Large research centres are located there along with eight public universities and colleges, most notably Charles University and Czech Technical University. This results in a highly educated workforce with around 30 % of inhabitants having gone through tertiary education and around 85 % having finished at least a secondary one (Ibid.).

On a state level, Prague shows clear dominance over the rest of the Czech cities. As already mentioned, it houses around 12 % of the state’s citizens, and even more importantly, produces one-quarter of the whole country’s GDP (1,193 billion vs 4,773 billion Czech Crowns in 2016). The medium wages are the highest, while unemployment rates tend to stay the lowest. Investments in research reached 34,5 % of the Czech Republic's total in 2016 and a similar percentage of researchers also worked in Prague during that year (Ibid.).

When it comes to the immigrant population, Prague has seen a considerable increase in the 21st century. Starting at 77 922 in the year 2004, it has grown to 195 068 by 2017, resulting in foreign citizens amounting to more than 16 % of the city's population. Even more importantly, the foreign population is remarkably economically active. Out of the 195 thousand expats residing in Prague in 2017, almost 186 thousand contributed to the labour market, representing at least 20 % of the city's workforce. However, the countries of origin of the foreign citizens have to be taken into account. By far the largest group of expats comes from Slovakia (close to 34 % in 2017), a country that used to form one state together with the Czech Republic, and whose citizens therefore have little trouble blending in culturally and linguistically. Ukrainians represented the second biggest group of immigrants with 23,5 % of the whole foreign population in 2017, while nationalities like Russian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Vietnamese, Polish and British each accounted for between 2 to 5 % (IPR Praha, 2018).

However, on the European level, the competition reaches completely different heights. When it comes to GDP per capita, Prague falls way behind cities like Paris and Vienna but reaches comparable numbers to Berlin and outperforms for example Budapest (Statista, 2020; Český statistický úřad, 2023; Šíková, 2021). Surprisingly though, given that Prague is often regarded as an affordable destination, locals are confronted with considerably disadvantageous purchasing power standards, making life in Prague comparatively even more expensive than in Paris.

Where Prague excels though, are unemployment rates. Unemployment has been diametrically lower compared to Western European cities, giving Prague's citizens many job opportunities (Eurostat, 2023). This can of course work both ways, as the city continually struggles with shortages of employees in certain specialised sectors. That comes in spite of Prague having an unusually high percentage of citizens, who have finished tertiary education, probably as a result of free public university programmes. Needless to say, talent attraction through city branding offers a potentially game-changing opportunity. Especially since Prague scores high on liveability, notably thanks to its amount of greenery, general safety and excellent public transport.

## **4.2 Primary Stakeholders**

According to Henninger et al.'s (2016) classification of stakeholders, which divides stakeholders into four distinct categories, the most dominant group is primary stakeholders. This group consists first and foremost of the city government and municipal organisations. As stated in Chapter [2.3.4 Stakeholder Management](#), *“these stakeholders assume the decision-making roles within the branding processes and bear the responsibility for creating a strategy that aligns with the interest of all stakeholders. Moreover, they formulate a cohesive brand message that is communicated consistently throughout the city branding strategy.”* This chapter provides an overview of the specific primary stakeholder in the context of Prague.

### **4.2.1 Prague City Hall**

The most obvious primary stakeholder for devising a place branding strategy is Prague City Hall, especially its political and public administration structures. They represent clear authority when it comes to major decision-making concerning the city and possesses both an apparatus and a budget through which to create and execute the strategy.

#### **4.2.1.1 The Mayor**

The Mayor of Prague represents the single most relevant political stakeholder for any large strategic steps to be taken by the city. He does not hold ultimate power over municipal decisions but his authority and the importance of his position make him an ideal leader of a city branding project. At the same time, the subject matter of international relations falls under the scope of the Mayor's official responsibilities.

For the studied period of 2018-2022, Mr Zdeněk Hřib from the Pirate Party assumed this position, promising a liberal approach with a stronger focus on international relations. His views on city branding and the work he has done during his tenure are analysed in the analytical research part of this study, thanks to his provided interview.

#### **4.2.1.2 Prague City Council and Assembly**

The two elected decision-making bodies of the City of Prague are the City Assembly and the City Council. All strategic documents have to be approved by the Council, and if they exceed a specific level of importance, also by the Assembly. This makes a large-scale city branding strategy a topic on which the majority of the Assembly would in all likelihood have to agree.



During the years 2018-2022, both mentioned political bodies were led by the Pirate Party in a coalition with Praha Sobě (Prague Together) and Starostové a nezávislí (Mayors and Independents) political parties. Same as Mayor Hřib, this government set on a clearly liberal path.

#### **4.2.1.3 Media and Marketing Department (OMM)**

When it comes to non-political administrative structures of the Prague City Hall, the natural department connected to branding activities is the marketing one. This department, led in the studied years by Jana Berková, another respondent of the primary research interviews, is responsible for all the marketing and PR efforts coming from the city and targeting local citizens. That being said, OMM cannot act as the sole responsible body within the city administration for the branding project, since its agenda does not include branding/marketing targeting foreign audiences. This makes the department an important actor and stakeholder within the process of creating a strategy, but not the obvious leader.

#### **4.2.1.4 International Relations Unit**

The International Relations Unit represents another important section of the administrative body, with its agenda covering communication with international actors, but as with the marketing department, the leadership role could face opposition. The history of the Unit has been somewhat turbulent, with the agenda belonging to the Culture Department for a long time. The Unit itself has been officially created as an independent body towards the end of the 2018-2022 electoral term, led by Tereza Hrušková, who also gave her opinions on the city branding strategies and efforts for the purposes of this study. Despite its establishment towards the end of the electoral term, the Unit has quickly adopted the creation of a place branding strategy focused on talent attraction as one of its major priorities.

### **4.2.2 City Organisations**

#### **4.2.2.1 Institute of Planning and Development of the City of Prague**

Institute of Planning and Development of the City of Prague is an organisation funded by the city and primarily responsible for its long-term strategic development, especially in the field of spatial planning. Even though the Institute focuses first and foremost on urbanism and related areas of architecture and infrastructure, it serves as the principal actor in devising long-term development strategies for the city, namely the [4.3.1 Strategic Plan for the City of Prague](#) (IPR

Praha, n.d.). During the studied years, IPR Prague was led by Ondřej Boháč, who also contributed to this research as an interviewee.

#### 4.2.2.1.1 Creative Prague

Creative Prague started as a project within IPR Prague in 2015 with the goal of actively and strategically developing cultural and creative sectors, providing them with support and promoting their activities. In 2021 it officially became an independent municipal organisation (Kreativní Praha, n.d.). Prague's strong cultural presence contributes significantly to its reputation, and Creative Prague's involvement in place-making and development further underscores its relevance in potential city branding activities.

#### 4.2.2.2 Prague City Tourism

Prague City Tourism, is the official certified DMO of the City of Prague, which was established in 2020 from the original Prague Information Service. In 2020, it became a joint-stock company with a considerable level of independence. Their activities are focused on developing both domestic and incoming tourism, primarily concentrating on destination marketing and related services (Prague City Tourism, 2023). Consequently, PCT possesses considerable experience and expertise in place branding compared to other city departments and organizations. In 2021, PCT introduced a new brand position for Prague, portraying the city as 'bohemian,' 'classy,' and 'fused' (Prague City Tourism, 2021). However, a notable limitation of these branding activities is that PCT solely focuses on tourism, neglecting talent attraction and does not aim to present Prague as a vibrant economic hub and livable city to a broader audience. As a result, its potential leadership position in city branding efforts on a larger scale is hindered by this narrow focus.

#### 4.2.2.3 Prague Convention Bureau

Prague ranks among the most popular congress cities in the world, in recent years it has been ranked in the top ten destinations in the popularity charts. The Prague Convention Bureau is the official convention bureau of the City of Prague. It was established in 2008 as a non-profit organisation. It focuses on business tourism, consultancy services for official event organisations and, most importantly, *“strengthening the positive awareness of the city of Prague as a convention and incentive destination”* (Prague Convention Bureau, 2023). The goal of stimulating economic growth with branding activities targeting businessmen, scientists

and experts from various fields affirms PCB as a valuable stakeholder for any talent attraction-based city branding efforts.

#### **4.2.2.4 Prague Innovation Institute**

The Prague Innovation Institute represents another city institution focused on economic development. It was created in 2020 as a public benefit organisation in order to “*plan, support and advance education, environmental protection, the city's infrastructure, and scientific, R&D, creative, cultural and innovational enterprises and non-business activities in order to improve Prague's competitiveness*” (Pražský inovační institut, 2023). This, however ambitious, objective, establishes PII as another relevant place branding actor within the municipal ecosystem.

#### **4.2.2.5 Operátor ICT**

Last but not least, Operátor ICT is Prague's joint-stock company, which takes on projects mostly related to information and communication technologies, smart cities and big data. Its aim is to make the city more liveable using innovative practices and new technologies (Operátor ICT, n.d.). Through the smart city projects especially, coupled with participation in large-scale international projects, OICT has become an important player on the city level and could therefore be considered a suitable partner in branding activities.

### **4.3 Key strategic documents (2018-2022)**

This chapter introduces the initial phase of the primary research, which is content analysis. The analysis examines official strategic documents that have been created by the city representatives from 2018 to 2022. It provides a comprehensive overview of each of the documents, identifying the specific areas they focus on, their main goals and the city's (intended) approach to implementation. Furthermore, the chapter analyses if and how place branding is mentioned in the strategies, seeking to determine the level of familiarity with the concept in Prague's key strategic documents.

#### **4.3.1 Strategic Plan for the City of Prague**

The official Strategic Plan for the City of Prague was last updated in the year 2016 after a rigorous design process managed by IPR Prague and involving dozens of experts, city representatives along with the general public. This high-profile conceptual document was

championed by the former Mayor, Adriana Krnáčová, and finally approved by the City Assembly in 2017 (IPR Praha, 2017). Although the year of approval of the strategy falls outside of the scope of this study, the plan represents a medium-long-term vision of the city and therefore as a reference to its systematic development in the years 2018-2022 as well.

The Plan consists of three sections - the analysis, the proposal and the implementation. It identifies the most pressing challenges Prague has encountered and will confront in the future, sets goals to be achieved, and communicates official priorities. Very importantly, *“the plan provides a framework to citizens, investors and public institutions of how the city wants to develop and offers them the opportunity to realise their own activities in accordance with the orientation of the city”* (Ibid.). It applies to all areas of the city’s development and can be considered the ultimate reference to where Prague is heading conceptually.

In this regard, the Plan presents a vision of Prague in 2030. Prior to that, the authors want the city to become an inspiring metropolis, one that people admire primarily for its future, rather than the past. The Czech capital therefore needs to become as forward facing as possible, making confidence, competitiveness and flexibility its core strengths. This all aligns with the overall goal of positioning Prague as a very liveable city that is considered ideal for life and business.

According to the Plan, the goal should be achieved by no longer relying on reputation and status quo, but proactively addressing the modern challenges faced by urban areas, including ageing population, environmental issues or migration. According to the Plan, culture serves as the fundamental cornerstone for Prague's future success. Culture, in all its diverse forms, is envisioned to be a part of all of the city’s efforts, influencing interactions between citizens and shaping business practices. Along with culture, the Plan emphasizes the importance of social stability, thoughtful development of the public space and good governance practices (IPR Praha, 2016b).

Building on this objective, the Strategic plan identifies five interconnected priorities: prosperity, civic society, authenticity, social cohesion and beauty. Out of those, the goal to become an “authentic city” is the most relevant from a branding perspective. It advocates for an easily understandable and memorable brand achieved by setting marketing priorities for the city’s cultural brand and accentuating the evolution of the city. Culture is seen as a major

advantage compared to similar cities, and the strategy suggests branding Prague as a city with *“a unique atmosphere, where people from all around the world go to ‘breathe in the scent’ of culture, cultural life and historic heritage in both its authenticity and its own lifestyle”* (IPR Praha, 2016a).

Importantly, the authors of the Plan acknowledge that even though Prague has a well-established brand, it is predominantly based on history and beauty and therefore cannot fully exploit the potential of the city. To enhance the brand's effectiveness, it must align with reality, having support from citizens and fostering collaboration with the city ecosystem to make Prague appealing to visitors and investors. In conclusion, Prague's representatives should build a unified international image of the city as a stable location, highlighting not only its rich cultural heritage but also emphasizing modern culture and, above all, its exceptional liveability.

Furthermore, the Plan also stresses the importance of collaboration with partners from the private sector. Especially when it comes to business trips abroad incorporating various partners, not only the visual identity should be in sync, but everyone should work on creating a shared portfolio that can be presented as one to interested foreign parties. Hand in hand with that, further enhancement of provided services in Prague should take place. That means primarily promoting tourism outside the city centre, supporting business tourism and always keeping in mind cooperation among various city stakeholders.

In conclusion, the Strategic Plan for the City of Prague creates a vision of Prague in 2030, to which all the city stakeholders should aspire in the medium-long term. It provides a general framework for all consequent strategies developed by the city's various representative bodies. Culture is defined as the building block for the city's development and, from the branding perspective, a need for a change towards a more talent-attraction-oriented narrative is acknowledged, as well as the importance of city stakeholder cooperation.

#### **4.3.2 Analysis of Prague's Innovation Ecosystem**

The Analysis of Prague's Innovation Ecosystem, written by Petr Suška in 2020, aligns with the principles of the Strategic Plan. The study begins by identifying the most critical challenges Prague must confront in terms of innovations. It then offers an overview of the active entities from the public, private, and academic sectors involved in the field, detailing their respective

roles. The analysis includes examples of local best practices and solutions, a SWOT analysis, an assessment of the funds invested by different actors, and a benchmark analysis comparing Prague to other cities. As a result, the study presents recommendations for future progress and advancement.

Apart from aiming to improve the field of innovations and therefore also Prague's attractiveness to foreign talent, branding is only briefly touched on in Suška's Analysis. Relevant points include expressing the need to create a united vision of the city (and its innovation ecosystem) and systematically communicate it to the outside world. This goal of course goes hand in hand with talent attraction, as the advances in innovative solutions should both fuel and be fuelled by the influx of talented individuals to the city. Last but not least, the Analysis emphasises the critical significance of a strong city brand in providing numerous benefits and granting Prague a competitive edge over other municipalities. Those benefits include for example easier access to relevant technology and data, or the power to effortlessly attract esteemed partners who view association with a strong Prague brand as a valuable marketing asset (Petr Suška et al., 2020).

### **4.3.3 Prague Regional Innovation Strategy**

The Prague Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS) directly elaborates on specific goals defined in the [Strategic Plan for the City of Prague](#). It was created by a large group of experts and updated for the years 2014-2020 with the primary objective of securing access to European Union funds. It particularly focuses on the fields of research, development and innovation, highlighting the need for the city's executive bodies to identify an appropriate role that will benefit all the stakeholders involved in the area (RIS HMP, 2014).

The strategy bears particular relevance for Prague's branding activities. It targets actors within the city, who see the importance of *"increasing the competitiveness of the capital and the domestic and international awareness of the city's economic parameters and qualities"* (Inovacni Strategie, n.d.). This intention stems from a premise of the RIS, which indicates that Prague has a much higher potential when it comes to innovative activities than is being reflected on an international scale. Particular weaknesses range from inadequate participation of city representatives at international events to the absence of a foreign marketing strategy built on economic values.

#### **4.3.4 Economic Foreign Policy Strategy 2018**

The part of the RIS focusing on branding-related activities is further developed by the Economic Foreign Policy Strategy created during the studied timeframe of 2018-2022. The objective of the Strategy is to get Prague to a point where it acts as a magnet for international talents and companies with high added value including local and international start-ups. This objective should be supported by creating a professional online presence that provides state-of-the-art information services to foreign talent and companies and helping Prague become a liveable, modern and cosmopolitan city in general.

The Strategy offers a precise action plan defining specific steps to be taken in order to achieve its goals. The Economic Foreign Relations Strategy outlines a range of activities, projects, and priorities to be executed during the years 2018-2022. These initiatives include establishing an international website to showcase Prague's economic activities, operating the Expat Centre Prague, consolidating the display of Prague's economic ecosystem through city representatives and various organizations, reinforcing the city's position as a regional economic leader, leveraging the potential of the Prague House in Brussels for international cooperation, attracting talent and start-ups, advocating for easier visa access, and launching an international branding campaign (Usnesení Rady č. 3193; Usnesení Rady č. 1212). From a branding perspective, this comprehensive strategy stands out as the most relevant and significant strategic document produced by the city during the specified period. However, it should be noted that not all of these activities were actually implemented as planned (see Chapter [4.4.3.3 Activities](#)).

#### **4.3.5 Strategy for Sustainable Tourism of Prague: Putting Prague First**

Another strategy relevant to this study was created by Prague City Tourism over the COVID period in 2020. It highlights the need to change the city's approach to tourism in order to better benefit the citizens and visitors alike. It points out that most of the finances accumulated by tourism flow to the state budget instead of the city, therefore resulting in minimal benefits for the well-being of Prague's citizens. Furthermore, the challenges of mass tourism pose a threat to the residents' quality of life, caused by overcrowding in the city centre and disrespectful behaviour from the visitors. This has an impact on the visitors' experience as it diminishes the authenticity, quality and charm, and consequently hurts the brand of Prague.

The Strategy adopts a destination management approach rather than a marketing-oriented one, emphasising the importance of internal city stakeholder cooperation. It advocated for Prague to focus on developing people-centred public spaces that build on the citizens' priorities. This involves addressing critical aspects such as quality of life, sustainability, security and protection of its cultural and historical heritage, before continuing to attract more tourists. In this sense, the Strategy for Sustainable Tourism stresses the importance of steering the brand of Prague towards a liveable city rather than merely a tourist 'attraction'.

#### **4.3.6 MICE Strategy 2022+**

In response to the challenges posed by Covid-19, Prague Convention Bureau devised a new strategy for the MICE sector in Prague. Prior to the pandemic, Prague belonged among the top 10 of the most popular congress destinations and the industry was creating up to 14 400 full-time jobs. The Strategy defines the approach PCB and its partners need to adopt not only to restore the pre-Covid standards but also to surpass them. The vision for Prague is to become one of the most innovative, inspirational and sustainable destinations in the world, with the MICE sector being responsible for up to 25 % of tourism profits in the city.

From the branding perspective, the Strategy calls for the rebranding of Prague from a purely leisure destination to a business hub. The city should establish itself as a leader in specific strategic fields of expertise, portraying itself as inspirational, innovative, safe and sustainable. The way to achieve the goal is by supporting and promoting local research, scientific and innovation success stories while integrating them into the global context. Marketing campaigns should actively position Prague as a city with first-class congress infrastructure, which pursues hosting major events in strategically defined fields of expertise. In order to fulfil the vision, ongoing intense cooperation with local stakeholders needs to be set up along with strategic international partnerships. Last but not least, the Strategy sees education and an increase in investments as fundamental long-term components for achieving success.

#### **4.4 Perception of the Brand of Prague**

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the data gathered from individual semi-structured interviews in order to provide insight into the state of Prague's branding initiatives during the studied period of 2018-2022. The findings from these interviews will offer a deeper



understanding of the current state of Prague's branding efforts, as well as the challenges faced in the city's pursuit of an effective and impactful city brand.

#### **4.4.1 Specifics and Problems of the Image of Prague**

During the interviews, respondents presented a mixed perception of Prague's branding. While recognising the value of its historical roots and prominent landmarks, there were also some concerns about the city's complacency and the need to focus on the future, innovation, entrepreneurship and a more modern image in order to compete globally.

Jana Adamcová from Prague City Tourism summarised the image of Prague into three pillars that are in line with the official PCT's brand positioning: bohemian, classy and fused. This strategy highlights the city's uniqueness, the free mindset of its residents and its cultural tradition. Prague, she claims, is a liberal and lively cultural community with a rich history of many subcultures coexisting together in peace: *"We really wanted to emphasise that Prague has always been a crossroads of business and artists and intellectuals and so on. The fact that Prague is the way it is, has allowed us to let these completely diverse elements live here and interact, whether they're cultural, religious, architectural or otherwise."*

All of the respondents highlighted the city's historical strength and recognizability, which is concentrated primarily around iconic landmarks like Charles Bridge, Prague Castle, the Astronomical Clock and the city centre in general. As Ondřej Boháč, director of IPR Prague, acknowledges: *"It's what sells the city. Everybody knows this, and they don't know if it's in Chechnya or the Czech Republic, but everybody knows Prague."* All of the respondents agreed that Prague's brand awareness is high and pointed out that Prague is better known abroad than the Czech Republic.

However, as Boháč further observes, *"the city lives a little bit from its essence and by inertia and that there's actually nothing happening here that could be well presented"*. This view was also echoed by Petr Suška (Member of the Board at OICT), highlighting the lack of systematic communication activities: *"In general, I don't have a fundamental awareness of the brand of Prague. I don't think Prague is actively communicating anything, it's just living off the history and the essence of the legacy of previous generations, but certainly not the present."*

Lenka Kolářová from the City Hall elaborates on this opinion and further criticises Prague for being too comfortable as a capital city: *“Prague is still dealing with the fact that some of these things are here, they are working, and that's it.”* She argues that the city's historical brand and past achievements may hinder its progress towards becoming a more vibrant and modern destination for entrepreneurs, students and startups: *“To me, Prague is a terrible slob. Prague has become stuck or cemented in being the capital and somehow thinks it gets everything on a platter and doesn't have to do anything for it. By being the capital city, of course, the infrastructure is there, and the opportunities are numerous. And the city doesn't realise that it's not enough, and by staying in the same place it's losing out terribly in the competition.”*

Zdeněk Hřib, the Mayor during the research period, pointed out that the brand of Prague is better known than the national brand, but at the same time expressed a concern that the city may not effectively communicate its aspirations for innovation and the future: *“What are we saying to the world that we are? Because Prague is very well known abroad. I dare to say it's better known than the Czech Republic as such. And of course, we are known here because of the cheap alcohol and the nice architecture and music. But I don't think people associate us much with the things we want to communicate, innovation and so on. So that's the problem. We can be proud of that past, but the question is whether that's what to expect in the future.”*

Jaromír Beránek, a member of the Prague City Assembly, emphasised the need for Prague to focus on being more than just a tourist destination. He also noted that Prague should advertise itself as an appealing location for entrepreneurs, innovation and education and capitalise on its untapped potential, to get a chance to compete on a global scale: *“I see Prague as an attractive city, as one of the top European tourist destinations, as a city that I think is quite successful in sending the message that it is safe, that there is a relatively high quality of life, that there is accessible, reliable and fast public transport. However, there is very little talk about Prague being an interesting destination for startups, for innovative activities, and that entrepreneurship would thrive here in a broader sense. Unfortunately, what I would also very much like to see happen, for example, is that Prague is perceived as an attractive destination for university studies.”*

Overall, the findings suggest that Prague faces challenges in its branding efforts. While it is well-known for its historical charm, there is a desire to promote Prague as a modern and innovative city, appealing to various audiences, including entrepreneurs, students, and those

seeking cultural experiences beyond typical tourist attractions. The brand positioning of Prague should strike a balance between its rich historical history and its potential for modern development and progress in a variety of industries. There is a need for a more comprehensive and innovative branding strategy to showcase Prague's true potential and attract a wider range of visitors and residents. It is important to note that the idea of balancing Prague's historical charm with a modern and innovative image to appeal to diverse audiences is also developed in the [4.3.1 Strategic Plan for the City of Prague](#). Despite acknowledging the importance of this approach, concrete actions to implement such a strategy have yet to materialize.

#### **4.4.2 Prague as a Tourist Destination**

One of the most visible and recognisable perceptions of Prague is as an attractive tourist destination. As mentioned above, this brand image has been carefully crafted and is addressed in Chapter [4.3.5 Strategy for Sustainable Tourism of Prague: Putting Prague First](#). However, the interviews highlighted several problems with tourism in Prague. The dominance of cheap and low-quality tourism, overcrowding in the city centre, lack of variety in services, difficulties in regulating and enforcing change and the overall negative image of the city are the primary issues.

Many respondents mentioned that Prague is known abroad for cheap alcohol, stag parties and prostitution, which has led to an image of Prague as a party destination rather than a sophisticated city. As Lenka Kolářová mentioned: *“The position that we have is that Prague is great for a two-day trip for cheap beer, but it's not perceived as a knowledge hub, as a cultural centre of Europe, that's just missing. We're kind of a grey area and just one of the checklist items when someone is driving through Europe. Sure, it would be a shame to leave Prague out because there's Charles Bridge, Prague Castle and still cheap beer, but there's not the depth. I see that as a huge shame.”*

Tereza Hrušková, the Head of [4.2.1.4 International Relations Unit](#), elaborated with a personal experience of encountering young tourists in the city centre. She observed that Prague is often perceived as a destination for cheap alcohol and parties, lacking recognition for its potential in arts, culture and other areas: *“Now I have a very vivid experience of talking to young Dutch guys. They came here as tourists, they all studied at good universities and they were not fools. And they just came to Prague for the cheap alcohol, for the parties and for the easy girls.”*

*Prostitution is an incredible draw and this is what they expect. And the moment one tries to offer them an alternative in the form of art or leisure, they say they'd rather go to London."* She sees the problem of the current branding in not being able to communicate Prague's full range of offerings to international audiences: *"I think that's the problem with the branding, that we're not able to tell people that Prague can be at least as good as London in some things."*

Boháč identified the historic city centre as the area most affected by the negative aspects of tourism in Prague: *"Tourism is concentrated in an awfully small area, and the people who used to live there don't live there anymore. That means that politicians aren't really confronted to any serious degree with the fact that there's some unmanageable environment and they can't put their kids to bed at night or do any shopping. Nobody lives there anymore. Central Prague has lost population, it has 30,000 residents today while in 1990, 100,000 people lived there. It's just a dead city, where they've made a kind of ghetto for tourists, so they don't bother anybody."* Hrušková confirmed this, emphasising the historical and cultural importance of the area: *"For Prague 1, there are negative aspects of mass tourism, which is not of high quality, and everyone turns a blind eye to it. If we take that into account that we're talking about the capital, Prague 1 is actually the cradle of our Czech mentality, there are a lot of institutions here, we have Prague Castle, the president, and we let it be looted by drunk young teenagers who don't bring any added value to the city."*

As pointed out by Suška, Beránek and Hřib, the lack of clear rules and effective regulation in the tourism sector contributes to the negative aspects of mass tourism in the city. Beránek calls for clear rules and their enforcement: *"What is a great pity is that we are not able, especially in the tourism sector, to define and enforce some clear rules, leading to a lot of chaos. It needs to be said that market mechanisms are totally failing in this respect."* According to Suška: *"The city's brand as far as tourism is concerned is being distorted by people coming here to drink and have cheap stag parties. That's gonna be awfully hard to change. And we're struggling with something that's self-inflicted, and institutionally we have no way of enforcing that cheap, disgusting tourism to actually not be here at all"*.

However, Hřib notes that the city government lacks the authority and power to address these negative aspects: *"This is due to some history and, in the case of alcohol, probably the excise tax settings, lousy government regulation of Airbnb and the overall decadence of the post-war development. It's very complicated, with the mentality that the public administration can't*

*really be trusted, and for that reason, it's best not to give it any power. So that's why the historic centre looks the way it looks. That's why we just have these Thai massages and such in the historic streets. Part of the reason is that Prague doesn't actually have enough power to handle its own affairs because it just doesn't have it embedded in the law."*

Prague's long-standing reputation as a party destination with cheap beer and stag parties presents a big challenge in transforming the city's image into a more sophisticated destination. As Suška stated, this shift would require a tremendous amount of work, resources, and good leadership: *"I think it's going to be an awfully big challenge to change that image when you have this long tradition of being more or less Disneyland with cheap beer and pretty girls. That's awfully hard to change, it's going to take a lot of effort and a lot of money. I don't actually know if there's the courage, the will and the desire to change it."*

Zdeněk Hřib agreed that Prague's reputation is not as positive as he would wish, and expressed the need to attract a different kind of tourists by expanding the city's communication to include other aspects, such as cultural programming: *"We have the Prague Spring Festival here, and I, when I was in Taiwan in 2005 as a student, when I said Prague, a guy who was selling pencils in a stationery shop, not even in the capital, he said 'Yeah, that's great'. That's a thing to build on for sure. The Vltava Philharmonic Hall<sup>10</sup> is also trying to attract a different type of tourist than the ones that come around the pubs here."* Boháč also calls for engaging in new forms of tourism and attracting more sophisticated clientele: *"I think there are other forms of tourism that we should be trying to promote in a targeted way. Prague, by its very nature, is always expected to be a cultural city, it has the heritage that it has, but I don't think that's what's being developed there, and it's about architecture and interventions in public space."*

Importantly, Adamcová argues that this issue is already being addressed by PCT in their [4.3.5. Strategy for Sustainable Tourism of Prague: Putting Prague First](#), which highlights the need to bring in more affluent clientele. According to her, the strategy, approved by the City Council in 2020, is already showing results: *"We're seeing an increase in tourist spending, which means that we're able to generate an image and an offer that's making people want to spend more money. At the same time, we've seen in the data that the more expensive restaurants are actually*

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<sup>10</sup> The Vltava Philharmonic Hall is a project of a new concert hall in Prague. It aims to offer great technical facilities and a lively and open cultural space for all visitors. The Vltava Philharmonic is expected to confirm Prague's international reputation as a cultural metropolis and symbol of the Czech musical tradition.

*growing in revenue and traffic. So all indications prove that the image shifts towards a sophisticated city, better city and that we're slowly coming to fruition."*

#### **4.4.3 City Branding Efforts**

Participants expressed various perspectives on city branding. It can be observed that all respondents genuinely understand the discussed issue and were able to provide definitions of city branding that were in line with the theoretical framework.

Overall, city branding is recognised as a complex process of creating a positive image and reputation for the city, while taking into account a variety of perspectives and target audiences. Hrušková links the concept of city branding to the management of reputation: *"Reputation management, actually controlling how your city is perceived abroad or in some international context."* For Roman Muška, the director of [4.2.2.3 Prague Convention Bureau](#), city branding is about creating an idea or impression in the minds of the target audience: *"I think that city branding can be anything more or less evoked when you say Prague, whoever you are."*

Suška defines it as a multifaceted process that communicates the unique attributes of a city: *"City branding is a process that involves a whole range of different activities that lead to communicating a particular destination or place or location and using different means, media, and interventions that bring out some unique attributes of that place."*

Hřib emphasises the importance of defining a unified brand: *"Well, it should be primarily, in my opinion, about the city trying to act together, consolidated, with all of its components, and secondly, trying to communicate a unified message externally,"* while Kolářová highlights the complexity of target audiences and cooperation across different stakeholder groups: *"For me, city branding is the idea that is created in the minds of the target audience. Whether those target groups are tourists, which is the functional line for us, or talent, investors, or even European institutions. That city brand, in my opinion, should be blended from the political to the economic side of the city. So for me, that's what should be associated with the name of Prague or with the name of a particular city in the minds of the target group."*

Finally, Adamcová defines city branding as a result of a long-term vision: *"For me, branding is always a reflection of a long-term vision, be it of an organisation or a city. That is, if everyone*

*- at least at the level of the city leadership - agrees that we want Prague to be richer and more beautiful and have people actually want to live there and not flee, then branding is a way to actually communicate and support that vision. For me, branding is always underneath that level of actually having a vision of where the company should go.”*

Benchmark cities like Vienna, Barcelona, Berlin, Copenhagen and Amsterdam were referred to as examples of effective city branding strategies. Suška made a suggestion that benchmarking against cities with similar cultural backgrounds, such as German-speaking cities, might be a valuable approach: *“I think the benchmark, even for the cultural basis and so, is the German-speaking system, which is Munich, Vienna, and Berlin, if you look at the cities that Prague resembles in some way, whether it's history or approach to urban development work.”* Boháč agrees and further states that the Bavarian territory might be the closest to the Czech mentality: *“I think we need to actually be moving in a similar cultural region when we're doing these considerations, which for us is German-speaking countries plus a chunk of Eastern Bloc. Bohemia is actually the closest in mentality and everything to Bavaria. I think we have to look for something that's not going to be a completely alien species for us.”*

Aside from the German-speaking region, Scandinavian cities were frequently cited as sources of inspiration. Kolářová pointed out Tallinn as a successful example: *“If I want to talk about the benchmark, for me, what I shift towards is mainly the Nordic cities and also the Baltic republics in some cases. Helsinki, Stockholm, Tallinn. Those are the cities that I think are doing it well. And they are able to translate the benefits they get from foreign investment and foreign companies into innovating themselves. And that to me is what ideally should work like that. So the fact that Tallinn is one of the most digitised metropolises in Europe, if not the world, brings benefits for those external foreign entities that come there, as well as for its own citizens. And that's something for me is an example that it works.”*

#### **4.4.3.1 Goals**

To ensure the effectiveness of city branding, the strategies and activities should be aligned with clear and realistic goals. According to Kolářová, this is one of the initial tasks a city should undertake: *“Defining these goals should be one of the first activities you do. Why do you want to do this? Because although I'm a big believer in city branding, if you don't know why you're doing it, I don't think it's worth doing at all because it's never going to work. The passion for why you're doing it and the fuel for why you're doing it won't be there to sustain it long-term.*

*If I'm not able to define those goals, then don't do it at all.*” She mentioned a number of possible objectives, including talent or investment attraction: *“There may be several goals. It could be that foreign students will want to study here, that we will get another European institution, that we will get investors, not from China, but from some countries we want, and that we will increase jobs in Prague. There may be several of these goals, but I think it is very important that the city rationally considers what these goals are and adjusts the city branding accordingly.”*

The defined goals should be in accordance with the overall direction of the city's development strategy and vision. As Beránek suggests: *“The primary goal should be to support the long-term development strategy, mission and vision of the city. That is, to help anchor the positioning of the city both inward and outward. If we are talking about wanting to encourage attracting foreign talent, one of the defined goals should be to focus on supporting entrepreneurship, supporting better tertiary education, and perhaps building affordable housing for people who are staying for a shorter period of time and don't have such a good chance of finding accommodation on the open market.”* Successful city branding can become a tool for driving positive economic transformation and social outcomes: *“Yeah, that is, and let's rather say what are the overarching goals. For me, it's increasing competencies, skills and making Prague more attractive as a destination for foreign investment and helping to transform the local and national economy.”* The defined goals are consistent with the Strategic Plan (see Chapter [4.3.1 Strategic Plan for the City of Prague](#)).

Hrušková recognises the potential of city branding in its ability to address various challenges Prague faces by emphasising the strengths and success stories of Prague: *“Prague has a lot of subtle problems, and I think that city branding can help to a large extent to address a lot of the ills that are here now. The question is what the goal should be. If the goal is to cure some ills so that we can live here better and make this city work better, then I think we need to highlight what's already working well.”* Moreover, city branding could enhance Prague's image as a trusted partner: *“Then I think there are a lot of aspects like attracting foreign investment and working with European structural funds and international organisations and so on. That's where I also think we're actually still kind of the pretty girl from the east, where it's good to have us but not really let us do much of anything because those people haven't built up trust in us. You can work on that just as well with the city branding.”* However, to achieve success, cooperation between the city, state and other stakeholders is crucial: *“Of course, like a lot of*



*these things, it's not just the city branding that will solve it. There you need really very good cooperation with the state, with local government and with all the actors involved. But I think that the city brand is a marketing tool that can show the will of the city to change something. That's where I think it can be important."*

Considering Prague's image problem when it comes to tourism, Boháč argues for a comprehensive approach to city branding, addressing both foreign and domestic visitors: *"I think that the rebranding of Prague is actually very necessary, paradoxically, from the inside - towards tourists, as in not foreign tourists, but domestic tourists. And I see it as a big problem. If we compare it with, for example, the first republic, there was a completely different energy. The state wanted to build its capital."* He continues to describe a shift in perception of Prague in the rest of the Czech Republic, claiming that the city should focus on tackling the so-called pragocentrism and presenting a different image to the world: *Today it's not like that at all. Today it's more like 'those people from Prague'. So I think that's where the rebranding is needed. Because yes, (Prague is) the capital city, but also it would be nice to combat pragocentrism. I mean, are we presenting ourselves like this, is this how is Prague perceived outside? Well, if yes, we're doing something wrong."*

Beránek summarised the expected objectives: *"Well, I think Prague should be perceived as a city that continues to build on its best historical traditions, a city that has ambitions to develop and a city that cuts itself off from some mafia practices. That means a city that is educated, a city that is innovative, a city that is good to live in, and a city where you can rely on the functioning of public infrastructure and public services."*

#### **4.4.3.2 Stakeholders**

Successful city branding strategies are characterised by effective stakeholder management. In the words of Kolářová, the city government and administration should work together with the academic and private sectors to understand their needs and ensure the effective delivery of the project: *"I see city branding as a tool that should achieve some results - it's not just to check off that I have something - so I think that other stakeholders should be involved in city branding that can benefit from it in some way. Whether it's universities, companies or different associations. They should all have a say because first, it should help them, and second, I think they could then help us. And if they don't agree with the city branding, what it says or what it stands for, then nobody is going to help us."*

Suška proposed the quadruple helix framework, used mostly for the management of relations between the academic sphere, private sector, governments and the public (Leydesdorff, 2012): *“That's already part of the analytical part, typically some triple or quadruple helix. You need to work with the private sector, you need to have research organisations there. Prague has 14 universities, right? And it's not just purely universities, there are high schools that are here and are high quality, especially in technical fields. Then, of course, you have to involve a certain selection of public sector players, whether it's the city, city organisations, individual departments, or city companies. Lastly, the public, organised into various non-profit groups.”* Hrušková elaborates, stating that the involved parties should include actors within the city involved in the image-making: *“Well, the list for Prague would be ultra-broad. Typically, it's all the actors that are involved in how the city works and looks. Starting with educational institutions, whether it's colleges, or art schools; major cultural institutions like galleries, theatres, festivals; municipal corporations; contributing organisations; hobby societies.”*

Muška mentioned the value of the business sector and listed unions and chambers of commerce among the key stakeholders: *“I think that important chambers of commerce could have a say in it. And if we are talking about experts and the like, then perhaps the larger, stronger associations that are linked to industry: the union of industry and transport, trade, tourism and the like. I think those are the kind of key players that should be invited. I don't want to say all of them at once, but maybe in some smaller circles, they should discuss this.”*

Kolářová warns against a top-down approach to developing a city brand and emphasises the importance of extensive collaboration, not only on the national level but also within the entire municipal ecosystem: *“One of the things I think city branding has to have, in order for it to work, is authenticity. I don't think we should be so confident that we're going to come up with a city brand from the table here and suddenly companies are going to benefit from it. And that we're going to get Microsoft or AI research agencies here because we as city officials wrote it at the table and we think that's going to save everything. This is an area that requires tremendous collaboration, not just across the government, but with the city as a whole.”*

At the city level, key [4.2. Primary stakeholders](#) include the city council, relevant departments and municipal companies. According to Beránek: *“In the case of Prague, I think that apart from half to two-thirds of the council members who have at least a partial jurisdiction, it should*

*be the majority of joint stock companies that are committed to some new technologies.*” As for the municipal companies, Prague City Tourism, Prague Convention Bureau, Operátor ICT or Prague Innovation Institute were most frequently mentioned.

Overall and in line with the strategic documents, all respondents mentioned the need for collaboration across sectors and emphasised the importance of involving various stakeholders in the city branding processes to ensure the brand corresponds with the actual needs of the stakeholders and secure successful implementation of the place branding strategies in Prague.

#### **4.4.3.3 Activities**

The individual interviews provided insight into the various city branding activities and efforts in Prague. While the key documents are described in Chapter [4.3. Key strategic documents \(2018-2022\)](#), this section aims to provide further insight into the strategic approach to city branding by the City Hall, especially the Economic Foreign Policy strategy, described in Chapter [4.3.4 Economic Foreign Policy Strategy 2018](#). As Kolářová elaborated: *“In 2018, Prague commissioned an economic diplomacy strategy, which first mentioned a brand in the non-tourist segment. On the basis of this, an action plan was created that already mentioned the development of a city brand and partial activities have already started to work on it.”* She continued to explain that based on this strategy, several marketing agencies were approached to help create the city brand as a part of the preliminary market consultations.

However, these activities were paused due to several reasons, including economic problems associated with Covid. *“Then at some point, a year later, let's say, the issue came up again. The aim was to innovate Prague's foreign relations from the passive status quo and create something more strategic, more long-term. And the city brand gained more and more attention because it is something that should actually be a superstructure of all those activities.”* Hrušková added: *“These activities developed quite clearly. We did create a strategy in which that was embedded as one of the main things that would be developed in that next five-year period and a process how to develop that was proposed.”* Hřib elaborated on the process of approving the new strategy: *“We were planning to have a strategy approved for the foreign policy of Prague, but it just didn't get processed because of the end of the term. Why? Wasn't there a political agreement? Well, there's no consensus on what our intent was here, but unfortunately, there were a lot of other smart people who had different opinions. So we'll see what happens with that now, it's not under me anymore.”* However, as was noted by Kolářová

and Hrušková, the strategy did not get approved after the change of the political representation.<sup>11</sup>

Generally, the interviews showed Prague's city branding attempts to be irregular and rarely successful. Maintaining steady progress, coordinating with stakeholder interests, and convincing multiple target audiences of Prague's identity are difficult tasks. However, one of the biggest problems mentioned by the majority of participants was not the lack of strategic documents, but their actual enforcement and continual evaluation in practice. This issue will be analysed in further detail in the following chapter.

## 4.5 Problems

This chapter examines the data gathered from interviews, with a particular focus on the challenges experienced while attempting to develop Prague's city branding. Throughout the discussions, various issues related to positioning Prague as a dynamic, modern, and appealing city emerged. This analysis aims to provide insight into the common problems and barriers encountered by stakeholders during the city branding process.

### 4.5.1 Lack of interest

The political landscape of Prague was characterised as showing little interest in developing city branding strategies. Boháč defined the issue simply: *“I think Prague's problem is that it doesn't have a problem.”* He continued to explain that the situation with Prague's reputation is not recognised as a pressing problem for the politicians at the moment, and therefore it is not a priority issue to deal with: *“I think in any interview, a politician will tell you that they would like to have other tourists here, but at the same time, for them, it's not in the day-to-day problems that they are installed with that they have to deal with necessarily. If it works somehow, don't touch it.”*

Hřib and Beránek as representatives of the local government addressed this issue as well, and both agreed on the lack of interest in city branding strategies on a political level. Hřib argued

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<sup>11</sup> The timeframe of approval of the strategy falls outside of the primary research period of this thesis, however, the author saw it fit to include the outcome of the analysed activities. In the words of Hrušková: *“The elections came and suddenly it stopped being a topic again, and the perception of foreign relations returned to its original context. The more progressive things ceased to be wanted. And, although it was presented several times as being one of the topics and as something that the political representation would want, the actual instructions were the opposite.”*

that as the benefits of attracting talent and investors may take longer to materialise, it is difficult to explain these efforts and their benefits to coalition partners: *“There you have to imagine something specific under it, which in terms of this topic here is quite complicated because the benefit comes delayed. Well, then it's a problem to explain to the coalition partners what it's actually good for.”* Beránek elaborated by saying that politicians need to first address other, more pressing problems, in the city: *“When I compare this with other problems such as unaffordable housing, and congested traffic, every political representative has to somehow confront them. But this is not the issue that primarily decides the election.”*

Muška elaborated that the issue is not attractive to politicians and the prevailing attitude is focused on short-term political gains: *“The topic must be attractive to politicians, and it will be attractive if it adds to their credibility. They need to gain credit with the voter base, let's face it, so the topic must not be shaky or controversial for the voter base and it must bring something to those people.”* According to Muška, the voters also fail to recognise the potential benefits of such activities. While the aim is on improving the quality of life of Prague's residents, there is doubt regarding the recognition of the positive impact: *“I can't say how much it can bring to the people who live in Prague. That's difficult, but this is about making a good life for those people. I don't know if there is a theme of bringing more expats from abroad and having more research centres here and so on. But I think most people, who live in Prague, are not interested in that at all. If you compare it to how big tourism is, everybody can imagine anything under tourism - at least everybody goes on holiday somewhere.”*

Adamcová believes that without a clear demand from the relevant sectors, there is no incentive to pursue these activities: *“Usually when there is a problem, like in our case, the sector comes forward. I don't feel any pressure from Czech investors here. If you don't actually have demand in terms of a sector, well, why would you as a public administration respond to that, right? Isn't it also about what the community actually wants?”* She explained that in the case of tourism, the demand was there and was systematically communicated, and as a result, the city agreed without difficulty. However, she questions if there is a similar systematic demand in other sectors, especially investment and talent attraction. She believes that if the sector approached the city with specific requests or proposals, that would stimulate interest from the city to engage in such a conversation.

Beránek pointed out that, unlike other cities, Prague did not have to deal with significant difficulties, such as major economic downturn or high unemployment, which would be a catalyst for city branding activities: *“There was not even a given necessity in terms of some external actors who should try to manage the city, such as high unemployment. If we look back to the years 2000, and 2001, how and why the South Moravian Innovation Centre was created in Brno, then it was directly related to increased unemployment and the fall of Foxconn, which was operating in Brno. And it was some kind of a counter-reaction to a sequence of events that in fact never happened in Prague.”* In contrast, after the revolution, Prague's economic status has been steadily increasing. As a result, the city has never been forced to undertake substantial self-improvement initiatives in light of unfavourable external conditions.

#### **4.5.2 Issues with Strategy Implementation**

As has been proven in Chapter [4.3 Key strategic documents \(2018-2022\)](#), the lack of existing strategies is not a problem. Within Prague's ecosystem, there are several strategies addressing the issue of city branding, management of reputation and more consistent communication of the city. However, Prague deals with a lack of a broadly agreed strategic vision of the city and specific long-term goals that are actually implemented and enforced. Hřib considers having a strategic vision as *“an unifying element”* for accommodating communication of Prague abroad. Several interviewees noted that, while strategies exist, they are not approached in an executive manner, resulting in a lack of direction and inconsistency. According to Beránek *“Prague has great reserves, especially in communication, that strategies have been created and exist to some extent, but this has not been approached comprehensively.”* Adamcová mentioned the inability to present the vision effectively to the political representation: *“That's their problem - not being able to present a strategic vision to the political establishment and then move it forward in an executive manner.”*

Prague Institute of Planning and Development is the official city organisation responsible for creating municipal strategic documents, as outlined in Chapter [4.2.2.1 Institute of Planning and Development of the City of Prague](#). Its director, Ondřej Boháč, addressed the challenges that Prague faces in enforcing a strategic vision for the city and implementing long-term plans. Boháč expressed disappointment in the inability to effectively deliver the ambitions and goals set up in strategic documents: *“We don't have a political culture here that takes a strategy and implements it, that's not the case. That is why we have an incredible number of strategic*

*objectives that are all well thought out.*” He observes that politicians often prioritise their own interests: *“Local elections in our country are always a festival of ideas because everybody feels that they have to profile themselves as to what is their issue, and why they should be taken seriously. But it's not that a politician would come here and take a strategy and start implementing that.”*

In his view, the strategic plan of the city is considered as *“kind of like a wishlist”* or an *“optional add-on”* rather than fundamentally guiding documents for decision-making and city development. He identifies a significant contrast in how countries such as Germany or Austria base their decision-making (for example in the case of spatial planning) on a well-defined strategic plan. In those conditions, strategies are developed and used as guiding tools for the development of cities, guaranteeing coherence and compatibility. Unlike that, the reason why Prague requests these documents is mostly because of the pressure from the European Union: *“To get subsidies, we have to have a strategic plan. That was the motivation for the city to approve it. It's terrible.”* However, Boháč emphasised that the crucial role in establishing rules for enforcing the strategies is the responsibility of the state rather than the city.

#### **4.5.3 Lack of Leadership and Fragmentation**

Clear leadership and better coordination have been identified as critical missing elements in Prague's branding. The lack of agreement on who should lead the branding process, as well as the lack of a clear institutional structure for implementing branding strategies, all contribute to the overall problem. Hrušková summarised the problem by stating that *“there's not a mandate created for an entity that would solve it, and there's not the political support created to give a mandate for that solution.”*

Beránek provides a further explanation on this issue, stating that the lack of political leadership might be caused by insufficient knowledge or interest: *“There has been no one to pick it up off the ground and take it up as an important political issue, which in turn may be related to the fact that there is perhaps relatively less interest in awareness on the part of the electorate. But these are very closely interconnected, even though it may not be some super expensive thing, and conversely, the benefits in the medium and longer term may be quite substantial.”*

There is a consensus that Prague's ecosystem is incredibly complex, with coordination between the city hall, municipal districts and municipal organisations proving to be challenging. However, as stated by Kolářová, that should not be grounds for justifying the city's passivity when it comes to city branding: *“Prague is an incredibly complex ecosystem, cooperation with municipal districts, plus as a region, it is terribly complex. But we're not alone in this. Other cities have it too, maybe not as fragmented, but they are not far from it. We can't just use the excuse that we have a hard time doing it, because of the partisanship in that city. It's about the fact that there's consistently no demand being created and no awareness being created that these things are needed.”*

Political instability and leadership changes contribute to *“extreme fragmentation”* according to Hřib. He described the problem of different municipal companies falling under the jurisdiction of different council members which creates complications in reaching an agreement. Boháč agreed: *“I think that there are too many players in Prague, too many institutions that have their own opinions about this, and those opinions are often not compatible.”* He thinks that trying to come to an agreement among different actors might be a waste of resources: *“You have to convince such a large number of people who are your opponents that you have no chance of agreeing. Then in the end you end up wondering why do it if everyone is happy and doesn't like the change. You need a lot more energy to make that change than you do to function normally. And no one actually sees it as a problem.”*

Boháč also pointed out that the current system is incapable of change because of a variety of different players within the ecosystem and inflexible regulations: *“We have set up a system that is incapable of change, and the moment there is a crisis of any kind, suddenly we are very much operational. But that's because we turn off the normal rules. They stop applying and at that moment we are able to deliver. It's not about the incompetence of people or absence of ideas, it's just that the system in our country is so complicated that you just can't deliver that kind of result in one term or two terms.”* Prague's city government and public administration are set up for maintenance rather than proactive change policy: *“That momentum there if there's somebody who has the idea and the energy, they also have the legislative tools and the competence to deliver that shift or change - we don't have that.”*

The absence of a mandate for the city or another entity to address the branding issue and the lack of political leadership leads to a fragmented approach with multiple conflicting opinions



and overall confusion in the allocation of responsibilities. Suška argued this challenge will be difficult to solve as there is an intentional lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities, which creates an environment in which everyone operates independently: *“You'd have to have an environment where anything can be consolidated. But the nature of both the politics and the people who run businesses or operate here is such that you can hardly actually do the defragmentation. Because the information asymmetry - the fact that we don't know who does what - exists here intentionally. That information symmetry allows this fragmented system to exist where everybody has a little pond instead of one big pond. That environment doesn't reflect the power of all the different actors that are in it. On the contrary, it's tearing itself apart masochistically, and I don't think you can fix that.”* Using the examples of Western cities such as London and Paris, Suška demonstrated that having one consolidated system with larger governmental units could streamline decision-making and facilitate legislative changes faster.

#### **4.5.4 Political Instability**

Political instability has been cited as another pressing issue preventing the continuation of city branding activities. The turnovers of the political leadership of Prague disrupt the implementation of long-term plans and strategies, which results in general frustration and a lack of progress. The issue of frequent changes in political leadership, where each new term brings a different perspective and lack of continuity has been discussed by Kolářová. She contrasts the situation in Prague with politically stable cities, where successful projects develop under consistent leadership over multiple terms: *“When you compare yourself to a successful city, you find that in the position of mayors or governors in the regions, they have been there for more than one term. That means that they've had more of a chance to set something up and continue to show some impact or that success. In our case, after those four years, it's completely changed, ideally, always the opposite spectrum replaces the political representation and says 'let's start completely differently.’”*

Similar sentiments are echoed by Beránek who emphasised how current political objectives frequently cause these initiatives to take a backseat: *“Then again, we are faced with the limitation of the outlook here, that what doesn't get done in one term is always a second- or third-tier activity.”*

Suška raises the problem of unstable political cycles and coalitions which lead to a lack of continuity and stability within the city government: *“Further, the political cycle is terribly unstable, with more and more colourful coalitions that don't provide continuity and stability.”* He draws attention to the fact that this tendency is not typical only for Prague, but also for other post-socialist countries. Political power shifts impede progress and present an obstacle to building on the work of predecessors.

#### **4.5.5 Unexpected Crises**

External events, specifically the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, have been cited as disruptive to branding initiatives in Prague, making it difficult to allocate resources and maintain focus while dealing with more urgent matters. Kolářová mentioned that their efforts coincided with the beginning of the pandemic: *“If I talk specifically about my journey within the municipality just with the topic of branding, we had the misfortune of starting to do it just before covid started. On the one hand, you can certainly say that there was more time to devote to it, but unfortunately on the other hand, the financial resources were needed absolutely somewhere else.”* Having dealt with this crisis and wanting to start over, the war in Ukraine started and further complicated their efforts by diverting financial resources and attention elsewhere.

Hřib also reported the difficulties they faced due to the unexpected crises, making it challenging to prioritise city branding: *“Well, that's the other thing, of course. We've had two global crises here now. It's just that at times when there was going to be some significant fructification of those issues, there was always something that had to be dealt with urgently and it was a higher priority - see covid, that made foreign travel impossible for a while. And then the Ukrainian crisis and especially the economic pressure associated with it.”*

#### **4.5.6 Financing**

Adamcová emphasised that impactful outcomes are usually the ones driven by significant financial resources: *“It's simple maths. The impact is made by whoever has significant financial resources. I don't see an organisation here that is investing any significant funds in attracting investment to Prague. Following the money always worked for me, because where there is money, there is logically an interest from a sector and then it makes sense to pursue that.”*

However, Kolářová voiced her concern about the ability of the city to be able to finance the branding activities: *“It's financing, because, at least in the beginning, the city brand is an expensive affair - both in money and, of course, in human resources. I'm not saying that you can't do a city brand in a low-cost version with some relatively functional activities, but if you start from scratch, at least the research costs an awful lot of money.”* The lack of simple and tangible outcomes is the reason why is it difficult to justify a bigger budget for these activities: *“The outcomes are intangible for quite a long time and I can't see people putting much stock in it, so by the fact that all these things have to be approved, especially the bigger ones. I see a big obstacle there in that nobody will approve larger sums up into the millions of crowns for something that isn't visible in the first place and isn't a priority. I see that as a big problem.”*

Hřib addressed this issue from a different point of view, arguing that the fundamental problem with financing city branding activities is the financing of the cities: *“Even if we could get the whole Google headquarters here, the city wouldn't get an extra penny out of it. That's the fundamental problem. We just don't finance cities based on how they're going to boost the economy in that particular city, but based on that headcount of people who are permanent residents. This is the problem because then there's nothing actually forcing them to support innovation at all.”* There is a lack of incentives to support innovation and economic growth, meaning that the cities do not have the motivation to implement such initiatives: *“Realistically for me, it would actually be best if they invested in innovation in Brno, as the money they make there gets redistributed based on headcount anyway. So they'll have the costs, I'll have the revenue, and I'm happy and didn't have to lift a finger for it. The system is desperately dysfunctional in terms of setting up those basic incentive processes, so of course, it can never work.”*

#### **4.5.7 Misinterpretation as ‘Just a Logo’**

As discussed in Chapter [2.4 Challenges faced by cities in developing and maintaining successful place brands](#), city branding is often misinterpreted as logo planning or simply an exercise in creating a new visual identity. Moilanen (2015) defined this as one of the problems cities frequently face.

This has been found to be true in the case of Prague as well. According to Adamcová: *“I think most people in management positions that actually implement the brand just fixate on that logo,*

*but that's a thousandth of the world to me. That's a common mistake that somebody thinks it's the logo and the typeface and the colour scheme when it's actually the whole world and the story that we're telling.*" She added that in the case of Prague, she sees a lack of care for everything but the logo itself.

Hřib, as one of the key representatives of the local government, actually confirmed this assumption by discussing the logo in his answer to one of the interview questions: *"What is the Prague brand? First of all, we have the Najbrt logo, it's a little square. And then we have the emblem, that's the lions, the flags and the coat of arms with the hand with the sword in the gate. If you look at the way that the cities around us, such as the V4 cities - if you look at Budapest, they don't really have that duality in their logos."* The underlying reason for this misconception might be the intangibility of the topic, according to Hrušková: *"I think that actually, the politicians know what we mean, but it's still very abstract to them."*

## **4.6 Solutions**

In order to provide a comprehensive approach to the topic, the analysis identifies possible proactive measures to overcome challenges and create a more impactful and cohesive city branding strategy.

### **4.6.1 Appointing an Authority**

The respondents discussed that appointing authority or a guarantor of the project would help unify the branding efforts and clear the confusion with the allocation of responsibilities. Several options were considered, including anchoring city branding activities directly at the City Hall or appointing an external authority that would be closely linked to the city. There was an agreement among the interviewees that effective collaboration is key to the successful development and implementation of a city brand regardless of which entity would be in charge.

Given the fragmented city ecosystem and the large number of city organisations, Hrušková thinks that the optimal approach is to establish the coordinative body of the project at the City Hall. Kolářová provided further details of the responsibilities within the organisational structure: *"This topic is at the intersection of foreign relations and marketing. And if I talk specifically about how it works at the Prague City Hall, the marketing department there is*

*dedicated to purely local information and targets local residents. So, logically, it would make sense to me that it would be dedicated to foreign relations.”*

Moreover, she argued that for communication to be consistent and aligned, there should be one department that covers all the different information streams, whether it's inward, outward or at the level of the partners. Muška agreed with this approach, stating that *“because it is the brand of Prague, Prague should decide what that brand will be, what style it wants to present itself to a certain target group, how it wants to develop which products, whether and how it wants to develop tourism or the congress industry.”*

According to Kolářová, the optimal approach would be to establish an overreaching department or unit for managing external relations of the city: *“It's not just about marketing as such, let's say B2C marketing. The marketing that we are extremely lacking, apart from the city branding, is B2B or G2B communication. We are incredibly lacking in communication with other sectors, be it universities, professional associations or companies individually. These are other entities that the city should be working with.”* However, Hrušková sees several challenges of this approach: *“Of course, it has problematic elements in that we don't have the ability to offer competitive salaries there, it's not an easy environment in terms of how it works.”*

However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, political leadership is crucial in advocating for city branding activities. According to Beránek, cooperation throughout the city administration is necessary and the city should show unequivocal interest: *“It should be communicated under the brand of the city, it should be approved at the political level, and the city should actively sign up for wanting something like this and not leave it to, say, partial activities of the private sector, which are also going on in some areas, but they can never be as comprehensive and interconnected as if the city tries to grasp it and do it well.”*

Kolářová affirmed that there should be a defined leader or owner of this issue among the political representation, with a specialised team working under them to provide arguments and data supporting these activities. Otherwise, it won't be possible to conduct these activities: *“And I still think, unfortunately, based on the experience I have at the moment, that it has to be someone from the political leadership. I have a feeling, maybe frustration, that from the bottom up it's just impossible. If you don't get at least some of the political leadership on your side, it's not going to work.”*

Boháč and Hřib both agreed that the designated person among the political representatives should be the Mayor. According to Boháč, the responsibility for city branding activities should lie with the Mayor, not bureaucratic institutions: *“I think that's an absolutely significant political message, that's not administrative. Whoever is running that city and wants to move it somewhere, that's definitely the Mayor, that's not a bureaucrat or any institution.”* Hřib discussed the role of the Mayor in shaping the city's image and handling the direction of the city's foreign relations. While it is not always the case abroad, he recalled that during the 2018 coalition negotiations, there was an agreement that international relations should be handled by the Mayor, highlighting the importance of this position.

In contrast, Adamcová disagreed with the approach of placing the main coordination of branding activities within the City Hall: *“You have to understand that Prague has so many institutions and actual entities involved, that the idea of effectively running the whole thing from the City Hall is actually unrealistic in itself.”* She believes that the overreaching authority should be Prague City Tourism, where the brand of Prague is already being created: *“I think that we have built the brand of Prague nicely. Well, whoever wants to join - look at Prague Convention Bureau, they did, and the brand is so universally well-established that they can add any other topic. That's not a problem.”*

Placing the responsibility for city branding under an external entity has been mentioned by other participants too, especially the ones working in municipal companies. According to Suška, Prague has organisations and workplaces dedicated to such activities, for example, OICT or IPR, which in his opinion are more qualified: *“I think they're maybe better suited to do that than the City Hall itself, although the effort is actually good. On the other hand, you need a lot of different specific skills and competencies, which I think city organisations either already have, or are more dynamic in getting, and they have a strong market contact.”*

Hrušková and Kolářová also considered the potential of an external entity, highlighting the advantages in terms of greater flexibility, budget autonomy, and, according to Kolářová, increased credibility: *“External partners from companies, and in some cases universities, don't want to work with the city at all because of bad experiences they had with public administration. So the title of an external entity, even if it is an extended arm of the city, would also give that more credibility.”*

Cooperation is seen as essential, regardless of the actual guarantor. Kolářová highlighted the fundamental role the city plays because of the fact that city branding reaches beyond superficial elements like posters or websites and should be reflected in the reality and offerings of the city. She proposed that a close connection between the city and the external entity responsible for branding should be established: *“There should be a two-way, very intense communication, where the city says what area it needs help in regarding city branding, and whichever entity will help. Conversely, the external body, because it will have access to a huge amount of data, experience and examples of good practice, should bring that information back to the city. Ideally, this should be in the form of a spiral towards improving both institutions.”*

Finally, having experience from similar projects, for example, with developing the Strategic Plan, Suška argued for a collaborative partnership between the City Hall and the contributing organisation in order to include both perspectives: *“It should be in some tandem. I might really lean towards either a contributing city organisation or a conceptual department that does the materials, whether it's Operátor or IPR. And then have a close connection there to a department within City Hall, like a mirror team. Above that, there should be a steering board that holds the boundaries or the limits of how it should work, and below that, individual thematic teams that can deal in further detail with the tourism part, the business part, stakeholder engagement, economic indicators and so on.”*

#### **4.6.2 Raising Awareness**

In order to generate interest among the key stakeholders and present city branding initiatives as an essential component contributing to Prague's development, it is necessary to educate the involved parties and demonstrate how effective city branding can lead to tangible benefits.

Beránek believes that the lack of interest and the perception that Prague does not need these activities can be addressed by sufficient education in those areas. He highlighted the need to calculate the financial value of potential benefits for the city, showcase positive examples from abroad and generally promote city branding as good practice based on recommendations of international organisations, such as the OECD.

Boháč called for a wider public discussion that would bridge the gap between the tourist and residential aspects of the city: *“I also think it's a pity that it's not discussed much in the public*

*space here, because of how separate these two worlds are, the touristic, inner world, and the lived, Prague world.”*

Hrušková sees potential in establishing a working group of experts consisting of multiple stakeholders, attracting attention not only in Prague but also on the national level: *“I think what would help is to create a platform that would draw attention to this in the longer term, not just on the scale of Prague, but in terms of other cities as well. Paradoxically, I think that if there was a network of experts - whether based at a university or an NGO - that would actually draw attention to how much we're missing the train. It's not just a problem of Prague, but actually of the country as a whole.”* She thinks that showcasing positive examples from other Czech cities might spark an interest among local politicians: *“What works terribly well, especially in the Czech environment, is envy. And the moment when some smaller cities - typically for Prague that would be Brno or Olomouc or Ostrava - if they would come up with city branding, suddenly it would start working here very quickly. We know these examples from abroad, whether it's the example of Porto in Portugal or some smaller cities that started later than us, so I think this could work quite well.”*

It is important to create awareness about the positive impact of such city branding, not only to the involved stakeholders but to the general public as well. According to Hřib: *“It would have to have some sort of added value and those people would have to understand what that added value is. Which I would say is closely related to attracting some talent and that support here.”* Suška considered targeting various groups of residents and engaging them in different activities to involve the local communities in developing the long-term evolution and transformation of the city's brand: *“I think that we need to raise awareness through interacting and working with different target groups who are interested, online and offline. Reaching out to young people, raising awareness about the status quo. Not just being purely reactive, but also having a conceptual plan of how I want to change, transform and develop the brand and those communities, and engage them. And that's really long-term work that has to come from multiple stakeholders wanting to come together and share the fruits of working together. It's very hard, especially in Prague, to agree on that.”*



### 4.6.3 Strategic Approach

As the theoretical part of this thesis demonstrates, city branding is a complex set of activities, which includes various stakeholders and communicates to a number of audiences. According to Suška, continuous and systematic work is essential: *“I don't think you write a concept and you're done. It's a continuous work of a team to create a brand, to respond to various external factors that embed that brand in the broader context of the environment or system in which Prague operates.”* He identified the necessary steps that need to be undertaken: *“Primarily, I think there needs to be some analysis done. Then, as part of the analysis, you need to pull stakeholders and maybe ambassadors in relation to who you want to work with. And in the design part, there should be a series of measures with roadmaps, with some goals and tools that tell you this is where we want to get to - and now I say Prague is a modern city for young people, who want to start a business or a startup. Ideally the narrower the definition, the easier it is to target your end group.”* As for the key metrics, he mentioned setting up SMART goals based on reach, word of mouth, economic indicators and strategy implementation indicators.

## 5 DISCUSSION

The qualitative analysis presented above provides a full account of the researched case of the City of Prague, with an emphasis on specific city branding efforts realised in 2018-2022. More specifically, it delves into the issues faced when attempting to develop and implement these activities. The following discussion does not seek to draw any judgments regarding the efficiency of the stated actions. Instead, the goal is to remark on the findings and offer answers to the research questions formulated in the research methodology of this thesis (see Chapter [3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY](#)). In order to set the framework for the conclusions that will be drawn in the thesis' final chapter, it is important to highlight the patterns and themes that have developed from the empirical data. As a result, this chapter seeks to comprehend how Prague developed its brand image, and what challenges were encountered during that process, whilst continually confronting the findings with the theoretical framework of city branding produced in the theoretical section.

The first two chapters will address the research questions. Chapter [5.3 Managerial implications](#) provides recommendations and indicates what course of action should be taken based on the findings of this thesis. Chapter [5.4 Research Limitations](#) discusses the limitations of this research that can be further analysed and inform the direction of future research.

### 5.1 Research question 1

When answering the question of **how Prague's city branding efforts have evolved in the period of 2018-2022** (defined in Chapter [3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY](#)), it is important to acknowledge the starting position and strategic plans made by the city in the place branding area. As evidenced by Chapter [4.1 Prague in Context](#) and [4.3 Key strategic documents \(2018-2022\)](#), Prague can build on many strengths including a highly educated population or economic prowess. However, if the city wants to maintain its position in the global labour market, it needs to strategically develop and improve its attractiveness to be able to allure more resources, know-how, goods and services (Anttiroiko, 2015).

The findings of the interviews indicated mixed perceptions of the image of Prague. On one hand, the city is well-known internationally on account of its historical roots, architectural landmarks and rich cultural tradition. Based on the current tourism-oriented brand, Prague's reputation abroad is built mainly on the image of an attractive tourist destination that should

not be missing from an itinerary when travelling through Europe. Unfortunately, Prague is mostly associated with cheap alcohol, stag parties and prostitution, which leads to the reputation of a party destination rather than a sophisticated, cultural centre. The respondents indicated several problems with the tourism sector in Prague, including the dominance of cheap and low-quality tourists, overcrowding in the city centre, a lack of quality services and difficulties with regulating the sector and enforcing changes.

The analysis of strategic planning identified six key documents in the period 2018-2022, developed either by the city or by relevant municipal organisations. These strategies address the formidable touristic brand that has been created over the years, commending the success, but at the same time stressing that it no longer communicates the immense potential of the city in areas outside of traditional tourism. The analysis of both strategic documents and interviews identified the importance of positioning Prague as more than just a tourist destination. Across the studied documents that have been formulated, in some cases even before 2018, a consensus that Prague has more to offer than history and beauty and needs to communicate it clearly, can be observed. The demand to create a strong and unified international brand built mostly on economic values is expressed throughout the examined strategies and was extensively discussed in the interviews.

All respondents agreed that the brand of Prague is very strong and even surpasses the national brand. Despite the strength of the current brand, Prague's branding is lacking in structured communication and does a poor job of showcasing its current potential. The city should actively promote itself as an attractive place for studying, living and working to be able to compete globally. In order to move beyond its historical appeal, Prague has to articulate its aspirations for innovation and the future more effectively. That of course goes hand in hand with conveying the message to foreign audiences in a clear, systematic and consistent manner both online and offline. The message should be one of presenting Prague as a liveable, innovative and cosmopolitan city, which approaches culture in a modern way, focuses on sustainability and is an attractive destination for talent and business. All this can be achieved only through the cooperation of relevant stakeholders inside and outside of the city structures.

However, despite the declared importance to revise and update the positioning of the brand of Prague in both the strategic documents and interview responses, the findings indicate that in reality, Prague's city branding attempts have been sporadic and lacking effectiveness.

## 5.2 Research question 2

The second research question aims to identify **what were the problems encountered in the efforts to create a city branding strategy for Prague, and how can they be overcome** (as defined in Chapter [3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY](#)). This section aims to summarise the encountered problems while the second part of the research question regarding the possible solutions is summarised in the following Chapter [5.3 Managerial implications](#).

All in all, it has to be recognised that Prague's representatives and experts have long been aware of the need to rebrand the city in a more modern way. The strategic documents point out the shortcomings, call for changes and sometimes even set out a specific action plan (especially in the case of [4.3.4 Economic Foreign Policy Strategy 2018](#)). Answering the second research question of this study, it is evident that the problems encountered in the efforts to create a city branding strategy are not down to the lack of awareness among stakeholders or insufficient communication of the problem, but rather stemming from the absence of real actions.

According to Vanolo (2017), one of the main objectives of a place brand is to inspire a shared vision of a place. Even though Prague has approved several strategies addressing a desire to change the communication of the city, enhance its brand reputation and develop city branding activities, respondents reported that the city lacks a broadly agreed strategic vision and specific long-term goals. The problem is that the existing strategies are not approached in an executive manner, leading to a lack of direction and consistency in the implementation of these strategies. IPR Prague, a municipal organisation responsible for preparing strategy documents for the city, is experiencing issues in effectively fulfilling and implementing set objectives.

One of the reasons is the local political culture, in which politicians prioritise their personal interests over implementing strategic plans. The key strategic documents are frequently seen as a wish list or an optional add-on, rather than a manual for decision-making. Moreover, instead of a genuine commitment to effective implementation, the motivation to commission city strategies can be influenced by the need to obtain subsidies from the European Union. Regrettably, the city does not have any direct enforcement tools for strategy execution, as the rules are set up on the national level.

Next, the lack of awareness of the concepts of city branding was examined. The study finds that even though there is a variety of viewpoints on city branding, all respondents demonstrated a clear understanding of the concept and provided definitions that correspond with the theoretical framework. The same can be said for the strategic documents, which consistently communicated a need for a unified and modern brand. City branding has been recognised as a complex process with a focus on building a positive image and reputation for the city. It involves managing the city's reputation, considering various perspectives and target audiences, highlighting the city's distinctive attributes and putting forward a consistent message.

The evidence suggests a general lack of interest in the city branding activities in Prague. The political body in charge of Prague does not appear particularly interested in creating or enforcing strategies specifically for attracting talent and investment. According to Kotler et al. (1993), cities need branding to be able to respond to economic turmoil, adapt to the demands of global competition and keep pace with new technological advancements. However, Prague has seen consistent economic development since the revolution, in contrast to other cities that have endured economic downturns or severe unemployment. Therefore, the current state of Prague's reputation is not seen as a critical issue by city authorities, and as a result, city branding is not given priority attention.

According to Anholt (2006), it is often the case that city leaders overlook the impact of the perceptions and associations connected to a city's name. The image and reputation of the city can influence significant financial, political and social aspects, such as employment opportunities or business environment. Consistent with this theoretical perspective, politicians in Prague tend to concentrate on issues that have a more direct impact on citizens' lives, such as traffic congestion and expensive housing, as these issues are more likely to affect election results. Also, it may take some time for the benefits of attracting talent and investment through city branding to materialise, making it challenging to explain the efforts and their advantages to coalition partners. Consequently, politicians fail to recognise city branding as an appealing subject since it does not increase their immediate popularity with voters. Moreover, the potential advantages of city branding in enhancing the quality of life in Prague are not well understood by voters either, making it difficult to create demand for these activities. There is minimal motivation for the city government to implement city branding initiatives if there is no apparent demand from key sectors. In contrast, the need for tourism-related initiatives has been more organised and evident, leading to greater interest from the city.

Govers (2020) argues that without the support of senior government, strategic reputation management is bound to fail. However, it is frequently disregarded by politicians and city councils, being perceived only as a responsibility of communications and marketing departments or organisations. Clear leadership and better coordination of the key stakeholders have been found to be a pressing problem in Prague's branding efforts, too. There is a notable absence of agreement on who should take charge of coordinating the city branding process, leading to a lack of direction and initiative. A number of factors, such as inflexible regulations and fragmentation of the ecosystem contribute to the perception that the present system in Prague is resistant to change. Coordination is difficult due to the incredibly complex ecosystem involving numerous stakeholders, including Prague's City Hall, municipal districts and various municipal organisations. The lack of a clear institutional structure for putting branding plans into practice further complicates the situation. As a result, roles often remain unclear and several organisations work independently without a shared vision or strategy, leading to a disjointed system as opposed to a single integrated ecosystem. Fragmentation interferes with efficient decision-making, and for that reason, implementing long-term branding projects is difficult. This aligns with Moilanen's (2015) findings, which highlighted that conflicting and parallel activities among various stakeholders, combined with a lack of coordination and absence of leadership, can create challenges in the successful implementation of city branding.

Furthermore, city branding under the control of local government can be heavily influenced by electoral cycles and campaigns (Vanolo, 2017). In accordance with this perspective, the research findings indicate that political instability, abrupt changes in political structures and lack of continuity have a significant influence on the city branding efforts in Prague. The frequent turnover of political leadership and, mainly, a complete change of direction with each new term disrupts the continuation of city branding initiatives and long-term plans. The constant shifts in political power impede progress and make it challenging to build upon the work of predecessors. Unlike politically stable cities, where projects can develop under consistent leadership over numerous periods, Prague suffers difficulties in maintaining its branding initiatives as a result of these frequent changes in administration. Moreover, the disregard for political balance and the formation of diverse coalitions contribute to the lack of continuity and stability within the city government.

Govers (2020) sees a close connection between securing political support and persuading the decision-makers that they should invest money and effort in city branding. The ability to obtain financial resources plays a crucial role in driving successful outcomes from city branding efforts in Prague. Projects supported by adequate funding are more likely to produce tangible results and attract talent and investment in the city. However, city branding is considered an expensive activity both in terms of financial and human resources. The situation in Prague, where the city would have to start these initiatives from scratch, might require considerable costs, especially for the initial research part. Justifying a larger budget might be difficult due to the intangible outcomes and absence of immediate results of city branding. Another aspect that significantly complicates the city branding efforts is the current structure of funding, administered at the national level, where cities obtain funds based on the number of permanent residents, rather than the growth of their economies. Therefore, cities lack incentives to support economic development and innovation through branding activities, which makes it difficult to persuade the city government to invest in these initiatives.

External events and unexpected crises have also been reported to impact branding initiatives. Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine both led to redirecting financial resources to deal with the immediate needs arising from these crises. As a result, money that could have been allocated toward city branding was instead used to address the more urgent problems. Furthermore, the occurrence of these events shifted attention away from city branding and as a result not only disrupted the ongoing activities but also made it difficult to restart the efforts when the crises were over, mostly because their consequences often persisted.

Last but not least, city branding is often misinterpreted as solely marketing, logo planning or an exercise in visual identity. As addressed by Henninger et al. (2016) and Moilanen (2015), this misconception is a common challenge faced by cities in developing and implementing successful place brands. In the case of Prague, there is a tendency among some actors to focus on the city's logo while overlooking other crucial elements of city branding. This narrow focus neglects the broader narrative and contributes to a limited understanding of the holistic nature of these activities. Zdeněk Hřib, the former Mayor, indirectly confirmed the misconception by primarily discussing the logo when asked about the Prague brand.

### 5.3 Managerial Implications

One of the objectives of this thesis was to offer recommendations on how Prague should approach the future creation and management of its city branding strategy. Based on the analysis of Prague's city branding efforts and the problems the city has faced while trying to develop and implement these activities, several managerial implementations can be suggested for the future creation and supervision of the new city's branding strategy.

First and foremost, a clear leadership and authority needs to be defined. Based on the information obtained during the interviews, the best candidate for the role of leader would be the City Hall, specifically the International Relations Unit. This is because the Unit has already addressed the topic of city branding in the Economic Foreign Policy Strategy in 2018 and in the subsequent International Relations Strategy mentioned by Hrušková and Kolářová<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, thanks to the prestige and strong position of the City Hall as an official governing body of the city, it will be easier to manage all the stakeholders and impose the implementation of strategies through City Council Resolutions or Policy Statement of the Prague City Council.

Second, the City should establish a dedicated and competent project team. This team should consist of a project manager and at least two specialists, possibly outsourced from relevant municipal organisations such as IPR Prague, PCT or OICT. It is a common practice at the City Hall to outsource some activities in such a way, because municipal organisations are usually better equipped in terms of skill sets needed for successful project management and implementation. This team, operating under the City Hall, would be responsible for the coordination of all branding activities, managing communication with relevant stakeholders, ensuring the consistency of the messaging and driving the implementation of the strategy across different sectors. The team should possess its own budget specifically allocated to these activities.

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<sup>12</sup> The International Relations Strategy is a document created in 2022 by the International Relations Department of the City of Prague. However, during the term 2018-2022, it did not manage to get approved by the City Council due to dealing with other, more pressing issues. The new political representation that took over in February 2023 did not approve the strategy either.



<b>Project Team</b>	Project Manager
	Project Specialists (possibly outsourced from IPR Prague/PCT/OICT)

Table 4: Project Team

However, for the project team to be able to enforce specific actions, it is necessary to secure strong political leadership. As evidenced by the findings, lack of political support is perceived as one of the crucial problems encountered while trying to create and maintain Prague’s city branding efforts. In order to get political support, these efforts need to be communicated in an attractive way to get the attention of policymakers. This can be done by showing tangible results and specific possible outcomes that will benefit the city, showcasing best practices from other cities - both in the Czech Republic and abroad - and calculating a clear budget to demonstrate the long-term financial return of these activities. Moreover, it is essential to engage important political players from the early phases of the creation of the branding strategy in order to overcome the lack of interest. Politicians' dedication and support for the branding initiatives will improve as they become more aware of the value of city branding in attracting talent, investments, and different forms of tourism and increasing the city's reputation.

To ensure genuine cooperation of the political representatives, a steering committee accountable to the Council should be created. The steering committee would be led either by the Mayor, who is the guarantor for international relations within the City Council, or the Deputy Mayor responsible for strategic development. However, since city branding is an all-encompassing activity that can cover different goals and aspects of the city’s development, other members of the City Council should be included in the committee as well. The steering committee should also involve key representatives from the most relevant municipal organisations, specifically the Chairman of the Board of Prague City Tourism and the Director of IPR Prague. The Project manager should also be a member of the steering committee, in order to provide a connection between the executive and governing bodies.

<b>Steering Committee</b>	Mayor of Prague (Bohuslav Svoboda)
	Deputy Mayor for Spatial and Strategic Development (Petr Hlaváček)
	First Deputy Mayor for Transport (Zdeněk Hřib)
	Councillor for ICT, Smart City, Science, Research and Innovation (Daniel Mazur)
	Councillor for Finance, Budget, Funds and Business Support (Zdeněk Kovařík)
	Councillor for Culture, Tourism, Conservation, Exhibition and Animal Welfare (Jiří Pospíšil)
	Chairman of the Board of Prague City Tourism (František Cipro)
	Director of IPR Prague (Ondřej Boháč)
	Project Manager

Table 5: Steering Committee (with the names of prospective members as of July 2023)

After securing a clear leadership, both at working and political level, the project team should set up a shared platform of experts and stakeholders from across the ecosystem. Based on the theoretical framework of stakeholder classification by Henninger et al. (2016) and the analysis of stakeholders in the context of Prague (see Chapter [4.2 Primary stakeholders](#)), primary stakeholders consist of the representatives of the City Hall, specifically the International Relations Unit and Marketing and Media Department; and municipal organisations, namely IPR Prague, PCT, OICT, PII, PCB and Creative Prague. However, to guarantee that the final product will respond to the interest and needs of all important stakeholders, representatives of secondary stakeholders should be involved, too. According to Henninger et al. (2016), secondary stakeholders include universities, business parks, museums, theatres and festival organisations. In the case of Prague, the most relevant actors are representatives of universities unified under the organisation Study in Prague, business and investment promotion agencies CzechInvest and CzechTrade, Czech Chamber of Commerce, and representatives of the biggest

business associations, such as ABSL, AFI or AMSP<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, city residents, as highlighted by Braun, Kavaratzis and Zenker (2013), are usually significantly neglected as stakeholders in place branding practices, despite their potential as vital participants in the branding processes. Therefore, representatives of the public would be engaged in the group as well. Overall, the consultation working group would contribute to the creation of a strategy that aligns with the interest and needs of all involved stakeholders. To ensure the information flow, the working group, chaired by the project manager and including a representative from the steering committee, would play a crucial role in providing transparent information for all stakeholders.

<b>Consultation Working Group</b>	Project Manager
	Representative of the Steering Committee
	International Relations Unit (City Hall)
	Marketing and Media Department (City Hall)
	IPR Prague
	Prague City Tourism
	Operátor ICT
	Prague Innovation Institute
	Prague Convention Bureau
	Creative Prague
	Study in Prague
	CzechInvest, CzechTrade
	Czech Chamber of Commerce
	Representatives from business associations

<sup>13</sup> The selection of these stakeholders was based on the author's practical experience and familiarity with the ecosystem.

	Representatives of the public
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Table 6: Consultation Working Group

The next step would be to define specific goals. Having clear objectives would help define the purpose and direction of the branding strategy. The goals should provide a roadmap for what the city aims to achieve through its branding initiative and guide the branding strategy towards certain results. Furthermore, setting specific objectives will lead to greater consistency and alignment, especially in the case of Prague, where communication with a larger number of various stakeholders has proven to be difficult. They would serve as a guide to all stakeholders involved in the city branding process and would help guarantee that everyone is on the same page and working towards the same goal. The specific goals should address the current challenges the city is facing or will continue to do so in the future. They should be in line with the overall direction of the city's development strategy and vision. The analysis of key strategic documents in this thesis serves as a strong conceptual foundation for establishing specific goals in city branding strategies. Drawing from these documents, the goals should revolve around the following issues:

- unifying, managing and strengthening Prague's reputation abroad;
- promoting the city's competitiveness;
- shifting the tourist brand from historical and traditional aspects to more sustainable forms of tourism;
- building Prague's position as a good place to live, work and study;
- increasing the attractiveness of the city and attracting companies, investment or talent needed for the development of strategic sectors;
- developing Prague's knowledge potential;
- supporting Prague institutions, businesses and start-ups in their presentation abroad;
- and contributing to the efforts of other stakeholders in a more sophisticated and effective presentation of the city.

Setting clear, measurable objectives for the city branding efforts will allow for a regular evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of the implemented strategies. This accountability is crucial for appropriate management and adequate allocation of the budget, time and manpower. Therefore, the methodology of SMART goals is recommended, covering the key aspects of specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound objectives.

The following course of action would be to identify Prague's unique selling point and determine its brand positioning. The theoretical part of this thesis highlighted the need for the brand to be authentic, consistent with the local culture and identity of the place (Vanolo, 2017). In order to create a comprehensive city brand that would resonate with various target groups, including students, qualified workers, entrepreneurs, tourists, local residents or investors, it is necessary to establish the current perception of the brand and determine what makes Prague unique and special, how is the city seen by different target groups, and what do stakeholders from the public, private and academic spheres expect from Prague's brand. Capitalising on the unique strengths that will emerge from research, the city can create a compelling and authentic brand identity that effectively appeals to its different audiences while also improving its reputation and attractiveness.

The process of developing Prague's new city brand should include leveraging industry best practices, seeking advice from place branding experts and practitioners, and drawing inspiration from successful examples of other cities similar to Prague, such as Barcelona, Helsinki, or Brussels. By closely analysing the tactics taken by these cities, Prague can get significant insights into good branding strategies and adaptability to specific cultural situations. Furthermore, consultation with city branding experts and practitioners will give vital insight and ensure that the brand creation process is well-informed and aligned with current trends and methodologies. By combining these valuable sources of information, Prague will be able to create a distinct and appealing brand identity that truly expresses its unique features and resonates with varied target groups, resulting in increased exposure, attractiveness, and long-term success.

#### **5.4 Research Limitations**

The main limitation of this study lies in the choice of a single case study as a research method. According to Yin (2009), case studies often do not follow systematic approaches and allow for biased views of results, which could ultimately influence the direction of the findings and results. However, as the author argues, this objection can be applied to other research methods, including experiments, survey questionnaires or historical research.

Furthermore, case studies are often criticised for lacking a scientific basis for generalisation, especially in the case of single case studies. Dul and Hak (2007) pointed out that a single case study may not fully represent the entire domain to which a theory is intended to apply. Limiting the focus of the research to only one city makes it difficult to generalise the results. Nevertheless, in this context the significance of replication in research is essential. Replicating the study in multiple contexts or with different cases can strengthen the validity and applicability of the findings, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Yin (2009) further contends that scientific facts are rarely based on single cases, but rather on multiple sets of research that replicate the same phenomenon under different conditions. Moreover, the single case study methodology provides an opportunity for a comprehensive and detailed investigation of the chosen subject.

The interviews conducted with representatives from the expert community may still contain some subjective bias despite careful selection. It is important to acknowledge that interviews, even with experts, can be influenced by the personal experiences of the participants, leading to potential biases in the final responses.

Given the research's limitations, it is critical to understand that the findings cannot be generalised due to the study's qualitative character and small sample size of respondents. However, many themes and ideas surfaced consistently across the interviews and certain topics reached saturation during the interviews, indicating a depth of inquiry in those sections of the study.

Despite several attempts, the interview with the Director of the Marketing and Media Department of the Prague City Hall, a primary stakeholder, did not take place due to personal reasons of the interviewee. While the research still provides valuable insights from other expert interviews and strategic documents, the absence of a crucial stakeholder's viewpoint is an important limitation that should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings and drawing conclusions.

To improve comprehension of city branding, it is recommended for future research to examine other cities with diverse cultural and historical backgrounds. Researching a broader range of cases can help reveal how various settings and characteristics influence city branding efforts. This comparative approach will help gain a better understanding of the complexities and

differences in city branding techniques around the world.

## CONCLUSION

This research aimed to contextually examine place branding efforts from the perspective of a local government, using the case of the City of Prague, to provide new insights into city branding practices. The literature review suggested that applying branding strategies for places can attract talent, investment, different forms of tourism and new residents. By strategically managing their image and promoting unique qualities, places foster economic development and respond to the current challenges they face.

Therefore, the first part of the thesis offered a theoretical framework that established the understanding of branding within the concept of cities. The main objective of the theoretical part was to explore current academic discourse that argues why cities must go beyond destination branding and tourism promotion and move toward more complex branding efforts. A brief introduction presented a historical development of the place branding practices and provided various definitions of the concept.

The second part of the theoretical framework provided a conceptualisation of the importance of cities, showcasing cities as significant actors in the globalised world. Research evidence suggests that cities worldwide engage in competition to attract the maximum value from the global flow of resources in order to advance their urban development. Hence, cities are encouraged to pursue more feasible strategies for strengthening their existing economies, and city branding can serve as a strategic tool for achieving this objective.

Furthermore, the concept of city branding has been defined from the perspective of strategic communication, elaborating on the notions of the image, identity and equity of the brand. The research demonstrated that successful strategies rely on collaborative partnerships with multiple stakeholders, fostering unity and engagement both externally and internally. Lastly, the examples from various cities have highlighted potential problems encountered in the practice of city branding.

The analytical part of the thesis explored the motivations and policy decisions that influenced Prague's brand identity, specifically focusing on the city's branding efforts between 2018 and 2022. Two research questions were formulated, aiming to understand the foundation of Prague's city branding concepts and strategies: *“How has the city branding of Prague evolved*



*in the period of 2018-2022?”*, while also investigating the reasons behind the ineffective nature of these efforts and potential solutions: *“What were the problems encountered in the efforts to create a city branding strategy for Prague, and how can they be overcome?”*.

A qualitative single case study was selected as the most suitable research design method, with an aspiration to enhance the theoretical understanding of city branding, contribute to its generalizability, and encourage further research in this area. The given issue is being increasingly analysed and qualitatively processed on an international scale, however, the specific dimensions of place branding have not been mapped sufficiently within the Czech academic environment. Therefore, the case of Prague was chosen as a focus of the study, providing a chance to offer valuable insights. The research method consisted of a combination of content analysis of relevant strategic materials and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. The author's connection to the city administration facilitated access to key stakeholders and strategic materials, enabling a thorough examination of branding concepts, strategies, challenges, and potential solutions, enhancing the study's depth and scope.

The research findings indicated that the reputation of Prague is mainly built on the city's image as an attractive tourist destination and fails to demonstrate other attributes of the city. The current perception of Prague is based primarily on the communication of Prague as a historical tourist destination associated with nightlife and cheap alcohol, which carries several problems for the quality of life in the city. In contrast, according to the strategic documents, the intent is to showcase Prague as a progressive place to live, where people want to study, work or invest, or where visitors want to return to repeatedly and spend quality time.

Despite these intentions and several attempts to apply this in practice, there seems to be a disconnect between the desired image and the actual reality of Prague's city branding efforts. The research identified several problems that obstruct the realisation of these aspirations. Although the city recognizes the need to rebrand in a more modern way, the lack of real action is preventing the plans from being translated into reality. There is a perceived lack of a broadly agreed strategic vision and specific long-term goals, leading to a sense of uncertainty and inconsistency in the execution of city branding efforts. The situation is further complicated by the lack of interest of city authorities and politicians in city branding activities. City branding often requires long-term vision and commitment, but some politicians may prioritise short-term issues that have a more direct impact on citizens' lives. Consequently, city branding initiatives

may not be given the attention and financial resources they need to succeed.

The absence of clear leadership and coordination is another challenge. In Prague, there is a notable lack of agreement on who should take charge of coordinating the city branding process, leading to a fragmented approach. Various stakeholders, including the City Hall, municipal districts and municipal organisations, work independently without a shared vision or strategy. Moreover, frequent changes in political power disrupt the continuity of city branding efforts. With each new term, there may be a complete change of direction, and the work of previous administrations is not sustained. External events and crises such as Covid-19 or the war in Ukraine also impacted branding initiatives, allocating resources towards more pressing issues. Lastly, a common misconception about city branding as solely marketing and visual identity planning persists.

Ultimately, the thesis offered managerial implications for the city's future approach to developing a city branding strategy. Overall, these challenges indicate the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to address the complexity of city branding. First and foremost, a clear leadership role needs to be established, with the most suitable candidate for this position being City Hall's International Relations Unit, given their previous work on city branding strategies. In addition, a competent project team should be established, possibly recruited externally from relevant city organisations, to coordinate branding activities, ensure consistency of the message and manage the implementation and evaluation of the strategy.

To ensure political support, the benefits of city branding need to be effectively communicated to policy makers and key political stakeholders need to be involved early in the process. A steering committee should also be established, reporting to the City Council, to oversee and support branding initiatives on the political level. To ensure a multiplicity of perspectives and a transparent flow of information during the branding process, a consultation working group consisting of representatives of all relevant stakeholders should be set up. Using the SMART methodology, it is necessary to define clear and measurable objectives aligned with the overall city development strategy. Prague's unique selling points and brand positioning should be determined through research and stakeholder input to create an authentic and appealing brand identity. Learning from successful examples of other cities' branding strategies and seeking advice from experts and practitioners will further inform Prague's approach. By implementing these recommendations, Prague can overcome its current branding challenges and begin to

develop a more successful city branding strategy that will showcase its unique identity, ultimately leading to the enhancement of its reputation and better chances at attracting talent and investment.

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# SCHVÁLENO

Institut komunikačních studií a žurnalistiky FSV UK Teze <b>MAGISTERSKÉ</b> diplomové práce	
<b>TUTO ČÁST VYPLŇUJE STUDENT/KA:</b>	
<b>Příjmení a jméno diplomantky/diplomanta:</b> Legáthová Lucia	<b>Razítko podatelny:</b> 
<b>Imatrikulační ročník diplomantky/diplomanta:</b> 2020	
<b>Fakultní e-mail diplomantky/diplomanta:</b> 42965067@fsv.cuni.cz	
<b>Studijní program/forma studia:</b> Strategická komunikace/prezenční	
<b>Název práce v češtině:</b> Za hranice cestovního ruchu: Vývoj place brandingu v kontextu hl. m. Prahy	
<b>Název práce v angličtině:</b> Beyond tourism: Development of place branding in the context of the City of Prague	
<b>Předpokládaný termín dokončení</b> (semestr, akademický rok – vzor: ZS 2022/2023) (diplomovou práci je možné obhajovat <u>nejdříve</u> šest měsíců od schválení tezi) LS 2022/2023	
<b>Charakteristika tématu a jeho dosavadní zpracování</b> (max. 1800 znaků): In recent years, cities and regions have increasingly become one of the primary actors on the geopolitical map of the world. According to the UN, up to two-thirds of the world's population will live in urban areas by 2050. With increasing globalisation, it is cities and regions that are competing for better access to investments, the presence of multinational companies, tourists, talent and students. Cities have begun to realise that in order to increase their competitive brand value on the international scale, a shift from marketing strategies focused solely on tourism to a multi-dimensional branding strategy is necessary.  The thesis will be based primarily on publications on place branding, strategic brand management and strategic communication. The given issue is being increasingly analysed and qualitatively processed on the international scale, however, the specific dimensions of place branding have not been mapped sufficiently within the Czech and Slovak academic environment. Therefore, this thesis will be based mostly on foreign academic literature and case studies.	
<b>Předpokládaný cíl práce, případně formulace problému, výzkumné otázky nebo hypotézy</b> (max. 1800 znaků): Prague has undergone a dynamic transformation in the last few years. From a cheap tourist destination, it is gradually becoming a city where the main focus is on improving the quality of life of the citizens, refinement of the public space and sustainable development. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the place branding dimensions of the City of Prague in recent years, identify the key stakeholders, analyse the current situation and propose solutions for the city to build a distinctive brand for itself.  This paper will first explore current academic discourse that argues why cities must go beyond destination branding and tourism promotion and move toward more complex branding efforts. It will then assess the historical, economic and cultural importance of the city, and analyse the current issues, including identity crisis, loss of tourism revenue, and the need to restructure the city's brand. The practical part of the thesis will put Prague's branding efforts over the past years into context and provide managerial implications for the future.  This research seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the motivations and expose the integrated policy and promotional decisions that occurred behind the scenes in the development of Prague's brand identity.	

Keller, K.L. and Swaminathan, V. (2020) *Strategic brand management: building, measuring, and managing brand equity*. 5th ed., global ed. Harlow: Pearson.

- This publication provides a framework for identifying, defining and measuring brand equity, using insights from both academics and industry practitioners.

Warren, G. and Dinnie, K. (2017). *Exploring the dimensions of place branding: an application of the ICON model to the branding of Toronto*. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*. 3. 56-68. 10.1108/IJTC-10-2016-0035.

- This study analyses the place branding dimensions of Toronto and offers a practical application of the ICON model of place branding to the multi-stakeholder city branding strategy of Toronto, providing insights into the collaborative and innovative practices that characterize effective city branding.

**Diplomové a disertační práce k tématu** (seznam bakalářských, magisterských a doktorských prací, které byly k tématu obhájeny na UK, případně dalších oborově blízkých fakultách či vysokých školách za posledních pět let)

JENČEK, Lubor. *City branding krajských měst v Česku*. Praha, 2020. Diplomová práce. Univerzita Karlova, Přírodovědecká fakulta, Katedra sociální geografie a region. rozvoje. Vedoucí práce Šifta, Miroslav.

CURRAN, Thomas Declan Roy. *Competition & Transition: Divergent Approaches to Nation Branding in Estonia and Latvia*. Praha, 2020. Diplomová práce. Univerzita Karlova, Fakulta sociálních věd, Katedra evropských studií. Vedoucí práce Kołodziej, Jacek.

VEBEROVÁ, Klára. *Branding Prahy*. Praha, 2018. 54 s. Bakalářská práce (Bc).

Univerzita Karlova, Fakulta sociálních věd, Institut komunikačních studií a žurnalistiky.

Katedra marketingové komunikace a public relations. Vedoucí diplomové práce doc. PhDr.

Jan Halada, Csc.

Datum / Podpis studenta/ky

14.09.2022

**TUTO ČÁST VYPLŇUJE PEDAGOG/PEDAGOŽKA:**

**Doporučení k tématu, struktuře a technice zpracování materiálu:**

**Případné doporučení dalších titulů literatury předepsané ke zpracování tématu:**

Potvrzuji, že výše uvedené teze jsem s jejich autorem/kou konzultoval(a) a že téma odpovídá mému oborovému zaměření a oblasti odborné práce, kterou na FSV UK vykonávám.

Souhlasím s tím, že budu vedoucí(m) této práce.

*Koude Klára Petrá*  
Příjmení a jméno pedagožky/pedagoga

.....  
Datum / Podpis pedagožky/pedagoga

TEZE JE NUTNO ODEVZDAT VYTIŠTĚNÉ, PODEPSANÉ A VE DVĚHU VYHOTOVENÍCH DO TERMÍNU UVEDENÉHO VE VYHLÁŠCE ŘEDITELE INSTITUTU, A TO PROSTŘEDNICTVÍM PODATELNY FSV UK. PŘIJATÉ TEZE JE NUTNÉ SI VYZVEDNOUT V SEKRETARIÁTU PŘÍSLUŠNÉ KATEDRY A NECHAT VEVÁZAT DO VÝTISKU DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE.

## List of Appendices

### Appendix no.1: Consent forms



Available from: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1rH5ufKsnXDriwVnAdFIlluI9pqI-8YYP?usp=sharing>

### Appendix no. 2: Interview transcripts



Available from:  
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1tQ7uFQsmqJr0eP6twmWzhWAkyt1LfK44?usp=sharing>