



Enlivening a place brand inclusively: evidence from ten European cities

Arja Lemmetyinen¹ · Lenita Nieminen¹ · Johanna Aalto² · Tuomas Pohjola¹

Revised: 6 August 2024 / Accepted: 7 August 2024
© The Author(s) 2024

Abstract

This study contributes to the stream of research investigating the influence of the creative sector on the development of cities and the importance of place branding to local development. Place branding increasingly influences the competitiveness and attractiveness of cities. We examined ten European cities as creative places and how integrating creative economy strategies, social inclusion, and sustainable practices into city branding contributes to differentiation and competitiveness. The current research contributes to the research area by examining certain cities in the context of the creative economy and investigating how, as creative brands, they can be differentiated from their competitors by utilizing inclusive planning of the image of the place.

Keywords CCIs (creative and cultural industries) · City brand · Place branding

Introduction

This study focuses on how the creative and cultural industries (CCIs) influence the development of cities. It is a research stream that includes the influential work of Boccella and Salerno (2016) and Cooke and Lazzeretti (2008). More specifically, this study contributes to the discussion about the concept of a city brand to understand how it differentiates a place by scrutinising the concept of a creative sphere. A creative sphere (Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski 2019) includes a well-developed creative sector (economy), well-developed social networks (society), and appropriate strategies supporting creativity (policy). The study aims to explore the role of the CCIs in the development of a city's

brand. The study addresses the following question: How can a creative city brand be differentiated from its competitors by utilizing inclusive planning of the image of the place?

The current research parallels that of Maheshwari et al. (2011) in concentrating specifically on place branding and its importance to local development. The process of place branding in the context of CCIs has been studied by Evans (2015), Mengi et al. (2017), and Rodrigues and Schmidt (2021), whereas Pasquinelli et al. (2022) recently focused on the place brand attributes of a specific city. Rodrigues and Schmidt (2021) concluded that the creative economy is an important dimension in the process of place identity formation because it can create a new look and highlight the distinctiveness of a city. Distinctive factors important to place branding include history and culture, events, and location (Braun et al. 2013; Kalandides 2011; Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013).

Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski (2019) investigated cities as creative brands. Pasquinelli et al. (2022, p. 9) have called for “a different and a wider set of cases” with broader geographical coverage “to provide further and a more nuanced insight” (ibid) into post-pandemic city branding. The current study contributes to the literature by exploring city brand associations and the creative sphere in ten European cities (see Dudek-Mańkowska & Grochowski 2019). The current research explores how a creative city brand can differentiate itself from competitors in the context of the

✉ Arja Lemmetyinen
arinle@utu.fi

Lenita Nieminen
lenita.nieminen@utu.fi

Johanna Aalto
johanna.aalto@laurea.fi

Tuomas Pohjola
tuomas.pohjola@utu.fi

¹ Turku School of Economics, University of Turku, Pori Unit, Finland

² Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Vantaa, Finland



creative economy. When defining the creative economy, we use the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) (2008) classification. The UNCTAD classification depicts four broad groups of creative industries: (1) *heritage*, including cultural sites and traditional cultural expressions; (2) *arts*, including performing and visual arts; (3) *media*, including publishing and audio-visuals; and (4) *functional creations*, including new media, design, and creative services. Our data include input from participants from all major fields of creative economies, with creative services and performing arts being the most common.

The research is inspired by extensive datasets compiled between 2019 and 2022 in a multidisciplinary project (www.disce.eu) related to creative economies across European countries to understand how creative economies are conceptualized within these urban contexts. The data encompass reviews of academic and policy documentation on the role of the CCIs in developing a city's overall reputation for attractiveness and interviews with a wide range of local cultural and creative workers, entrepreneurs and freelancers, volunteers and community groups and influencers, alongside policymakers and higher education institutions involved in the creative economy of the city.

The research should benefit a broad audience, including policymakers, urban planners, cultural and creative industry practitioners, and academics interested in the fields of urban and regional development, creative economies, and place branding. This study offers insights into the interface of the creative economy, social inclusion, and sustainable practices in place branding. It can therefore provide valuable guidance for cities and regions aiming to enhance their competitiveness and attractiveness through inclusive and innovative strategies. Specifically, our study highlights the importance of integrating creative economy strategies, social inclusion, and sustainable practices into place branding efforts as a means to advance differentiation and competitiveness in the inherently global landscape.

Literature review

The competitiveness of a city

A place or city brand aids in distinguishing the place/city from its competitors based on the significance attributed to it by consumers/visitors/residents (Bose et al. 2022). A city brand encompasses a range of visual and symbolic elements that distinguish a city and contribute to its unique identity (e.g. Anholt 2005; Alperytė & Išoraitė 2019). However, many scholars point out that city branding is a complex and multifaceted concept that requires strategic and critical understanding if it is to be managed effectively (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005; Govers 2013; Pohjola et al.

2023). Bonakdar and Audirac (2020) highlights the link between city branding and urban planning, suggesting that a more socially responsible approach is needed to address challenges such as social inequity and gentrification. A place (or city) with an innovative reputation gains credibility, and its image may become a significant driving force of customer/visitor/resident satisfaction and local development (Maheshwari et al. 2011).

The focus of this study is city branding. Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005, p. 510) state “that city branding has been practised consciously or unconsciously, for as long as cities have competed with each other for trade, populations, wealth, prestige or power”. In line with Boccella and Salerno (2016), we see CCIs as driving the economic growth and local development of European cities. De Noni et al. (2014, p. 220) have identified opportunities to nurture the image and cultural creativity experienced by visitors to a city, aspects that influence the attractiveness of the city brand.

The above studies show that it is possible to enhance the positive associations with a city's brand image of those with a positive attitude to the city. According to Parkerson and Saunders (2005), “socio-cultural and man-made” are the primary differentiators that set a place's brand apart from the competition. Sasaki (2010, p. S6) conducted case studies of Kanazawa, Osaka, and Yokohama in Japan to determine the competitiveness and attractiveness of the cities to residents, visitors, investors, companies, and the talented workforce. The study reports that artistic and cultural experiences stimulate urban social inclusion, albeit slightly differently in each environment. The CCIs are considered essential for disseminating the brand message because they foster distinctiveness and renewal, both of which have implications for competitiveness (Rodrigues and Schmidt 2021). However, it should be noted that the factors that influence the branding of a place can also be difficult, if not impossible, to control (Ind and Schmidt 2019), which can be seen as increasing the importance of place brand design and processes.

How to enliven a city brand

Pasquinelli et al. (2022, p. 8) reported on the pre- and post-pandemic brand communication on Instagram of four iconic Italian cultural cities (Rome, Florence, Venice, and Milan). The sudden pandemic forced the cities to alter their brand communication, which was particularly evident in Milan in turning the city into “an emerging sustainable destination brand”. The findings echoed a movement towards the inclusive, green, smart city paradigm called for in policy statements (e.g., OECD 2020).

Merrilees et al. (2018, pp. 20–21) followed Sasaki (2010) in pointing to the significance of experiencing a city brand of social inclusion. Gustafson (2001) suggested we ask what a city means to its stakeholders including



residents, visitors, companies, policymakers and investors. Merrilees et al. (2018) follow the stream of city brand literature (Freire 2009; Paganoni 2012; Zhao 2015) by adopting a people focus, demonstrating the dominant role of social bonding as a city brand association. It is not the buildings of the city, nor even the available leisure activities, but the friends and relatives, that is, social bonding that creates the most resounding experiences.

Places where new technologies are consciously used to accomplish desirable urban results (Yigitcanlar et al. 2019) seek to deliver an urban vision of a society marked by improved well-being and quality of life by increasing the efficiency of public services and infrastructure using digital technology (Carro-Suárez et al. 2023). However, society is today concerned not only with its own well-being but also with the well-being of future generations, and as a result, the role of sustainability in smart city development programmes is increasing.

Cities and urban ecosystems are likely to face a range of new issues in the future, given the speed at which urbanization is advancing and its geographic spread. Smart urbanism and how it is reflected in the literature merits critical evaluation. Future policymaking and the governance of digitalized sustainable and smart cities should avoid becoming overly technocentric and technocratic to ensure there is room for complementary environmental and social sustainability perspectives (Bibri 2021).

Place culture, place identity, and place image

The style of life that the locals experience and develop is known as the place culture (Aitken and Campelo 2011; Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013). Place identity is influenced by the importance of continuous communication amongst all stakeholders involved in the brand establishment process. Consequently, instead of being a particular result of such a process, place identity should be understood as a complicated process of identity building, and the place image as referring to the way people perceive the place (Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013). Lemmetyinen and Go (2010) have also described place branding as an ongoing process driven by stakeholders.

Sang (2021) relies on the model promoted by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), in which an effective place brand should promote the residents' place-related identity in order to fully express the place's culture and enable outside visitors to build an image of it. An effective place brand should guide the place's culture to adapt to changes in the place's image. However, Sang (2021) criticizes Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) for omitting the important element of the planned image in their model. This study takes account of Sang's (2021) critique and views the desired (planned)

image of the place as an inclusive phenomenon involving different actors.

The creative sphere and inclusive image planning represent the potential of a creative city brand

According to Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski (2019, p. 274), cities that have a broad basis on which to develop their economy and a high ceiling for creativity may not experience the creative economy as a valuable brand asset, whereas those "cities undergoing restructuring of the economy treat creativity as a very important element of branding" (ibid.). The influence of the creative sector on the development of a creative city brand is at its height "when in the city there is a well-developed creative sector (economy); dynamic creative community (society), and well-designed strategies to support creativity (policy)" (ibid). Focusing on the relationship between the creative economy and place branding combines the phenomenon of the creative economy with a specific location and, therefore, creates a city as a brand (Dudek-Mańkowska & Grochowski 2019). Place brand is formed through a dialogue between multiple stakeholders (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013). In this study, we specifically explore the role of CCIs and the creative sphere in this process of dialogue and shared value creation.

In the context of place branding, inclusivity plays a crucial role in image building. Zimmerbauer (2011) and Cassel (2008) both emphasize the bidirectional relationship between regional identity and image, with the latter highlighting the importance of targeting the local population in image building. Inclusivity then comes into play, as it involves the active participation of all stakeholders in the branding process (Lucarelli 2022). Almeida and Almeida (2023) further underscore the influence of destination image on territorial branding, suggesting that an inclusive approach to image building can enhance overall regional development. Therefore, inclusivity is a key factor in creating a positive and authentic regional image.

By synthesizing the theoretical discussions above, this study aims to explore how a creative city brand can be differentiated from its competitors. Figure 1 illustrates an *inclusive city brand model* in which the creative sphere described by Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski (2019) forms the basis of the competitive edge of a creative city with its economic, societal, and policy-related components. The dynamic branding model described by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), highlighting the interplay between the place culture and identity and the dominant role of image, is complemented by the notion of Sang (2021) emphasizing the significance of the planned image. In the inclusive city brand model, the planned image is replaced by the inclusive planning of the image of a place.



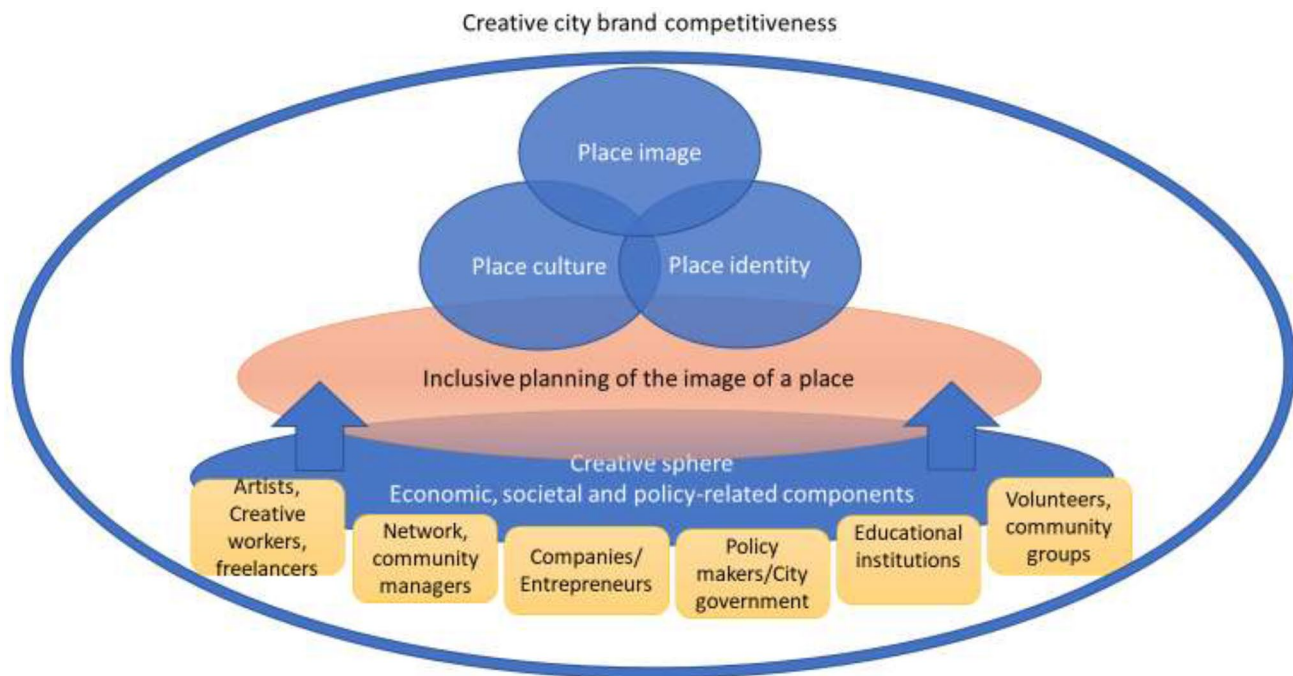


Fig. 1 An inclusive city brand model

The inclusive city brand model synthesizes the main theoretical discussions; it merges the creative sphere (economic, societal, and policy-related components) by Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski (2019) and the dynamic branding model (place culture, place identity, and place image) by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013). It is completed by the idea of the planned place image of Sang (2021), as illustrated in Fig. 1. The methodology section below introduces the data sources of the study and how it was analysed.

Research design and methods

Case study methodology

The current study is an extensive multiple-case example in which “not all the features of the cases are necessarily analysed in similar detail as in the one-case, intensive research designs” (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, p. 137). The choice of the method reflects the researchers having a specific pre-defined research interest. In this instance, the authors were interested in how a creative city brand can be differentiated from its competitors. We believe that a sampling of multiple case cities makes it possible to “extend emergent theory, fill theoretical categories, provide examples of polar types” (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2016, p. 137). Conducting a multiple-case study requires more time and resources but often elicits more compelling evidence, and “the overall study is

therefore regarded as being more robust” (Yin 1994, p. 45; Herriott & Firestone 1983).

We present the creative sphere of cities as narratives from which it is possible to learn. Therefore, the main aim is not to compare case narratives with each other; the important thing is to learn from them. That point is reinforced by Stake (1998), who saw comparison as a powerful conceptual mechanism but one that should not compete with learning about and from the cases. Stake (1998) encouraged researchers to maximize learning from holistic, ethnographic, and phenomenological case studies.

Data collection and analysis

This research is inspired by extensive datasets compiled between 2019 and 2022 in a multidisciplinary project focusing on creative economies to provide an in-depth understanding of issues of sustainable growth and the attractiveness and social cohesion of specific cities in Europe (www.disce.eu). In our study, we draw on insights from ten cities in seven European countries: Lund in Sweden, Pori in Finland, Enschede in the Netherlands, Leuven in Belgium, Pécs in Hungary, Liepāja in Latvia, L’Aquila and Treviso in Italy, Chatham in England, and Dundee in Scotland. The study thus provides a wide set of cases, with broader geographical coverage offering a more nuanced insight into city branding.

Qualitative content analysis of documents—or documentary analysis—can be seen as “representations of the reality of organizations within which they are created”.



Such analysis therefore informs about the goings on in the organization analyzed and helps “uncover such things as its culture” (Bell et al. 2019, p. 519). Atkinson and Coffey (2004) suggested that documents should be viewed as a distinct level of reality. Hence, documents should be recognized as texts written with a distinct purpose in mind rather than as simply reflecting reality. A researcher wishing to employ documents to understand aspects of an organization and its operations will need to complement the analysis of documentary evidence with other sources of data (Bell et al. 2019, p. 519).

More specifically, our study used two sets of data. First, we reviewed the existing academic and policy documentation on the creative sphere of each case city. Another set of data comprised 290 semi-structured interviews with a wide range of local cultural and creative workers, entrepreneurs and freelancers, volunteers, and community groups and influencers, alongside policymakers and higher education institutions involved in the creative economy of the city. Table 1 below shows the number of interviewee groups in each case city.

The prevalent approach to interpreting documents qualitatively is to conduct a qualitative analysis (Insch et al. 1997) comprising “searching out... underlying themes in the materials being analyzed and can be discerned in several of the studies referred to earlier” (Bell et al. 2019, p. 511). The extracted themes are usually illustrated with excerpts from interviews, in our study, with excerpts from semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit how the interviewees saw the creative economy of their city and their recommendations to improve the inclusivity of the creative economy of the city.

The current study is a joint endeavour of four researchers, three of whom were involved in the collection and analysis of data. Two researchers first read the reviews of the existing policy documentation of each case city individually and manually searched the reports for observations referring to the elements of a creative sphere (economy, policy, and society). The research team discussed the findings together. Two members then completed this material with the interview quotes. The quotes from the interviews were selected to represent the interviewees’ views on the city’s cultural sphere and its dimensions. We believe that the narratives on the state of the art of creative economies in each case city helped us to determine the expressions of the dimensions of the cities’ cultural sphere, i.e. their economy, policy and society.

When combined with human oversight, artificial intelligence (AI) can serve as a potent tool in processing and summarizing large quantities of text for streamlining desk research (Watson and Webster 2020). While AI does not play a decisive role in the current research, it was utilised to complement the researcher-led identification of second-order patterns and related concepts and thus accelerate the research process (Dwivedi 2023). In practical terms, the well-established AI model, ChatGPT, was used to assist in checking connections between the literature review and the results extracted by the authors. The research team analysed the interviews, synthesised them with the CCI reviews of the case cities, and constructed detailed narratives on each city. This kind of data triangulation is “expected to provide a multi-dimensional but also a more objective analysis of the data” (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, p. 139).

This study explores whether a city has the creative potential to market itself as creative. We specifically ask how a

Table 1 Case cities/interviewee groups

Interviewee group/case city	Policy maker	Network/community manager	Company	Higher education provider	Creative worker or recent creative graduate	Volunteer and community groups	Total
Chatham	1	2	16	4	5	3	31
Dundee	2	0	16	2	7	3	30
Enschede	3	4	16	2	9	1	35
L’Aquila	2	2	12	1	9	0	26
Leuven	1	5	9	2	8	2	27
Liepāja	1	2	11	2	9	1	26
Lund	1	3	14	2	6	0	26
Pécs	0	3	11	2	9	0	25
Pori	1	3	19	3	10	3	39
Treviso	1	1	12	1	10	0	25
Total (individuals)	13	24	135	21	82	14	290

‘Network/community manager’ category includes venues for cultural centres and public or private ‘umbrella’ organizations and associations; ‘Company’ category includes private companies and cultural and creative institutions such as museums and theatres; ‘Creative worker or recent creative graduate’ category includes also freelancers/entrepreneurs based on the rationale that many of them are one-person businesses; ‘Volunteer and community groups’ category includes volunteers representing civil society, e.g. members of a local ethnic community



city brand in the context of creative economies can be differentiated from its competitors by applying the concept of a creative sphere presented by Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski (2019), who consider the creative sphere one of the brand associations of a city brand. Our study proposes that the creative sphere of a city comprises three components: a well-developed creative sector (*economy*), well-developed social networks (*society*), and appropriate strategies supporting creativity (*policy*).

We present the findings of the analysis in the following section.

Results: the narratives of ten cities

The creative sphere dimensions—economy, policy, and society—all relate to city branding in that they are important components of a city's overall reputation for attractiveness. Table 2 below provides a summary of the key dimensions of the creative sphere. The table was derived from the reviews of the policy documentation of ten European cities. An AI model was used to compile a user-friendly visualization of the report data in Table 2 (see, for example, Khurana et al. 2023; Kang et al. 2020).

Next, the research team analysed the interviews, synthesised them with the descriptions of the case city reviews, and constructed the following detailed narratives on each case city.

Narratives of cities

Chatham in England, with 80,000 residents, is one of five towns that make up the Medway authority and conurbation in the county of Kent, southeast of London. The closure of a historic dockyard and deindustrialization created levels of unemployment from which Chatham has not recovered. The region has many heritage sites, but Chatham has not capitalized on its cultural assets owing to the lack of local retail, leisure, and hospitality facilities. However, the transition to a service-oriented economy with creative industries is occurring. The largest creative sector is IT technology. The creative economy is seen as a key driver of the long-term growth and development of the region and is supported by a regional programme that envisions Chatham becoming a regionally significant cultural hub. Interviewees mentioned the idea of a hub or creating a cluster of like-minded businesses and organizations as a way to promote collaboration within the community and to retain local talent.

The following citation shows that proactive and, above all, concrete and reciprocal activity is required to exploit the creative potential of the city: "... *really smart thinking about how the area can better use its spaces and places, how the area can better, you know, service the arts and celebrate independent craftsmanship*" (GBR17146M50s). The following statement shows that such a creative hub or a community perhaps already exists in the city: "*I went onto*

Table 2 The dimensions of the creative sphere of a city

City	Economy	Policy	Society
Chatham	Transitioning to a service-oriented economy with creative industries	An economic regeneration focus; creative industries; cultural development	Diverse community, emphasis on creative industries and cultural participation
Dundee	Focus on digital media, gaming industries, and creative entrepreneurship	Strong support for digital and creative industries; cultural participation	Active engagement in digital, creative sectors; a focus on cultural innovation
Enschede	Transition from industrial to creative and knowledge-based industries	Economic transition; supporting creative industries and innovation ecosystems	Transition from industrial roots to a creative, innovative orientation
Leuven	Driven by education, research, technology, and arts	Support for education, research; creative industries; and cultural engagement	Vibrant cultural and academic community; high civic engagement
Liepāja	Industrial and shipping base, exploring creative sectors	Economic diversification, a focus on cultural and creative industries	Industrial heritage, exploring creative and cultural avenues
Pécs	Cultural heritage, tourism sector focus	Cultural policies supporting the preservation of heritage and urban development	Rich cultural heritage and a strong sense of community
L'Aquila	Reconstruction focused on rebuilding cultural and creative industries	Aimed at reconstruction, focusing on cultural heritage and sustainable development	Community resilience, focus on cultural heritage, rebuilding social fabric
Treviso	Entrepreneurship in traditional industries, integrating creativity	Encourages entrepreneurship, innovation, and creative industry integration	Strong entrepreneurial spirit; engaging with creative, cultural activities
Lund	High-tech and research industries, innovation and entrepreneurship	Supports innovation collaboration between academia, industry, and the creative sector	High levels of education; research; innovation; strong cultural scene
Pori	Diverse, with a growing creative and cultural sector presence	Supports industrial diversification and a growing emphasis on cultural activities	Diverse, a blend of industrial heritage and cultural activities



Twitter, and I just searched ‘creative’ and ‘Medway’, I just started searching for those words, and the same people came up. Moreover, it turned out that there was a bit of a creative community locally...and I started organising events in the co-working space. So, film screenings, um, kind of networking opportunities” (GBR17152F2s).

The public sector would preferably adopt the role of a supporter such as *“to reach out the local creative economy rather than the local authority leading”* (GBR17152F2s). The interviews reveal that practical support is particularly required; a policy alone is not enough: *“The Council could subsidize it; they could actually just help local people to find out how they could rent a space ... how to find funding or to give business rates relief for the first year”*.

Dundee is Scotland’s fourth-largest city, with 150,000 inhabitants. Creativity is supported by institutions like the Victoria and Albert Museum Dundee, and the city’s vibrant design, gaming, and art sectors are strengthening the local cultural development of the city. Dundee’s *innovative partnership approach* emphasizes collaboration between the local authority and wider city-based stakeholders and is one of the city’s strengths. However, greater understanding and communication will be required to cope with the problems of, for example, empty and unused spaces, and more regular meetings would help direct efforts to address common challenges. An informant, a lecturer, and a curator spoke about Dundee from the point of view of the discernible aims of sustainable development and inclusiveness and stated that: *“there has been a shift, and it’s not just about representation within an audience level but at a board level, a decision-making level, and a policymaking level”* (GBR213F40s).

Dundee has worked on its culture-led policy in a sustained manner to spur its urban regeneration since the 1980s. Dundee’s latest cultural strategy policy (pre-COVID-19) commits to enabling all citizens of the city to “make the most of their abilities within the cultural and creative industries”. Some informants related how prior digital and creative success stories illustrated ways cities could manage the structural change from a manufacturing-dominant economy to a post-industrial society. The following account is from an informant responsible for combining gaming and art in university education:

There’s a tradition of comics and publishing in the city; there’s a tradition of electronic engineering in the city; there was this growing computing expertise in the city. When Lemmings came out, it was the kind of coming together of all these different parts, and then they followed up Lemmings with Grand Theft Auto; the city really got put on the map (GBR217M50s).

Enschede, with 160,000 residents, is located in the eastern part of the Netherlands. The public image of the city is

built on four pillars: an enterprising city, a city of knowledge, a creative city, and a vibrant city attracting the creative class and those with higher education. According to the city’s policy documentation, strengthening cultural and creative opportunities and innovation ecosystems will make it attractive to a highly skilled workforce and companies. Enschede has a broad selection of theatre, music, and cultural events and hosts several annual festivals. One of the strengths of the city is the number of grassroots-level initiatives managed by the city, involving many voluntary parties—individuals and associations—in the brand work of the city.

The policies do not use the specific term *creative economy* or directly reference the cultural and creative industries. However, during the last ten years, the city has been very successful in re-formulating the vision of city marketing, and the transition from industrial to creative and knowledge-based industries has taken place. The city marketing has an ambitious goal:

We’re going to shift our focus now to how we can work on the brand of Enschede. How can we make sure that the image we want to have is not only known in the city but also outside of the region and on a European level? (NLD0020M50s).

The plan has been formulated with 50 stakeholders of the city drawn from the university, the university of applied sciences, and diverse cultural partners.

Leuven in Belgium has 100,000 residents and is an innovation-driven city aiming to acquire an international reputation for high-tech, health, and creativity. Leuven is close to an airport and the capital of Brussels and intends to attract international research-oriented and high-profile companies. In 2020, the EU chose Leuven as the European Capital of Innovation. Much of the local economy is driven by spin-offs of academic research in healthcare and technology. Enterprises in the CCI sector struggle to recruit sufficient creative professionals, and creative entrepreneurship among young people is stimulated via a portal. Co-creation is facilitated by a portal fostering collaboration between academia, business, and government. However, a creative industries expert, a dramaturg, raised a critical notion:

There are barriers. You know, I’m also part of a platform... trying to get Leuven international attention for health, high-tech, and creativity. But if we’re honest, the creativity is, you know, they don’t do anything for creativity. It’s about health and high-tech. And it’s a constant fight to convince those managers, those people, that creativity is the key...to be an internationally attractive city (BE19F31s).



Leuven has a cultural offering that includes UNESCO special interest sites. The city offers physical spaces where companies, schools, artists, and residents can experiment with innovative projects. One example is a music club that has taken the social responsibility of training marginalized young people to become musical experts:

We try to be a model for the cultural society, and we have a social role—we are a social model. I think we bring people together on a stage, but we also bring people together; as I said, our volunteers are very important to us, that community (BE16M50s).

Another example of the grassroots-level win–win cooperation concerns a recent graduate whose company the city supported by asking her to solve the city’s digitalization problem creatively and innovatively: “*What they wanted to do; they just didn’t really know how. So, instead of doing it themselves, they decided to let it come bottom-up*” (BE27F20s). Leuven has applied to become the 2030 European Capital of Culture.

Liepāja (70,000 residents) is situated on the Baltic Sea coast of Latvia. Since the 1990s, it has developed from a military city to become a modern port and a metal and textile-industry centre. The city’s creative economy is supported by cultural institutions, festivals, and music education. The public sector view of the CCI sector is that it mainly comprises providers of leisure-time activities, focusing on tourism and entertainment. The policy documents speak about economic diversification and the importance of cultural and creative industries, but the administration perhaps sees the role of the local community in the creative economy as being more of an audience for cultural events. The city concert hall, located in the city centre, hosts 200–250 events a year and is a cultural centre providing a space for different kinds of art.

We are a kind of, yes, an art centre that plays a rather important role; also, for example, the hotel chains and small business owners are very grateful to us. So, we are, we are yes—promoters of the economy and a kind of a very influential player. (LVA5006F40s).

The business sector considers CCIs and creative entrepreneurship as a sector that could drive positive change for the city and vision of Liepāja as the hub of Latvian rock music, attracting young people to stay in the city. Support from the city is expected to create neighbourhoods, creative quarters, and meeting places where institutions of different art genres, minorities, and various communities could meet. Workshops, residences, industrial parks, cultural centres and quarters are seen as private initiatives, but the city should be involved in the projects. Abandoned industrial areas of the city are seen as having huge potential for cultural events.

The creative economy in **Pécs** (150,000 residents) in Hungary is driven by cultural events, creative industries, and the legacy of having been a European Capital of Culture (ECOC). Despite considerable efforts after the European City of Culture nomination (2010), the importance of CCIs has diminished in the city. However, knowledge-intensive businesses (KIBS), R&D, and universities have become more important in Pécs. The CCI strategy of the Ministry of Innovation and Technology spanning 2020–2030 aims to “*[raise] awareness of the strengths, seize the opportunities, strengthen jobs, and create new jobs considering sustainability*”. However, the CCIs have not been encouraged from the perspective of the economy. As one informant put it: “*Art doesn’t really produce a direct profit. It is a long-term investment*” (HUN6024F42s). Another interviewee added: “*If I calculate my hourly salary, I earn less than a construction worker. People think that artists do this because they create for fun*” (HUN6008F45s).

The comments of several interviewees reflect confidence in the internal cohesion of the creative economy of the community but mistrust in the financial situation. The following interview clip shows that the creative economy concept includes two components that are not to be combined. When a young entrepreneur and creative worker was asked about Pécs as a working and living environment, he praised the city’s creative industries, but he did not want to see them from an economic point of view. It may also be that the city’s weak economy had made him sceptical of the role of the CCIs as part of the economy:

Let’s see it from a non-economic point of view for the first time. A lot of creatives come to Pécs...like artists and musicians. We can reach a lot of creatives in the city, and we can build on that. But a lot of money has been taken away from Pécs...Money has been taken away from the university too. There is a big economic problem...and there will be more. (HUN6005M33s).

He summarizes the state of the creative sphere of Pécs in a rather sarcastic way:

Inclusivity and sustainability are here. There are no problems with the creative economy here. There is a problem with the economy here. So, while I can’t pay the price for an artwork that reflects its value, well, that’s not a creative industry problem. It is an economic one. (HUN6005M33s)

L’Aquila in southern Italy has 70,000 residents. The city retains its ancient layout, and there are 2000 buildings of national cultural interest in the city. The city promoted reconstruction and recovery after an earthquake destroyed the historic centre in 2009. With 30,000 students, the city-centre university is a source of innovation. National and European-level actors have been involved in L’Aquila’s



policymaking by funding and coordinating the reconstruction. The creative policy of the city is to develop L'Aquila to become a creative, knowledge-driven university city based on resources existing before the earthquake: a notable cultural heritage, cultural institutions, and universities. L'Aquila has applied for the nomination of Italian Capital of Culture.

One informant saw inclusivity as a fundamental way to bring people together:

A bridge between people.... Inclusiveness should... involve people and make them talk to each other; this would also lead to sustainability because if people understand the value of what you are doing, if you understand the meaning and the sense of the activities you are carrying out, then you also look for the means to make them durable and sustainable over time. (ITA18024F40s)

Treviso in Italy has 85,000 inhabitants and a thriving creative economy based on events, creative hubs, and a strong focus on entrepreneurship in traditional industries: design and fashion. The situation reflects the 2021 strategy of Treviso City Council, which aims to improve the cultural attractiveness of the city to nurture tourism. A private sector hub called *Open-dreams* has been promoting the CCIs since 2019. The hub was established to repurpose a disused industrial area. The recovery project incorporated the territory's history and published a *cultural manifesto* to reinforce the city's cultural sphere. The city council's strategy is based on multi-stakeholder cooperation involving the universities, the private sector, foundations, and volunteers. An entrepreneur interviewee brought out the importance of collaboration but also its challenges:

In my opinion, the combination of the municipality, the university, and the association is not something to be taken for granted. If we could manage to combine this, and we are trying to do so, a reality that creates an important network between organisations operating in the same place, with the coordination of events and initiatives on a common theme while maintaining each one's prerogatives, this would be a really important thing. This is an attempt that we are making, and we are thinking about it these days. It's taking up a lot of energy and attention, and if we succeed, it would be an extraordinary thing. We are trying. (ITA28028M40s).

The following excerpt from another interview data illustrates that the idea of cultural inclusion is well established: *"I would associate the concept of inclusiveness with the possibility of involvement, the possibility of accessibility for all. Culture must belong to everyone, so its positioning must be within the reach of everyone"* (ITA28048M40s).

Lund (125,000 residents) is located in the south of Sweden, only 60 km from Copenhagen, Denmark. Lund University

has 44,000 students, ensuring that the city has a relatively young population. With the high levels of education, research, and innovation, regional policies have a cross-sectoral focus, meaning they address the media, life sciences, and food clusters, which are important to the economy of Lund. The focus is on high-tech and research industries, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Culture is seen as a driving force in the development of the city. The people of the region are active consumers of culture, and there are more companies offering cultural activities than elsewhere in the country. The policies highlight the importance of residents actively participating in cultural activities, but the voice of creative workers, entrepreneurs, and freelancers is perhaps not clearly heard. More openness and participation are called for. *"It's a problem because the politicians are not really into what we are doing"* (SWE1002M60s). The statements by the managing director of a well-established cultural institution in performing arts indicate it might be hard to find a common language with the politicians:

They want to see how many times you have played. Was it 150 or 200? And we try to tell them, yes, but it's also good even if we play 30 times...the quantity contra quality... That's a big problem, I think (SWE1002M60s).

It is quite evident that culture is seen in speeches and as a decoration of the cake, and technology investments overtake cultural investments. A managing director of a well-established private cultural organisation in performing arts told a story about his conversation with a decision-maker of Lund: *"A politician told me once when we asked for money, 'But Andy [a pseudonym], you have the fantastic streets of Lund, you have the fantastic buildings, it's free for you!'"* The interviewee admits that the level of culture in Lund is adequate:

But then, we have Ideon Science Village; we have the new ESS [a centre for high-tech innovation]. It's high technology, but still...and the community runs an art gallery. That's it. There's nothing more run by the community. There's no theatre, there's nothing else, no cultural institution. They build many new arenas and things like that. Nothing new in the culture way. Old library, old things from the sixties, but nothing new. They talk about it, but it never goes all the way (SWE1002M60s).

Pori, Finland, has 80,000 residents and a reputation as a [metal] industry and technology city. The city's industrial heritage is seen as an attraction for both residents and visitors. The city is internationally known for the Pori Jazz Festival, which started in 1966, and its administration is now an experienced and innovative event organizer that benchmarks festivals worldwide. The Pori Jazz Festival is important to the city's economy, but long-term planning is complicated by insecure external funding, the tightening of the national



economy, and project-based working within the region's CCIs.

There is no specific strategy relating to the creative economy for the city of Pori that is addressed under a regional cultural strategy. A few policy documents refer to event management and tourism. There are several networks of public, private, and third-sector cultural professionals that have been involved in culture-related strategies. The city has many international creative economy projects, and one of the interviewees emphasizes the role of project workers participating in projects as harbingers of the creative economy, stating that “*Decision-makers should take the results of their work more prominently into strategic decisions of the creative economy. A clearer role of the city’s project coordinator would also be needed*” (FIN7004F40s). One of the founders of an arts centre established on the grounds of the Art School spoke of cooperation:

The students at the Art School have the opportunity to use this workspace or to work here [at the radio] station in some way. It is one joint project of ours. Or if thinking about the suburban projects, if you create a small event there and get people together, it will prevent this sort of isolation and racism, other things like that (FIN7033M40s).

A member of a volunteer association called for cooperation arrangements to be more structured: “*Whether it is a voluntary association, such as Friends of the Museum or another association, it can be—it should be—assured that there are enough people and time to do the work*” (FIN 7032M65s).

The creative sphere as a crucial dimension of enlivening the city brand inclusively

The narratives of the case cities prompted some distinctive observations of how well their creative spheres developed economically, how dynamic the social networks are, and whether the policy strategies support the city’s creative brand. We present the creative sphere as a crucial dimension of the creative city brand that offers a flourishing environment for people and companies (Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski 2019). This environment is unique and makes it possible for a city or a place to differentiate itself from competitors on the basis of “the system of associative structures and social networks, connections and human interactions... encouraging the flow of ideas between individuals and institutions” (Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski 2019, p. 274). In this study, we consider the creative sphere to exist in a city where there is a well-developed creative sector (economy), a dynamic creative community (society), and well-designed strategies to support creativity (policy).

Based on the narratives of the case cities, we present examples of success and potential failure in terms of the

role assigned to CCIs in building cross-sectoral collaborations and successful inclusion.

The city has a well-developed creative sector (economy)

It is notable that, for example, in Pécs, the CCIs are not perceived as part of the economy. In a post-industrial city like Dundee, the technology-based gaming industry represents the core of the creative sphere. The CCI economy in Leuven has grown so fast that companies have been unable to recruit a sufficient workforce to support it. The data show that it is a challenge for several university cities to attract students and young people who will stay in the city. When cultural projects spur economic development, as in Dundee, they can transform communities and create inclusive prosperity. In particular, digitalization is a dimension of the creative city brand, which will emphasize smart city technology and digital infrastructure to promote innovation and growth. Cities prioritizing digitalization, such as Chatham and Dundee, can utilize it in their branding initiatives. The data of most of our case cities clearly show that the pandemic accelerated digital transformation and reinforced the importance of having a resilient creative sector. The acceleration of digital transformation during the pandemic and its role in creative city branding resonate with the observations of Pasquinelli et al. (2022) and Yigitcanlar et al. (2019). These studies discuss the movement towards smart, sustainable, and inclusive city paradigms, emphasizing the role of digital technology in enhancing public services and urban well-being.

Economic regeneration through CCIs has become a strategic focus for many cities seeking to revitalize their economies. For example, Enschede and Pori have a similar history, and both cities now recognise the role of creative industries as they renew their brand. Cultural heritage is about the stewardship of a city’s historical and cultural assets. The emphasis on the economic, societal, and policy-related components of the creative sphere in cities such as Dundee, Leuven, and Pori align with the discussion found in the work of Bose et al. (2022) and Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski (2019). An inclusive approach to this dimension involves not only preserving and celebrating the past but also ensuring that the narratives of all groups, especially those that have been underrepresented, are acknowledged. Cities like Pécs and Treviso, with their focus on cultural heritage, underscore the importance of this dimension in cultivating a shared sense of identity and continuity. The stewardship of cultural heritage in Pécs and Treviso, and the socio-economic integration seen in Enschede, reflect findings in the works of Merrilees et al. (2018) and Gustafson (2001). Those authors discuss the significance of social inclusion and the deep connections between cultural initiatives and the broader socio-economic fabric of the city.



In the city, there are well-designed strategies to support creativity (policy)

In the discussion of how CCIs and local and regional authorities interact and collaborate, the relevant questions are: who takes the lead and who coordinates the cooperation? For example, the CCI documents of Lund promise strategic support for the CCIs of the city, while the pre-pandemic cultural strategy of Dundee commits to enabling all citizens to “make the most of their abilities within the cultural and creative industries”. In the case of L’Aquila, the earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally affected the development of the creative sphere.

In Chatham and Treviso, the more top-down role of networks and hubs is significant in developing the CCIs. In Treviso, the CCIs are coordinated by a private sector hub, while in Chatham, the task falls to public funding and coordination. In Lund, the city has recognised formal tools for partnerships, such as joint ventures and research initiatives between Lund University and cultural practitioners, which are strengthened by supportive strategies and funding. However, despite the intensive cooperation between universities, the public sector, and industry, the voice of the CCI sector could be amplified.

In Pori, the city’s strategy of inclusivity in cultural policy safeguards relationships and involves a broad range of inhabitants, including the youth and elderly, in cultural activities. This inclusive approach expands the base of cultural partaking and inspires diverse segments of the city to work together on cultural productions.

Socio-economic integration signifies the degree to which cultural initiatives are part of the broader socio-economic field of the city. In cities where this dimension is emphasized, CCIs are not siloed but are integral to urban planning, social policy, and economic strategy. This holistic integration, characteristic of cities like Enschede, ensures that culture is a pillar of urban life, contributing to social cohesion and overall quality of life.

In the city, there is a dynamic creative community that supports cross-sectoral collaboration (society)

Community-based development emphasizes local agency and geographical context. It necessarily involves a range of institutions, people, and communities. In Enschede and Pori, bottom-up social networks bring in volunteers, both individuals and associations. Pori is an example of a city where volunteers provide a relevant resource supporting organizing events, such as Pori Jazz. Another example is Friends of the Museum, which is the social backbone of the museums of the city. In Liepāja, again, the role of the residents is seen more as being an audience than as an

active co-creator. The development of dynamic creative communities and the emphasis on cross-sectoral collaboration in cities such as Enschede and Pori align with the concepts of place culture and identity discussed by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) and Lemmetyinen and Go (2010). Those studies underline the ongoing, stakeholder-driven process of place branding that reflects the place’s culture and identity. In addition, CCI can extend the description of brand content, as Rodrigues and Schmidt (2021) pointed out.

Inclusion is a dimension of the creative city brand, demonstrating social sustainability and the development of a society that tolerates variety and equality. The branding efforts of Enschede mean it could be regarded as an inclusive city. Chatham stands out for its vigorous community involvement. The city is engaging minority groups in the CCIs as a basis of its collaborative strategy. The inclusive platforms for participation have attracted the creative energies of its varied population, thereby inspiring its creative sphere. L’Aquila, recovering from a shocking earthquake, has implemented a strategy of using the rebuilding process as an opportunity to restructure and support collaborations within the CCIs and engaged architects, urban planners, and local artists to re-establish cultural milestones. Leuven’s strategy, again, includes a participating model where residents, together with cultural organizations, actively contribute to cultural policymaking. The inclusive approaches to creative city branding, as seen in the policies of cities like Pori and Treviso, resonate with Bonakdar and Audirac (2020) and Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005). These works highlight the critical and strategic understanding required for effective city branding, which should include a focus on social equity and the integration of CCIs in urban development.

Cities that prioritize cultural diversity, like Leuven and Dundee, not only enrich their cultural landscapes but also empower ethnic and cultural groups to see their stories and traditions as reflected in the city’s cultural offerings. Cities like Pori, which intentionally engage people from young and older age groups, affirm the value of intergenerational exchange. Such partnerships, often seen in cities with prominent universities or colleges, enhance the vibrancy of CCIs through research, innovation, and the energetic involvement of students. They serve as a bridge between academia and the wider community, as observed in Leuven and Lund. For example, cities such as Lund have been exemplary in fostering a participatory cultural environment. When cities actively encourage participation from diverse groups, the result is a cultural tapestry that truly reflects the community’s voice and identity. In Liepāja, putting this kind of vision into practice is only just beginning. The higher education integration dimension reveals the synergies that can be achieved when cultural sectors and academic institutions collaborate. Most of our case cities do the same. The focus



on inclusive city brand development and the role of CCIs in dialogue and shared value creation echoes the thoughts of Zimmerbauer (2011) and Lucarelli (2022). That research highlights the importance of inclusivity in regional identity and image building, advocating the active participation of all stakeholders in the branding process.

Conclusions

We applied the concept of the creative sphere in this study as a base for the competitive edge of a creative city with its economic, societal, and policy-related components (Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski 2019). We considered that the interplay of place culture, place identity, and place image described in the dynamic branding model of Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) has a dominant role in how various stakeholders, such as residents, companies, and visitors, perceive the place brand. We completed the inclusive city brand model with an element of inclusive planning of the image of the place (Sang 2021). Using the inclusive city brand model as a framework for the theoretical discussion, we analysed ten European cities as creative places and examined how the integration of creative economy strategies, social inclusion, and sustainable practices into city branding contributes to the differentiation and competitiveness of cities.

Prior research has focused on the creative economy as a context for city branding (e.g., Evans 2015; Mengi et al. 2017; Pasquinelli et al. 2022). This study provides a wider set of cases, with broader geographical coverage, “to provide further and a more nuanced insight” into city branding (Pasquinelli et al. 2022, p. 9). The current research contributes to the earlier studies by examining the case cities in the context of the creative economy and investigating how the cities, as creative brands, can be differentiated from their competitors by utilizing inclusive image planning. By examining the approaches to inclusivity within the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) of the case cities, it becomes apparent that the recognized dimensions of inclusivity play various roles across different urban landscapes. The unique historical, social, and economic fabric of a city shapes the extent to which these dimensions are embedded in cultural policy and practice and the manner in which that happens.

The current study contributes to the literature by discussing the creative sphere as a branding resource (see Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski 2019; Rodrigues and Schmidt 2021). The *creative sphere* can support the development of a creative city brand and contribute to a city’s development. A city that can engage residents, companies, and tourists in the value co-creation of services and include a range of stakeholders in the development of

policies can build a thriving and sustainable society. The results illustrate that the creative spheres of the European cities in question are crucial assets to city branding alongside creative city dimensions, such as sustainability, social inclusion, and digitalization.

The CCIs can significantly influence the creation of a creative city brand. Cities with a healthy creative economy, a thriving and active creative culture, and carefully formulated policies that foster creativity will enjoy the greatest influence from the CCI sector. Cities can develop their creative industries to their full potential and establish a distinctive and engaging brand by fostering those three factors. The importance of the creative economy, especially in times of crisis, was highlighted both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of this emphasis takes the form of a lack of inclusiveness, that is, more limited opportunities to interact with other people. The creative economy has had a transformative impact on the development of new services, especially digital ones.

The *inclusiveness* and the *creative sphere* can support the development of a creative city brand and contribute to a city’s development. A city that can engage residents, companies, and tourists in the value co-creation of services and include a range of stakeholders in the development of policies can build a thriving and sustainable society. A bottom-up approach to addressing challenges, such as digitalization, can produce more effective and innovative solutions. The dimensions of inclusion and digitalization play vital roles in developing a creative city brand, which in turn can contribute to the overall development and attractiveness of a city.

This research offers managerial implications for policymakers, urban planners, cultural and creative industry practitioners, and academics. It underscores the importance of the creative and cultural sectors as a pivotal component of city branding and local development. The research highlights the necessity of a holistic approach, combining creative economy strategies with social inclusion and sustainability to foster vibrant and attractive city branding. The study advocates policies supporting creativity, inclusiveness, and digital infrastructure investment as being key to promoting innovation and enhancing city competitiveness. Additionally, it highlights the significance of preserving cultural heritage, which serves not only as a bridge to the past but as a foundation for shared and inclusive city branding.

The study is subject to certain limitations that merit consideration. The dynamic nature of city branding, influenced by continuous socio-economic, technological, and cultural shifts, suggests that the conclusions drawn here represent a particular moment in time. Accordingly, ongoing evaluation will be required to ensure they remain relevant. Moreover, the qualitative methodology, while providing depth, contains an element of subjectivity, which may need a balancing quantitative approach in the future to establish



a comprehensive understanding. Additionally, fully appreciating the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the creative sector and city branding strategies will demand further exploration. Finally, the focus on ten European cities could adversely affect the applicability of the findings to diverse global contexts. We acknowledge that the study might overlook other relevant examples and experiences, and hence, there could be a need for broader geographic research to validate these insights outside the EU.

Funding Open Access funding provided by University of Turku (including Turku University Central Hospital). The researchers have received a grant from the Finnish Cultural Foundation (Suomen Kulttuurirahasto) to carry out this study 2023–2024.

Data availability Not applicable.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Aitken, R., and A. Campelo. 2011. The four Rs of place branding. *Journal of Marketing Management* 27 (9/10): 913–933. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2011.560718>.
- Almeida, G.G.F., and P. Almeida. 2023. The influence of destination image within the territorial brand on regional development. *Cogent Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2233260>.
- Alperytė, I., and M. Išoraitė. 2019. Developing a city brand. *Journal of Intercultural Management* 11 (4): 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.2478/joim-2019-0022>.
- Anholt, Simon. 2005. *Brand new justice: How branding places and products can help the developing world*. London: Routledge.
- Atkinson, Paul, and Amanda Coffey. 2004. Analyzing documentary realities. In *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice*, 2nd ed., ed. David Silverman. London: Sage.
- Bell, Emma, Alan Bryman, and Bill Harley. 2019. *Business research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bibri, S.E. 2021. Data-driven smart sustainable cities of the future: An evidence synthesis approach to a comprehensive state-of-the-art literature review. *Sustainable Futures* 3: 100047. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sfr.2021.100047>.
- Boccella, N., and I. Salerno. 2016. Creative economy, cultural industries and local development. *Procedia, Social and Behavioral Sciences* 223: 291–296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.05.370>.
- Bonakdar, A., and I. Audirac. 2020. City branding and the link to urban planning: Theories, practices, and challenges. *Journal of Planning Literature* 35 (2): 147–160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412219878879>.
- Bose, S., S. Pradhan, M. Bashir, and S.K. Roy. 2022. Customer-based place brand equity and tourism: A regional identity perspective. *Journal of Travel Research* 61 (3): 511–527. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287521999465>.
- Braun, E., M. Kavaratzis, and S. Zenker. 2013. My city—My brand: The different roles of residents in place branding. *Journal of Place Management and Development* 6 (1): 18–28. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17538331311306087>.
- Carro-Suárez, J., S. Sarmiento-Paredes, and D. Nava. 2023. Smart and sustainable cities: A new urban transformation. *Sustainable Regional Planning*. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.110234>.
- Cassel, S.H. 2008. Trying to be attractive: Image building and identity formation in small industrial municipalities in Sweden. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 4 (2): 102–114. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.pb.6000086>.
- Cooke, Philip, and Luciana Lazzeretti. 2008. *Creative cities, cultural clusters and local economic development*. Cheltenham: Elgar.
- De Noni, I., L. Orsi, and L. Zanderighi. 2014. Attributes of Milan influencing city brand attractiveness. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 3 (4): 218–226. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2014.06.001>.
- Dudek-Mańkowska, S., and M. Grochowski. 2019. From creative industries to the creative place brand: Some reflections on city branding in Poland. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 15 (4): 274–287. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-019-00141-7>.
- Dwivedi, Y.K., et al. 2023. “So what if ChatGPT wrote it?” Multidisciplinary perspectives on opportunities, challenges and implications of generative conversational AI for research, practice and policy. *International Journal of Information Management* 71: 102642. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2023.102642>.
- Eriksson, Päivi., and Anne Kovalainen. 2016. *Qualitative methods in Business Research*, 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publication.
- Evans, Graeme. 2015. Rethinking place branding and place making through creative and cultural quarters. In *Rethinking place branding*, ed. Kavaratzis Mihalis, Gary Warnaby, and Gregory J. Ashworth, 135–157. New York: Springer.
- Freire, J.R. 2009. ‘Local People’ a critical dimension for place brands. *Journal of Brand Management* 16 (7): 420–438. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2550097>.
- Govers, R. 2013. Why place branding is not about logos and slogans. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 9 (2): 71–75. <https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2013.11>.
- Gustafson, P. 2001. Meanings of place: Everyday experience and theoretical conceptualizations. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 21 (1): 5–16. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jevp.2000.0185>.
- Haanpää, Minni, and Päivi. Hanni-Vaara. 2023. Smart and sustainable destination experiences: A content analysis on Finnish tourism experts’ perspectives. In *Information and communication technologies in tourism*, ed. Berta Ferrer-Rosell, Katerina Berezina, and David Massimo, 160–165. Cham: Springer.
- Hanna, S., J. Rowley, and B. Keegan. 2021. Place and destination branding: A review and conceptual mapping of the domain. *European Management Review* 18 (2): 105–117. <https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12433>.
- Herriott, Robert E., and William A. Firestone. 1983. Multisite qualitative policy research. *Optimizing Description and Generalizability. Educational Researcher* 12: 14–19.
- Ind, Nicholas, and Holger J. Schmidt. 2019. *Co-creating brands: Brand management from a co-creative perspective*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- Insch, Gary, Je Ellen Moore, and Lisa D. Murphy. 1997. Content analysis in leadership research: Examples, procedures and suggestions for future use. *Leadership Quarterly* 8 (1): 1–25.



- Kalandides, A. 2011. The problem with spatial identity: Revisiting the 'sense of place.' *Journal of Place Management and Development* 4 (1): 28–39. <https://doi.org/10.1108/1753833111117142>.
- Kang, Y., Z. Cai, C.W. Tan, Q. Huang, and H. Liu. 2020. Natural language processing (NLP) in management research: A literature review. *Journal of Management Analytics* 7 (2): 139–172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23270012.2020.1756939>.
- Kavaratzis, M., and G.J. Ashworth. 2005. City branding: An effective assertion of identity or a transitory marketing trick? *Journal of Economic and Human Geography* 96 (5): 506–514. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9663.2005.00482.x>.
- Kavaratzis, M., and M.J. Hatch. 2013. The dynamics of place brands: An identity-based approach to place branding theory. *Marketing Theory* 13 (1): 69–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593112467268>.
- Khurana, D., A. Koli, K. Khatter, and S. Singh. 2023. Natural language processing: State of the art, current trends and challenges. *Multi-media Tools and Applications* 82 (3): 3713–3744. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11042-022-13428-4>.
- Lemmetyinen, A., and F.M. Go. 2010. Building a brand identity in a network of Cruise Baltic's destinations: A multi-authoring approach. *Journal of Brand Management* 17 (7): 504–518. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2010.5>.
- Lucarelli, A. 2022. Inclusivity as civism: Theorizing the axiology of marketing and branding of places. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 25 (5): 596–613. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-01-2022-0011>.
- Maheshwari, V., I. Vandewalle, and D. Bamber. 2011. Place branding's role in sustainable development. *Journal of Place Management and Development* 4 (2): 198–213. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17538331111153188>.
- Mengi, O., S.B.D. Drinkwater, A. Ceylan Öner, and K. Velibeyoğlu. 2017. Place management of a creative city: The case of Izmir. *International Journal of Knowledge-Based Development* 8 (3): 271–291. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJKBD.2017.086437>.
- Merrilees, B., D. Miller, G.L. Ge, and C.C.C. Tam. 2018. Asian city brand meaning: A Hong Kong perspective. *Journal of Brand Management* 25 (1): 14–26. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-017-0073-1>.
- OECD. 2020. *Tackling coronavirus (COVID 19): contributing to a global EFFORT—Cities policy responses*. Paris: OECD.
- Paganoni, M.C. 2012. City branding and social inclusion in the glocal city. *Mobilities* 7 (1): 13–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2012.631809>.
- Parkerson, B., and J. Saunders. 2005. City branding: Can goods and services branding models be used to brand cities? *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 1 (3): 242–264. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.pb.5990026>.
- Pasquinelli, C., M. Trunfio, N. Bellini, and S. Rossi. 2022. Reimagining urban destinations: Adaptive and transformative city brand attributes and values in the pandemic crisis. *Cities*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2022.103621>.
- Pohjola, T., J. Aalto, A. Lemmetyinen, and L. Nieminen. 2023. A scene-setter, matchmaker, or co-creator? The role of the HEI in the CCI ecosystem engagement when branding a place. *Industry and Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09504222231177982>.
- Rodrigues, C., and H.J. Schmidt. 2021. How the creative class co-creates a city's brand identity: A qualitative study. *Journal of Creating Value* 7 (1): 19–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23949643211010594>.
- Sang, S. 2021. Reconstructing the place branding model from the perspective of Peircean semiotics. *Annals of Tourism Research* 89: 103209. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103209>.
- Sasaki, M. 2010. Urban regeneration through cultural creativity and social inclusion: Rethinking creative city theory through a Japanese case study. *Cities* 27: S3–S9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2010.03.002>.
- Stake, Robert E. 1998. Case studies. In *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*, 3rd ed., ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 86–109. London: Sage.
- Watson, R.T., and J. Webster. 2020. Analysing the past to prepare for the future: Writing a literature review a roadmap for release 2.0. *Journal of Decision Systems* 29 (3): 129–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12460125.2020.1798591>.
- Yigitcanlar, T., M. Kamruzzaman, M. Foth, J. Sabatini-Marques, E. Da Costa, and G. Ioppolo. 2019. Can cities become smart without being sustainable? A systematic review of the literature. *Sustainable Cities and Society* 45: 348–365. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2018.11.033>.
- Yin, Robert K. 1994. *Case study research: Design and methods*. London: Sage.
- Zhao, Y. 2015. China's leading historical and cultural city: Branding Dali City through public-private partnerships in Bai architecture revitalization. *Cities* 49: 106–112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2015.07.009>.
- Zimmerbauer, K. 2011. From image to identity: Building regions by place promotion. *European Planning Studies* 19 (2): 243–260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2011.532667>.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Arja Lemmetyinen D.Sc. (Econ. & Bus. Adm.) is an Adjunct Professor in international marketing and currently working as a Senior Advisor (marketing) at the University of Turku, School of Economics, Finland. Her research interest lies firstly in brand management and place branding. She is also interested in research on network management and value co-creation in networks.

Lenita Nieminen M.Sc. (Econ.) worked 2004–2022 as a researcher in several creative economy and entrepreneurship projects at the University of Turku, School of Economics, Finland. Her research interest lies in entrepreneurial learning, in particular, how art-based methods can support entrepreneurial learning.

Johanna Aalto LL.D., Lecturer (Laurea University of Applied Sciences). Her research interests include future operating environments and ecosystems, branding and value formation in organizations and places, and legal design.

Tuomas Pohjola M.Sc. in Marketing, project specialist and researcher at the University of Turku, School of Economics, Pori Unit. His research interests include place branding and value co-creation within industry ecosystems. Some current research and development perspectives include sustainability and digital transformation in regional branding.

