

ROUTLEDGE FOCUS

Strategic City Branding

Insights from Asian Cities

VIRIYA TAECHARUNGROJ



“This book in a nutshell presents the essentials of city brand and process of city branding. It is a very concrete and practically delivered compilation of fundamental knowledge on how to implement branding to cities step by step. The author not only succinctly presents the achievements of other scholars in the field, but also presents many of his own practical frameworks that city managers can easily implement. Numerous cases illustrate and comment the particular stages of the process while taking into account specificity of the region.

The book is also a good summary and refreshment for those who are already familiar with the subject, but want to learn more about Asian perspective and search for new solutions in their work with city brands.”

Dr hab. Magdalena Florek, *Editor (Place Branding and Public Diplomacy), Member of the Board (International Place Branding Association (IPBA))*

“This book offers a compelling exploration of city branding strategies for Asian cities. It examines stakeholder engagement, brand identity, and strategic positioning, providing actionable insights and tools to enhance any city’s brand and make a global impact. A must-read for anyone passionate about city branding!”

Professor Hong Fan, *Director of City Branding Studio (Tsinghua University, China), Member of the Board (International Place Branding Association (IPBA))*



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Strategic City Branding

City branding is crucial for the development of cities. *Strategic City Branding: Insights from Asian Cities* brings together concepts, case studies, and strategic management tools for effective city branding. This book demonstrates how cities can leverage their unique characteristics to build an appealing brand and attract tourists, residents, and investors.

The book presents a structured approach to city branding, featuring 24 concise case studies from various Asian cities. Readers will learn about the organisation of city branding efforts, city brand identities and visions, and the brand positioning process. It covers comprehensive execution strategies and methods for evaluating branding success. Each chapter offers conceptual tools for applying these ideas in practice, and the Asian case studies provide real-world insights into city branding.

This book is an essential resource for city branding and marketing practitioners, postgraduate students beginning their research, and undergraduate students new to the topic and delivers both an academic foundation and practical tools, equipping readers with the knowledge needed to create strong city brands.

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Insights from Asian Cities

Viriya Taecharungroj



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**For my family—Visuth, Vantana, Manumpon,
Patamon, Pinn, and Jye.**



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Preface

The concept of city branding has become a significant area of focus within the broader field of place branding, evolving both in practice and theory over the past few decades. Journals such as the *Journal of Place Management and Development* and *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* have played important roles in disseminating research. Several books have also contributed valuable insights. Despite the progress, there is still a need for practical guidance to assist cities in their branding efforts.

This book, *Strategic City Branding: Insights from Asian Cities*, offers practitioners a framework, concepts, and tools to start and improve city branding. The conceptual foundation is based on strategic management and strategic marketing principles. It is intended to help cities and professionals understand city branding and guide them in planning, implementing, and evaluating their efforts effectively. For those already involved in city branding, this book provides advice on enhancing their strategies for greater impact. Each chapter includes a conceptual tool, termed the “City Branding Toolbox”, grounded in relevant theories and concepts. These tools are designed to aid strategic thinking and stakeholder engagement, making the book practical and accessible for city branding practitioners.

While primarily aimed at practitioners, this book is also a resource for graduate students and early-career academics interested in applying city branding concepts. There is a need for practitioners who understand both theoretical and practical aspects of city branding, and this book serves as a foundation for bridging academic knowledge with practical application. The main emphasis is on strategic planning and management, but the process of writing this book has also revealed significant research gaps in city branding, which are discussed in the epilogue for academic researchers. The book also provides valuable insights for undergraduate students in business, marketing, public administration, communications, and urban planning, offering an introduction to city branding.

The existing body of knowledge on city and place branding is rich with case studies, particularly from Asia in the past decade. These studies provide detailed and insightful examples that illuminate specific contexts and challenges. The availability of numerous high-quality and accessible case studies from Asia serves as a critical foundation for this book.

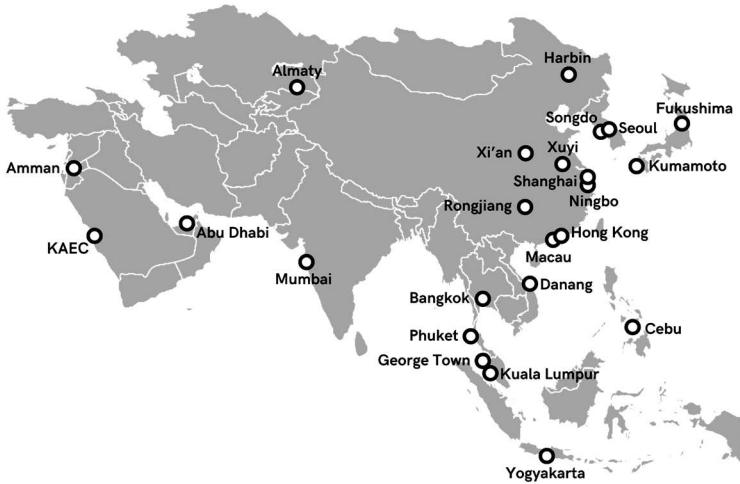


Figure 0.1 Case studies in *Strategic City Branding* (Source: Author's own creation)

All case studies in this book are based on the academic research conducted by scholars on the 24 cities in Asia (Figure 0.1). This approach, focusing on scholarly work rather than solely on the actual branding examples or campaigns from the cities themselves, provides a deeper understanding of city branding. While showcasing official city branding campaigns can offer insights into branding strategies, they often highlight only positive aspects and achievements. In contrast, academic research offers a critical perspective, revealing both strengths and weaknesses, which is essential for a realistic understanding of the realities of city branding.

The book is structured as follows:

- The first chapter introduces strategic city branding, tracing its evolution and comparing it to related concepts. It concludes with the City Branding Canvas, a central framework for the book.
- The second chapter examines city brand organisation, exploring governance structures and stakeholder engagement through case studies from Songdo (South Korea), Cebu (Philippines), Ningbo (China), and Fukushima (Japan).
- The third chapter explores city brand vision, linking city brand identity with the envisioned future, with examples from Almaty (Kazakhstan), Amman (Jordan), Macau (China), and Abu Dhabi (UAE).
- The fourth chapter focuses on city brand positioning, discussing target groups, value propositions, and brand architecture, illustrated by cases from KAEC (Saudi Arabia), Hong Kong (China), Phuket (Thailand), and Bangkok (Thailand).

- The fifth chapter addresses city brand execution, presenting seven strategies supported by case studies from Seoul (South Korea), Rongjiang (China), Xi'an (China), Yogyakarta (Indonesia), Kumamoto (Japan), Harbin (China), George Town (Malaysia), Xuyi (China), Mumbai (India), and Shanghai (China).
- The sixth chapter covers city brand evaluation, offering concepts and methods for measuring city brand image, outcomes, and impacts, exemplified by Danang (Vietnam) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia).

By integrating theory, practice, and case studies, this book aims to provide a comprehensive resource for those involved in city branding, particularly within the Asian context. I hope this book will inspire and inform practitioners and students, contributing to the continued development of city branding as a practice and an academic field.



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1 City Branding

A Strategic Imperative

1.1 Introduction to City Branding

1.1.1 The Evolution towards City Branding

In today's world, cities compete intensely to attract resources and maintain their influence and reputation. Globalisation and contemporary economic policies have heightened this competition, prompting cities to emphasise their distinctiveness. City branding has emerged as a strategic tool to address this challenge, enabling cities to stand out in the competitive world.

The concept of city branding has its roots in *city marketing* and *city image promotion*. Around the early 2000s, a gradual shift occurred from city marketing and promotion to *city branding*, or the more comprehensive term, *place branding*. This evolution represents a major advancement in urban development strategies, offering a holistic approach to developing and shaping city brand identity and image. This transformation is rooted in two primary theoretical streams: marketing and planning (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016). From a marketing perspective, city branding focuses on competitive differentiation, aiming to attract tourism and business investment while reinforcing the city brand identity (Bonakdar & Audirac, 2020). However, city branding extends beyond marketing techniques by incorporating planning-oriented approaches that integrate economic development, technological progress, and social change.

The emergence of city branding and place branding as distinct fields of study has opened doors for interdisciplinary research. While initially grounded in marketing and planning, city branding has attracted interest from various disciplines, including geography, urban design, architecture, governance and public administration, tourism, and communication (Lucarelli & Olof Berg, 2011; Zenker & Braun, 2017).

City branding is based on two key premises: that a “brand” of a city can be formed in the minds of people and that branding strategies can influence this “brand” (Kavaratzis, 2007). Adapted from Anttiroiko (2014), this book defines city branding as “a managed process of enhancing a city brand”. This managerial approach emphasises the strategic aspect of city branding,

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2 Strategic City Branding

focusing on the creation and maintenance of a city brand. Similarly, adapted from [Braun et al. \(2013\)](#), this book defines a city brand as “a network of associations in people’s minds”.

City branding involves the management and shaping of associations to create a positive brand image and influence perceptions and decisions. It is crucial to distinguish city branding from misconceptions that limit its scope. Specifically, city branding extends beyond logos, slogans, and promotional activities; it is intrinsically linked to urban planning and development and is not confined to the domain of tourism ([Anholt, 2008](#); [Bell, 2016](#); [Govers, 2013](#); [Hanna & Rowley, 2008](#)). A narrow understanding of city branding may lead to suboptimal outcomes presented as branding efforts. The following sections will clarify the distinctions and intersections between city branding and related concepts.

1.1.2 City Branding—Commercial Branding

Theoretically, cities can be considered brands, much like commercial products or corporations, due to the network of associations and diverse stakeholders they encompass. However, there are some key differences between city branding and commercial branding ([Acuti et al., 2018](#); [Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016](#)).

- **Stakeholders and Objectives:** Cities have far more diverse stakeholder groups than any corporation or product, each with varying and often conflicting objectives. While corporate brands are typically guided by a singular vision directed by company leadership, cities involve numerous public and private organisations, each influencing the brand’s development. The challenge lies in managing the expectations of these stakeholders, who operate under different objectives and boundaries. City brands must navigate the multifaceted interests of residents, businesses, and political entities, who are both the producers and consumers of the city brand, making the straightforward adoption of corporate branding strategies impractical.
- **Ownership and Control:** Another significant difference between city and commercial branding is the aspect of ownership and control. While commercial brands are owned and controlled by corporations that can direct their messaging and brand image, city brands lack a sole proprietor. Instead, residents, visitors, businesses, and governmental bodies all contribute to shaping the city’s image, often independent of the official public message. This shared ownership of the brand means that the city brand is continuously being redefined by its stakeholders.
- **Cities vs Corporations/Products:** Another key distinction is the inherent complexity and diversity of a city’s characteristics compared to a

corporation or product. Cities consist of multiple entities, histories, meanings, and values that transcend commercial brands. Cities evoke strong emotional attachments and socio-economic connections that can influence perceptions and behaviours more profoundly than commercial brands (Hospers, 2010). The emotional and socio-economic ties people have with cities, such as the concept of “topophilia” or love of place, illustrate the unique nature of city branding compared to the more transactional and consumer-oriented nature of commercial branding (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005).

These distinctions necessitate a strategic approach to city branding that differs from conventional product and corporate branding methods.

1.1.3 City Branding—City Marketing

In the landscape of urban development, the concepts of city branding, city marketing, and city promotion have been subjects of theoretical confusion. These concepts are often intertwined, with city branding and city marketing sometimes viewed as similar, separate, overlapping, or subsets of one another (Skinner, 2021). This conceptual ambiguity can hinder the effectiveness of strategies implemented by cities. However, Boisen et al. (2018) and Mabilard et al. (2024) offer a comprehensive clarification of these concepts within the broader context of place, which includes cities, regions, and other spatial entities.

City promotion is a *supply-driven* approach focused on gaining *attention* for a place through coordinated promotional efforts targeted at specific audiences. In practice, cities often distribute promotional responsibilities across various organisations, such as tourism boards or investment agencies, each operating at different levels and focusing on different aspects of city promotion.

City marketing is a *demand-driven* approach that centres on understanding and fulfilling the needs of target groups, such as tourists, residents, and investors. It is about making *choices* that influence the behaviour of the audience. While city marketing aims for tangible outcomes, such as increased visitors and investments, it also seeks to enhance the satisfaction of current residents and businesses.

City branding is an *identity-driven* approach focusing on managing a city’s *reputation* and shaping perceptions. It aims to create an affective connection with the audience, fostering a positive and consistent image that enhances the city’s attractiveness and competitiveness. Unlike city marketing and promotion, which primarily focus on external communication, city branding emphasises developing a strong internal identity that resonates from within.

4 *Strategic City Branding*

Despite the conceptual distinctions between city branding, city marketing, and city promotion, Mabillard et al. (2024) argue that in practice, these concepts are challenging to dissect completely due to the overlapping instruments and shared objectives involved. City branding seeks to improve a city brand image and reputation, while city marketing focuses on attracting visitors and talent (Mabillard et al., 2024). However, these objectives are cyclically linked, as a positive reputation can lead to increased interest, and more visitors can enhance a city brand image and reputation. Consequently, the practical implementation of these strategies often involves a blend of both approaches, making it difficult to separate them entirely. This interplay suggests that while it is valuable to understand their distinctions theoretically, a more integrated approach is necessary for practical application.

The purpose of this book is to provide guidance for practitioners engaged in city branding, recognising that while the concepts of city branding, city marketing, and city promotion can be dissected and researched separately, they should be considered together from a practical perspective. Therefore, throughout this book, the term city branding will encompass both city marketing and city promotion, reflecting the intertwined nature of these strategies.

1.1.4 *City Branding—Place Branding*

The relationship between place branding and city branding is one of scale and focus. Place branding encompasses a broad range of areas, including countries, regions, cities, and districts aiming to shape perceptions and enhance the attractiveness of these places to residents, investors, and tourists. City branding is a specific application of place branding, focusing on urban areas and their unique challenges and opportunities. The broader field of place branding can be likened to a family tree, where city branding, along with nation branding, destination branding, and other forms, are branches that apply branding principles to various spatial scales and contexts (Braun, 2012). In this book, the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably when the concept of place branding can be applied and used as city branding.

The concept of a *city* can be complex, as it serves as a settlement, a functional unit, and a legal entity (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016). This book focuses on city branding because, while place branding conceptually applies to various levels, the practical differences are significant. For example, the complexity of stakeholder engagement and governance structures varies between city and nation branding, necessitating distinct approaches. Strategies effective at the city level may not be suitable for national applications due to these differing dynamics. Therefore, this book emphasises a clear focus on cities to provide practical insights for practitioners. Despite the varied definitions of cities across nations, the book's case studies include places officially recognised as cities and those with similar functions, such as special administrative

regions, provinces, prefectures, and counties. This flexible approach ensures the practices align with the framework presented in this book, regardless of the official classification.

1.1.5 *Why City Branding Matters: Benefits and Impacts*

City branding has been intensively practised due to its five main benefits (Anttiroiko, 2014; Dinnie, 2011):

- **Attract Investors, Visitors, Future Residents, and Customers:** City branding plays a crucial role in attracting investors, visitors, future residents, and customers. A strong, positive brand can also attract and retain companies, students, skilled workers, and customers seeking to purchase products from the city. This attraction capability is considered the core of city branding (Mabillard et al., 2024).
- **Guide City Development and Regeneration:** City branding provides a strategic vision for the city's future, directing planning and implementation efforts. As a governance tool, city branding influences urban planning and policymaking (Zhao et al., 2024). This ensures that development efforts align with the city's brand objectives, fostering a cohesive direction.
- **Foster Collaboration within and across Cities:** City branding also supports collaboration within and across cities by providing common ground for stakeholders. This approach encourages partnerships with other cities, institutions, and the private sector. Branding processes also organise resources into clusters or networks, enhancing collective value creation and promoting economic growth (Pattaratanakun & Taecharungroj, 2024).
- **Improve a Standard of Living and Experiences:** City branding improves the standard of living and experiences for residents, visitors, and businesses. By aligning expectations with reality, branding efforts enhance satisfaction and experience for all city stakeholders. Improving living standards of its key stakeholders is a fundamental goal of city marketing (Kavaratzis, 2004).
- **Strengthen Civic Pride, Cohesion, and Identity:** Another benefit of city branding is the strengthening of civic pride, cohesion, and identity. By reinforcing local identity and fostering community development, city branding increases civic pride and harmony among residents. Branding a city through its local cultural products and events contributes to creating a unique local identity and strengthens residents' sense of belonging (Pattaratanakun & Taecharungroj, 2024).

Ultimately, achieving these goals through city branding aligns with sustainable development principles. While the primary objective may often be economic growth, city branding also significantly contributes to social and environmental progress (Aguilera-Cora et al., 2024).

6 *Strategic City Branding*

1.1.6 Key Challenges in City Branding

While city branding offers several benefits, there are challenges that cities must be aware of, divided into stakeholder and identity challenges based on [Bonakdar and Audirac \(2020\)](#) and [Pattaratanakun and Taecharungroj \(2024\)](#).

1.1.6.1 Stakeholder Challenges

Stakeholder challenges involve issues such as neglecting key stakeholder groups in the city branding process, offering only limited participation (tokenism), and concentrating decision-making power in the hands of a few individuals. The process of city branding is inherently political, involving various actors with conflicting interests, often resulting in decisions about who and what to include in the city branding efforts. This can lead to the marginalisation of certain societal groups, such as when branding efforts disenfranchise peripheral communities or favour certain groups deemed more “valuable”. Tokenism and limited public participation are also significant challenges, as branding efforts sometimes exclude genuine democratic decision-making. Such approaches can lead to social conflicts and undermine the legitimacy of branding efforts.

1.1.6.2 Identity Challenges

Identity challenges involve the misrepresentation of a city’s identity, either unintentionally or intentionally, that does not reflect its true or potential character. Such misrepresentation creates a gap between the idealised image projected by city branding and the actual socio-economic conditions, often driven by elite agendas rather than community interests. Over-commodifying a city’s identity, such as its culture, for economic gain can be detrimental to the city’s authenticity. City branding may lead to the manipulation of identities, where the commodification of urban environments results in gentrification and the displacement of residents.

1.2 City Branding Canvas: A Strategic Management Framework for City Branding

Given the significant benefits and challenges of city branding, a strategic management approach is crucial for ensuring effective outcomes. The City Branding Canvas ([Figure 1.1](#)) serves as a strategic framework designed to enhance the effectiveness of city branding efforts. This canvas functions as a comprehensive model, integrating all essential components necessary for a holistic branding approach. Inspired by the structure of the Business Model Canvas, it adapts the format to address the unique characteristics of city branding.

ORGANISATION	VISION	POSITION		EXECUTION	EVALUATION
CITY BRANDING AGENCY Which governing agency should be established or enhanced to oversee city branding or collaborate on city branding tasks?	CITY BRAND IDENTITY What is the city brand identity? • Physical Identities • Behavioural Identities • Symbolic Identities	STRATEGIC TARGET GROUPS What are the strategic target groups of the city to realise the vision?	VALUE PROPOSITION What value proposition should be developed to attract the target groups? • Functional Benefits • Emotional Benefits • Self-Expressive Benefits	BRAND COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN	CITY BRAND IMAGE How will the city brand image be evaluated?
				DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES	
				VISUAL IDENTITIES	OUTCOME Which key branding outcomes need assessment and what is the best way to evaluate them?
				CITY EXPERIENCES	
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT Which key stakeholders need to be engaged and in what way?	ENVISIONED FUTURE What is the envisioned future (preferable vision) of the city?	CITY BRAND ARCHITECTURE What strategies can be employed to align the city with associated brands, including national, regional, city, district, and sub-brands?		PLACEMAKING	IMPACT What are the main indicators used to measure the impact of city branding?
				PLACEFUL PRODUCTS & SERVICES	
				INCENTIVES	

Figure 1.1 City Branding Canvas (Source: author's own creation)

The proposed framework synthesises components from existing models, including the Place Development Strategy (Mabillard et al., 2024), Participatory Branding Process (Ntounis & Kavaratzis, 2017), Strategic Place Brand Management Model (Hanna & Rowley, 2014), Brand Management Process (Anttiroiko, 2014), and the 4D Place Branding Model (Fan, 2014).

The City Branding Canvas is underpinned by several guiding principles (Kavaratzis, 2009; Mabillard et al., 2024; Middleton, 2011). Its design focuses on *comprehensiveness* and *integration*, incorporating all crucial elements necessary for a complete branding strategy. This ensures that every phase is interconnected. A key aspect of the canvas is its *strategic* process linking, which connects organising, vision, position, execution, and evaluation. The focus on the city brand *identity* is particularly emphasised; the canvas guides cities to explore and define their physical, behavioural, and symbolic identities. This focus ensures that the vision and subsequent branding activities resonate with the city's key stakeholders. Moreover, the canvas is *action-oriented*, highlighting key strategic executions essential for igniting and supporting the branding efforts.

The canvas is divided into five main sections—organisation, vision, position, execution, and evaluation—each of which plays a critical role in the strategic management of a city brand. Subsequent chapters in this book offer further detailed explanations, case studies, and strategic tools to help practitioners implement this framework successfully.

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2 City Brand Organisation

2.1 Introduction

Unlike commercial branding, where the entity responsible for setting and managing the brand is clearly defined by the organisation that owns it, city branding lacks a clear owner. In city branding, no single entity has outright ownership or control, which makes identifying the main responsible agency for city branding the crucial first step in the process. This agency acts as the primary operating entity, coordinating, collaborating, and implementing branding tasks alongside other relevant parties. While a single governing agency cannot accomplish all branding tasks, it serves as the essential hub that directs and harmonises city branding efforts. This chapter explores the agency for city branding, examining its types and success factors.

Another key concept in city branding is stakeholder engagement, which represents the “how” of city branding. Stakeholder engagement functions as the core operating mechanism—*modus operandi*—of city branding. Thus, it is vital to prioritise stakeholder engagement, placing it front and centre before other stages of city branding. The active involvement and collaboration of various stakeholders—including residents, businesses, government entities, and others—are paramount to the success of city branding initiatives. This section identifies who the stakeholders are, outlines the required characteristics of engagement, and presents strategies to engage them effectively. Additionally, this chapter addresses the challenges that may arise during the stakeholder engagement process. By the end of this chapter, readers will grasp the characteristics of a successful city branding agency and the importance of stakeholder engagement, along with strategies for effective engagement. [Figure 2.1](#) visually represents the city brand organisation concept, highlighting the relationship between the agency, city’s stakeholders, and the strategies discussed throughout the chapter.



Figure 2.1 City Brand Organisation Concept (Source: author's own creation)

2.2 Governing City Branding

Effective city branding ensures the tasks of city branding are properly executed. Therefore, identifying the agency accountable for city branding is of utmost importance.

2.2.1 Types of City Branding Agencies

Various types of agencies can be responsible for city branding, depending on the national and local contexts. The three major types—local government, semi-independent organisations, and partnerships—differ primarily in the level of government control, from the highest to the lowest. Each type has its advantages and limitations, and cities must navigate these to determine the best fit for their specific situation. Here are three types of city branding agencies.

12 *Strategic City Branding*

2.2.1.1 *Local Government*

In this model, the local government assumes full responsibility for city branding. This type is prevalent in countries, with strong governmental control, where local governments manage branding with or without collaboration from external parties. Local governments coordinate with national governments to align local branding efforts with broader national strategies (Alsayel et al., 2023). For instance, in centrally administered countries, local governments develop their policies by co-creating and executing a vision of the city that aligns with higher-tier policies and intentions (Alsayel et al., 2023; Lu et al., 2020). This approach provides room for local autonomy while adhering to national strategic goals; it enables local governments to promote their cities effectively within the broader national framework.

2.2.1.2 *Semi-independent Organisation*

A semi-independent organisation is another common model for city branding agencies (Boisen, 2007). This type of organisation is branched out from the local government, retaining government support while enjoying more autonomy to bypass bureaucratic inefficiencies. The semi-independent status allows these organisations to implement long-term strategies without being disrupted by political cycles, coordinate efforts across multiple municipal departments, and maintain credibility and influence with stakeholders (Boisen, 2007). However, it is crucial for these organisations to ensure legitimacy by involving citizens and stakeholders in the branding process, as their input and commitment are vital for successful and democratic urban governance (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013).

2.2.1.3 *Partnership*

City branding can also be governed through partnerships between public and private sectors. An example is a partnership between a city airport, an airline, and a destination marketing organisation (DMO) to enhance the city brand identity and promote it as a travel destination (Vlassi & Papatheodorou, 2024). This model allows for rapid formation and high flexibility, relatively independent of government agendas, and can effectively align the interests of all parties involved. Another form of partnership is the Business Improvement District (BID), where businesses within a defined area collaborate to improve and promote their district (Silva & Cachinho, 2021). Successful partnerships require inclusivity, long-term commitment, a shared vision, and the ability to evaluate their impact and effectiveness (Van Gelder, 2011).

For cities without a specific agency for city branding, exploring these options can provide a framework for establishing effective branding governance. For those with existing agencies, the next step involves identifying success factors for city branding organisation and governance.

2.2.2 Key Factors for Successful City Branding Agencies

After determining the type of the agency, it is essential to identify the common factors that can contribute to the success of the city branding agency. While some factors might be more relevant to specific agency types, all should ensure that these six factors are thoroughly always considered. These are not just initial considerations; the most critical aspect is to ensure that they are maintained and enhanced continuously.

- **Citizen Engagement and Legitimacy:** Successful city branding depends on broad stakeholder engagement. Ensuring democratic legitimacy requires inclusive agenda-setting, transparent processes, and meaningful citizen participation. This involves stakeholders in the production, decision-making, and implementation of policies, ensuring that diverse voices are heard and integrated. By engaging citizens as co-owners of the brand, cities can foster commitment, enhance the legitimacy of branding efforts, and ensure long-term political unity and consistent strategies that endure beyond political cycles (Braun, 2012; Eshuis & Edwards, 2013).
- **Private Sector Involvement and Collaboration:** Successful city branding relies on active collaboration between public entities and the private sector. Engaging the private sector enhances the credibility and effectiveness of branding initiatives by leveraging the unique strengths, resources, and perspectives that businesses bring. Mabillard et al. (2024) emphasise that involving business clusters can foster networks that boost the city's attractiveness and economic vitality. Furthermore, private sector participation is crucial for increasing independence in city branding efforts and providing the necessary expertise (Alsayel et al., 2023)
- **Shared Vision and Long-term Commitment:** A shared vision among stakeholders and a long-term commitment to branding goals are essential for successful city branding. A clear, strategic vision helps align efforts and resources towards common objectives. Embedding branding objectives into political priorities ensures a coherent approach that can withstand changes in political leadership (Braun, 2012). When the agency embraces a shared vision and collaborative decision-making, city branding efforts gain greater credibility and effectiveness. This shared approach also helps mitigate tensions and internal resistance arising from conflicting objectives among multiple stakeholders (Eshuis et al., 2013; Virgo & De Chernatony, 2006).

- **Resource Mobilisation and Funding:** Mobilising sufficient resources, including financial and human capital, is vital for successful city branding (Alsayel et al., 2023). Ensuring adequate budgets and the efficient use of resources can significantly enhance branding efforts. Often, the lack of budget is seen as the main obstacle to effective city branding (Eshuis et al., 2013). So, the success of the city branding agency largely depends on its ability to accumulate sufficient resource. Direct contact with the national government can also facilitate resource accumulation and support (Alsayel et al., 2023).
- **Autonomy and Adaptability:** Autonomy and adaptability are crucial for the effectiveness of any city branding agency. While the degree of autonomy varies depending on the agency type, even the most controlled entities require some level of independence to formulate and execute city branding initiatives that align with the local context (Lu et al., 2020). Autonomy allows the agency to avoid bureaucratic inefficiencies, leading to more streamlined decision-making and implementation processes across various departments and entities (Boisen, 2007). City branding efforts must also be adaptable to changing circumstances and responsive to the needs and concerns of citizens (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013).
- **Evaluation and Accountability:** Regular evaluation of branding efforts and a willingness to assess impact and effectiveness are crucial for continuous improvement. This includes transparent benchmarking of performance and adjusting strategies based on feedback and outcomes (Van Gelder, 2011). Additionally, clear political responsibility for city branding is essential. Political leaders must be accountable for branding initiatives. This accountability ensures that branding efforts are integrated into broader policy areas and that elected or appointed officials can be held responsible for their activities (Braun, 2012).

The first essential aspect of city brand governance is establishing an effective agency that encompasses several critical success factors. These factors are critical to sustaining effective and impactful city branding efforts. The following two cases, Songdo (South Korea) and Cebu (Philippines), offer valuable insights into city branding agencies and practices, particularly highlighting the partnerships between public and private sectors.

The two cases (Boxes 2.1 and 2.2) illustrate the formation and challenges of partnerships between the public and private sectors for city branding. A key issue in both cases is the importance of stakeholder engagement, which emerges as the second crucial element for city brand organisation.

Box 2.1 Songdo—Crafting a Smart City through Public-Private Partnerships

This case study highlights a network of city branding agencies that span public and private organisations, demonstrating how coordinated efforts drive the development of a smart city. While the government provides central planning and support, the branding initiatives in Songdo are primarily executed through collaboration among various stakeholders.

Public-Private Collaboration in Building Songdo

In 1986, Incheon city officials initiated the city branding slogans “international hub city” and “intelligent city” to support the large-scale land reclamation project that led to the Songdo International Business District (IBD). Permission for this project was granted in 1991, with construction beginning in 1994. However, the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis prompted the Korean government to attract foreign investment by designating free economic zones, leading to the establishment of the Incheon Free Economic Zone (IFEZ) in 2003. Songdo accounted for one-third of this area, positioning South Korea as a business and logistics hub in Northeast Asia through deregulation and foreign investment incentives (Kim, 2010; Shin & Lee, 2024).

Songdo IBD’s development highlights successful collaboration between public and private entities, each with distinct roles but united by a shared vision of creating an eco-friendly, ubiquitous, smart city. Incheon Metropolitan City provided local government support and oversight, while Gale International led master planning and real estate development. POSCO Engineering & Construction managed engineering, and technological partners like Cisco provided advanced information and communication technology (ICT) solutions (Kolotouchkina & Seisdodos, 2018). The IFEZ Authority coordinated development, ensuring alignment with national economic goals.

The Korean government’s role included substantial infrastructure funding, such as the \$10 billion investment in the Incheon Grand Bridge, enhancing connectivity to Incheon International Airport (Kim, 2010; Rugkhapan & Murray, 2019). These efforts fostered a favourable business environment through incentives for foreign direct investment and tax relief, crucial for the project’s success (Kim, 2010).

Joint Efforts in Shaping Songdo's Brand

Songdo's branding strategy highlights its blend of state-of-the-art technologies, innovative urban design, and sustainability, positioning it as a future urban development model. The city's "U-city (ubiquitous city)" concept evolved into a smart city model, emphasising seamless ICT integration (Rugkhapan & Murray, 2019; Shin & Lee, 2024). This vision was elevated by technological firms like Cisco and LG CNS, enhancing Songdo's global appeal (Rugkhapan & Murray, 2019).

The city's branding efforts were strongly supported by its stakeholders, including Gale International, POSCO, IFEZ, and key IT partners. These entities actively promoted Songdo across various channels. Cisco developed a video series showcasing Songdo as a futuristic city, while Kohn Pederson Fox detailed the urban master plan. City developers engaged with global audiences via social networks, sharing content focused on Songdo's lifestyle and social events (Kolotouchkina & Seisdedos, 2018).

The Future of the City of the Future

Despite the comprehensive branding and development efforts, Songdo faces challenges such as environmental concerns from land reclamation and a lack of community engagement, with critics noting an emphasis on technology over fostering a vibrant social environment (Rugkhapan & Murray, 2019). There is also a call for greater inclusivity towards domestic entities (Shin & Lee, 2024).

The case of Songdo IBD illustrates a collaboration between public and private sectors, operating as a network of city branding agencies. Partners contribute their competencies and expertise to develop a cohesive city brand, with private sector involvement playing a crucial role when their interests align with the city branding objectives.

Box 2.2 Adapting Governance in Cebu's Creative City Branding

This case study explores the dysfunction of city branding agencies in Cebu, which were initially set up to respond to the pressures of the city's UNESCO designation. Over time, the adaptation of these agencies, narrowing their scope and focus while becoming more adaptable, led to better results.

Evolution from *Ceboom* to UNESCO Creative City

Cebu City, the oldest city in the Philippines and the capital of Cebu province, has grown into a highly urbanised metropolis. Despite being classified as a “secondary city”, it serves as the core of Metro Cebu and was the sixth richest city in the Philippines in 2021 (Sevilla, 2023). However, significant issues of poverty and inequality persist, with many residents living in historical squatter communities and overcrowded slums (Amper, 2023).

Cebu’s economic transformation began during the *Ceboom* period from 1988 to 1992, characterised by pro-business policies that attracted foreign investment and drove rapid growth. The city branded itself as “Cebu: An Island in the Pacific” to shed the negative image associated with the Philippines in the 1980s (Sevilla, 2023). This transformation led to Cebu’s designation as a Creative City of Design by UNESCO on 31 October 2019. The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) aims to leverage creativity for urban regeneration, innovation, and sustainable development, aligning with the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (Neo, 2023).

Challenges in Cebu’s Creative City Governance

The UCCN designation has pressured Cebu to maintain its prestigious status and drive further development. The local government collaborates with various agencies, including the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), to fully utilise this designation (Chuangchai, 2019).

Nonetheless, meeting UCCN criteria has posed significant organisational and management challenges. The Creative Cebu Council and Create Cebu have struggled with effectiveness, often hindered by a top-down approach that neglects local solutions and grassroots involvement (Chuangchai, 2019). The Creative Cebu Council, aimed at promoting creative entrepreneurship, was dissolved in 2016 due to its inability to effectively engage the broader creative community. Similarly, Create Cebu, focused on urban revitalisation and collaboration, faced challenges aligning with the UCCN’s comprehensive framework, leading to fragmented efforts and limited impact (Neo, 2023).

The creative sector in Cebu also faces challenges, including public distrust in state planning and implementation, particularly among independent creatives and informal vendors (Neo, 2023). A hierarchy in art genres, with design often favoured over other fields, creates competition and excludes lower-income groups, reflecting a

commercialisation of culture and a Western-centric view of success (Neo, 2023). These internal struggles and external pressures complicate governance and necessitate new methods to harmonise relationships with stakeholders.

Adapting the Governance Structure and Strategy

In response to these challenges, Cebu has implemented new governance strategies, such as Urban Acupuncture and the Cebu Creative Grid, a multi-sectoral partnership. Urban Acupuncture involves small-scale interventions to revitalise historical areas, while the Cebu Creative Grid fosters collaboration among government agencies, academia, and the private sector (Neo, 2023). These initiatives have helped embed a design mindset that leverages heritage and traditions to instil pride and ensure effective program implementation.

Cebu's approach demonstrates that effective governance for city branding requires adaptability. It is insufficient to simply have an organisation responsible for city branding; the city branding agency must embody key success factors to navigate external pressures and internal challenges. As Cebu continues its journey as a Creative City of Design, it highlights the ongoing need for adaptation and collaboration by the city branding agency.

2.3 Engaging Stakeholders

Stakeholder engagement is the backbone of city branding efforts and should be the core mechanism of how city branding is governed and organised. A city brand emerges from the dynamic interactions among stakeholders, where meanings are created, shared, and enacted (Reynolds et al., 2023). Over time, the brand is co-created by multiple stakeholders in an ongoing, open, and fluid process, emphasising that the brand depends on stakeholders' interactions with the brand identity (Rodrigues & Schmidt, 2021).

Traditionally, city marketing and branding have viewed residents and stakeholders as customers rather than citizens and co-producers of the city brand (Eshuis et al., 2014). This customer-oriented view overlooks the unique nature of a city, which differs significantly from a product or company. In reality, residents and other stakeholders are essential participants in the city branding process (Braun et al., 2013; Zenker & Seigis, 2012). Thus, stakeholder engagement, which involves identifying and managing stakeholders and their interests, is vital in city branding (Hanna & Rowley, 2013). It encourages stakeholders' active participation in developing a city brand. This participatory approach frames branding as a dialogue among various stakeholder groups about the city brand (Kavaratzis, 2012).

This section outlines the types of stakeholders, the concept of stakeholder engagement, strategies for stakeholder engagement, and challenges.

2.3.1 *City Brand's Stakeholders*

Stakeholders are broadly defined as individuals, groups, or organisations that influence or are impacted by a branding outcome and have an interest in its success or consequences (Mabillard et al., 2024). These stakeholders can be categorised into several groups: the public sector, the private sector, communities, other institutional stakeholders, and other individual stakeholders (Golestaneh et al., 2022; Mabillard et al., 2024; Stubbs & Warnaby, 2014).

2.3.1.1 *Public Sector*

The public sector includes government authorities, politicians, and public administrations at all levels, including economic development agencies and DMOs. Local governmental organisations deliver services that either support or potentially harm the city brand. Politicians at both national and municipal levels play a crucial role in shaping the future of a city brand, often requiring long-term strategies that transcend political changes.

2.3.1.2 *Private Sector*

The private sector is another critical stakeholder group, consisting of businesses, chambers of commerce, tour operators, investors, and business clusters. This sector promotes the city brand through commercial ventures, enhancing its visibility and attractiveness. Business leaders, property owners, and local entrepreneurs, through their investments and commercial activities, play a key role in fostering economic vitality and innovation. Local businesses, whether directly involved in city branding or not, significantly contribute to the city's prosperity and employ many residents, thus having a vested interest in the city's success.

2.3.1.3 *Communities*

Communities, including residents, are a vital stakeholder group often overlooked in city branding activities. Residents can play various roles: as integrated parts of the brand through their characteristics and behaviour, as ambassadors lending voice to the brand, and as citizens and voters instrumental in political legitimisation (Braun et al., 2013). Residents, encompassing youth, students, the workforce, retirees, and more, are critical to authentic city branding, as their daily experiences and satisfaction reflect the city's identity. This group also includes local influencers and community leaders, who contribute to the

authenticity of the city brand by actively participating in city branding processes. Engaging residents ensures that the brand reflects the city's identity and strengths, fostering pride and community.

2.3.1.4 Other Institutional Stakeholders

This group includes public, private, or independent civic organisations, such as NGOs, religious organisations, and similar entities that provide essential services and advocacy at the local level. Educational institutions like local schools and universities play crucial roles in shaping city branding through their policies and resources. Additionally, cultural and sports organisations, infrastructure and transport providers, and promotion agencies manage and promote various aspects of the city brand.

2.3.1.5 Other Individual Stakeholders

Lastly, other individual stakeholders, often external but directly involved with the city in some capacity, include marketing and branding experts, tourists, leisure seekers, and export customers. Marketing and branding experts provide expertise in developing effective city branding strategies. Tourists' experiences and perceptions significantly also impact the city brand.

These major stakeholders of a city brand require continuous engagement by the cities. Effective engagement with these diverse groups leads to several crucial outcomes as outlined in the next section.

2.3.2 How Stakeholder Engagement Enhances City Branding

Effective stakeholder engagement is crucial for city branding as it leads to several significant outcomes.

- **Shared Ownership and Decision-making:** City brands are inherently complex, co-created by multiple stakeholders who interact with and appropriate the brand. Continuous engagement fosters a sense of shared ownership and facilitates shared decision-making, which helps break deadlocks and reach consensus (Eshuis et al., 2014; Kavaratzis, 2012; Vuorinen & Vos, 2013). Even without full consensus, engagement helps stakeholders understand diverse viewpoints.
- **Legitimacy and Inclusivity:** Stakeholder engagement imparts strong democratic legitimacy to the city branding process (Kavaratzis, 2012). Involving diverse stakeholders ensures inclusivity, which is essential for successful city branding efforts. Place brands developed in isolation often fail (Aitken & Campelo, 2011), highlighting the importance of open and inclusive engagement processes.

- **Trust and Acceptance:** Effective stakeholder engagement fosters trust and acceptance of the city branding processes and vision. Without trust and acceptance, stakeholders may hinder progress. Engagement builds higher trust and acceptance among stakeholders (Houghton & Stevens, 2011), which is crucial for effective city branding and local stakeholder support (Golestaneh et al., 2022).
- **Identity and Belongingness:** Stakeholder engagement enhances a sense of identity and belonging (Kavaratzis, 2012). If the branding process is disconnected from stakeholders, instilling pride becomes challenging. A strong sense of identity and belonging enables stakeholders to act in ways that reinforce and strengthen the city brand.
- **Energy and Advocacy:** Engagement energises stakeholders, encouraging active participation in city branding. Residents' attitudes and attachment to the city can influence external perceptions (Insch, 2011). Effective city branding initiatives involve local players in crafting and conveying new messages about the place, turning them into active city brand ambassadors who promote the city to its target audience (Braun et al., 2013; Houghton & Stevens, 2011).
- **Quality of Branding and Policies:** Effective stakeholder engagement enhances city branding and related policies (Kavaratzis, 2012), strengthening the entire branding process. Engaged stakeholders lead to better-informed governments and citizens, resulting in improved policies and decisions (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). Failure to engage stakeholders can lead to significant mistakes, wasted resources, and unmet objectives.

For stakeholder engagement to be successful, it must have specific characteristics. The following section outlines these desirable traits of effective stakeholder engagement.

2.3.3 Key Factors for Successful Stakeholder Engagement

For stakeholder engagement in city branding to be effective, several key aspects should be considered: engagement needs to be early, broad, continuous, diverse, and meaningful.

- **Early Engagement:** Engaging stakeholders from the inception of the process is crucial because city branding is not a blank slate (Houghton & Stevens, 2011; Yang et al., 2011). Early engagement ensures that local stakeholders, who live with the results of the branding effort, are involved in the initial discussions about the city brand identity and vision. By engaging stakeholders from the beginning, cities can avoid superficial participation and ensure the branding process is rooted in local realities.
- **Broad Engagement:** Stakeholder engagement must be broad, ensuring that many stakeholder groups are represented in the city branding efforts

(Golestaneh et al., 2022). While strong partnerships and collaboration are beneficial, it is crucial not to neglect less-vocal stakeholders. Proactively reaching out to various groups helps capture a wide range of perspectives and ensures inclusivity.

- **Continuous Engagement:** Engagement should be continuous, not treated as a one-time act. Ongoing engagement throughout the city branding effort and beyond is essential for maintaining stakeholder interest and involvement. This ongoing interaction helps build trust and commitment among stakeholders (Yang et al., 2011).
- **Diverse Engagement:** Diversity in engagement methods is essential, as stakeholders have diverse roles (Reynolds et al., 2023). Different stakeholder groups may require varying levels of engagement. While some groups might prefer higher levels of involvement, others might need less committed but more frequent interactions. The methods used for engagement should reflect this diversity, from community forums and meetings to digital platforms and social media interactions.
- **Meaningful Engagement:** Meaningful engagement is the most critical aspect. Cities must avoid engagement that serves merely as tokenism or a political agenda for the local government. Instead, engagement should be genuinely co-created by stakeholders, even in the face of conflicts (Bonakdar & Audirac, 2020; Reynolds et al., 2023). Meaningful engagement ensures stakeholders have a real impact on decision-making, moving beyond superficial participation to true collaboration and empowerment.

In conclusion, effective stakeholder engagement for city branding must be early, broad, continuous, diverse, and meaningful. The next section will explain strategies that cities can employ to achieve effective stakeholder engagement.

2.3.4 Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

Effective stakeholder engagement strategies are crucial for successful city branding. Based on Yang et al.'s (2011) adaptation of Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation, these strategies range from informing to empowering stakeholders.

2.3.4.1 Inform

Informing stakeholders is essential as it lays the foundation for further engagement. This involves disseminating information about the city branding process, ensuring stakeholders are aware of their rights and responsibilities. Tools for informing stakeholders include newsletters, fact sheets, media

management, and digital platforms (Yang et al., 2011). While informing is seen as the lower rung of participation, it remains vital for maintaining transparency and building trust. However, relying solely on informing can be perceived as tokenism, so it must be part of a broader engagement strategy.

2.3.4.2 Consult

Consultation involves actively seeking stakeholders' opinions and feedback through surveys, public hearings, and focus groups. This strategy can lead to a shared vision, position, and plans for city branding (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2014). Consultation should be proactive and include a broad range of stakeholders, ensuring diverse viewpoints are considered. Digital technologies, such as online surveys and community forums, make consultation more accessible and convenient and enhance stakeholder participation (Kavaratzis, 2012). Proactive consultation helps avoid the pitfalls of top-down approaches and creates a sense of ownership among stakeholders.

2.3.4.3 Involve

Involving stakeholders means integrating them more deeply into the branding process. Methods for involving stakeholders include appointing community champions, hosting community forums, and holding regular meetings. Bringing stakeholders into the city branding agency can ensure their perspectives are directly incorporated into decision-making. Involving stakeholders meaningfully can lead to more inclusive and representative outcomes (Yang et al., 2011).

2.3.4.4 Collaborate and Empower

Collaboration and empowerment represent the highest levels of stakeholder engagement, aligning with Arnstein's (1969) degrees of citizen power. This strategy can include partnerships, delegated power, and stakeholder control. Although full delegation of power is rare (Insch & Stuart, 2015), cities can initiate and maintain partnerships that give stakeholders meaningful control over projects and initiatives. Collaboration and empowerment facilitate creative and effective ways to enact the city brand, ensuring that it reflects the community's values and aspirations. This approach enhances the legitimacy of the branding process and builds long-term commitment and support from stakeholders.

Effective stakeholder engagement in city branding can be achieved through four key strategies: informing, consulting, involving, and collaborating/empowering. The next section will outline the challenges associated with

these strategies, exploring the complexities of effective stakeholder engagement in city branding.

2.3.5 *Key Challenges in Stakeholder Engagement*

Stakeholder engagement in city branding presents numerous challenges beyond the significant consumption of time and resources (Braun et al., 2013; Insch & Stuart, 2015; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Vuorinen & Vos, 2013). These challenges are intrinsic to the diverse nature of stakeholders and the complexity of their interactions.

- **Stakeholder Identification and Roles:** A primary challenge in stakeholder engagement is identifying relevant stakeholders and understanding their roles. City branding often emphasises partnerships between the public and private sectors, sometimes neglecting community involvement (Kavaratzis, 2012). This can lead to the exclusion of groups whose voices are critical for an inclusive branding process. Stakeholders play varied roles, such as advocates, followers, indifferent parties, blockers, and adversaries (Van der Wal, 2020). For instance, stakeholders who act as followers or are indifferent might not have their voices heard or their faces recognised, leading to their overlook in the branding process. It is essential to treat stakeholders differently based on their roles and engagement levels to foster a more inclusive approach (Reynolds et al., 2023).
- **Cynical Attitude and Hostility:** Another challenge is encountering stakeholders who are hostile or cynical towards city branding efforts. Such stakeholders may openly oppose the branding initiatives for various reasons, including past negative experiences or a general distrust of governmental actions (Houghton & Stevens, 2011; Insch & Stuart, 2015). These attitudes can hinder the engagement process and the overall success of the branding efforts. Addressing this requires avoiding controlling narratives or forcing consensus, which can lead to groupthink (Hakala, 2021). Instead, it is crucial to listen actively, engage more, and tailor engagement strategies to suit different stakeholder groups, even amid disagreements (Houghton & Stevens, 2011).
- **Lack of Understanding and Knowledge:** A significant challenge in stakeholder engagement is the lack of understanding and knowledge about city branding among stakeholders. Many stakeholders may not comprehend what city branding entails or its purposes. This lack of awareness can lead to a misalignment of expectations and objectives, further complicating engagement efforts (Houghton & Stevens, 2011; Insch & Stuart, 2015). It is important to engage stakeholders early in the process to foster a mutual vision and understanding.

Effective stakeholder engagement in city branding is challenging. The following cases of Ningbo (Box 2.3) and Fukushima (Box 2.4) illustrate the critical role of stakeholder engagement in city branding.

Box 2.3 Ningbo's Challenge with Stakeholder Alignment in City Branding

The case of Ningbo highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement in city branding, as the lack of engagement can lead to a disjointed and conflicting representation of a city with tremendous potential. Without proper alignment among stakeholders, Ningbo—a second-tier city in the Yangtze River Delta with a rich cultural heritage and a strategic position as a major port—faces challenges in establishing a cohesive city brand.

Diverse Perspectives and Misalignment of Ningbo's City Brand

Ningbo has been working to enhance its liveability and global presence. Despite its status as a significant port and commercial hub, Ningbo has struggled to create a city brand that resonates effectively, especially with tourists. A 2011 survey identified its historical significance and modern port facilities as strengths, leading to efforts to bolster its image (Shu & Zhang, 2013). The city's strategic repositioning under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2019 resulted in the slogan "City of Culture, Gateway to the World", which encapsulates its 7,000-year history and role in global trade (Zhang et al., 2021).

Ningbo's branding strategy has faced challenges due to diverse stakeholder perspectives and a lack of alignment (Zhang et al., 2021). City officials focus on economic growth and cultural heritage but struggle to integrate the port's identity with the broader city image. Younger residents value Ningbo's liveability but desire more vibrancy and competitiveness. Businesses appreciate the city's logistical strengths yet worry about a growing disconnect between the city and its port. Expatriates find Ningbo lacking in unique cultural and entertainment features, indicating a need for distinctive rebranding to differentiate it from other major Chinese cities.

Inconsistent Messaging in Ningbo's Brand Communications

Limited engagement and alignment between stakeholders create challenges in communicating the city brand. The creation and distribution of promotional content, particularly through short-form videos, have highlighted these issues. Varied production focuses and target audiences lead to scattered brand messages. A study by [Liu and Andriano-Moore \(2023\)](#) found inconsistencies between intended strategic messages and their execution. For instance, the Ningbo Talent Service Centre emphasises living advantages to attract talent, while the Film and Television Tourism Bureau focuses on tourist attractions. This results in a lack of coherence across campaigns, with government-produced videos often appearing traditional and less appealing to younger audiences who prefer more innovative and engaging content. In contrast, content created by individual producers or creative industries often uses advanced techniques like time-lapse photography and dynamic editing, capturing more of the city's excitement and energy.

The study further illustrates issues of fidelity in Ningbo's promotional videos. Many do not accurately represent the city's features and attractions. For example, videos produced by the Ningbo Resource Development Office depict uncommon fishing styles like baitcasting and fly fishing, which are not typical of shore-based angling in Ningbo. These videos also inaccurately show a fly fisherman catching a King Salmon, a species not found in Ningbo's warmer waters, where Sea Bass is more common. Such misrepresentations create a psychological mismatch and lack of coherence in Ningbo's city branding.

Aligning Stakeholders for Effective City Branding

Ningbo's case demonstrates the critical need for stakeholder alignment in city branding. The city combines rich cultural heritage with significant economic progress, symbolised by its ports. While digital technology facilitates the production of city brand communications, the real challenge lies in aligning the diverse perspectives of its stakeholders. Effective stakeholder engagement is essential for Ningbo to realise the true potential of its identities. This requires not only creating appealing and high-quality promotional materials but also ensuring these materials consistently reflect the city's multifaceted identity and strategic goals.

Box 2.4 Rebuilding Fukushima's Brand through Collective Stakeholder Engagement

The case of Fukushima demonstrates how, under crisis conditions, stakeholder engagement led by the sake industry and the public sector brought residents together to revitalise the city brand. This collaboration illustrates how collective efforts can foster recovery and reestablish a positive identity for a region facing significant challenges.

Impact of the 2011 Disaster on Fukushima

Fukushima Prefecture, located in northeastern Japan, faced a catastrophic event on March 11, 2011. A magnitude 9 earthquake off the coast of Miyagi Prefecture triggered a tsunami that devastated coastal communities and caused the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant disaster. This tragedy resulted in over 20,000 deaths and significant displacement, marking a turning point in the region's history (Gerster et al., 2021). The disaster severely impacted Fukushima's economy, society, and brand, particularly damaging its reputation for agricultural and industrial products.

Sake Industry's Role in Fukushima's Revival

Fukushima, renowned for its sake production, faced harmful rumours and fears about radiation, which damaged its image. International bans on Fukushima products further strained the local economy, with 54 countries initially banning imports, although this number reduced to 27 by 2018. Despite these challenges, the sake industry played a pivotal role in the region's recovery. Fukushima's sake producers, celebrated for their quality, faced production and consumption challenges due to post-disaster restrictions and infrastructural damage (Nguyen et al., 2021).

The sake industry spearheaded efforts to rebuild Fukushima's brand through public-private collaborations. Breweries and local governments worked together to promote Fukushima's products and foster regional pride. Events like *Fukko* (revitalisation events) and international promotion trips increased visibility and support. Local breweries collaborated with communities by hiring locally and sourcing materials from Fukushima to support other local businesses (Nguyen et al., 2021). This reciprocal relationship between the Sake industry and local communities was crucial in improving Fukushima's brand and economy through shared efforts and mutual support.

Hope Tourism and Fukushima's Citizen-Led Resilience

Tourism played a significant role in Fukushima's recovery through "reconstruction tourism" and "hope tourism". Unlike "dark tourism", which focuses on the negative aspects of disaster sites, hope tourism showcases recovery and resilience. This form of tourism promotes educational experiences and positive interactions, helping visitors understand the prefecture's challenges and progress while supporting the local economy. Hope tourism includes visiting disaster sites, learning about recovery efforts, and enjoying local cultural experiences, such as sake tasting and hot springs, contributing to financial recovery and disaster education (Gerster et al., 2021).

However, tourism post-disaster faced challenges. Local communities expressed concerns about turning their suffering into tourist attractions and the potential disrespectful behaviour of visitors. Incidents like the Netflix show "Dark Tourist" episode, criticised for its insensitivity, highlighted these issues (Gerster et al., 2021). Balancing recovery tourism with respect for local sentiments and accurately representing Fukushima's recovery remains a significant challenge.

Empowering the local community to control their narratives has been crucial in Fukushima's recovery. By involving residents as tour guides and storytellers, the community shaped the prefecture brand, ensuring that their experiences and perspectives were accurately conveyed (Gerster et al., 2021). This level of citizen participation in city branding exemplifies community engagement, allowing residents to reclaim their identity and share their resilience. While this approach may not present the fully positive image initially sought, it highlights the importance of genuine, community-driven branding efforts. Allowing residents to guide tours and share their stories ensures authenticity and fosters a sense of ownership and pride in the recovery process.

Fukushima's sake industry and hope tourism illustrate how a prefecture, under challenging circumstances, brought together the public sector, private sector, and community to work collaboratively. Despite numerous challenges, stakeholder engagement and collaboration enabled the city to reestablish its brand positively.

The following section introduces a tool for city branding agencies to plan and manage stakeholder engagement effectively.

2.4 City Branding Toolbox: Stakeholder Engagement Map

The Stakeholder Engagement Map ([Figure 2.2](#)) serves as a useful tool for city branding, especially beneficial for both newly established and existing city branding agencies. The purpose of this map is to either expand the perspective of the agency to strengthen stakeholder engagement or to map current practices and plans for enhanced future engagements. The Stakeholder Engagement Map provides a holistic view of the network of stakeholder groups—including the public sector, the private sector, communities, and other relevant stakeholders—with the city branding agency positioned at the centre. This central positioning exemplifies its role as the coordinator and facilitator of city branding efforts.

For new agencies, the initial step involves identifying key stakeholders within the city. These stakeholders typically span across the public sector, private sector, community groups, and other relevant entities. The map visually represents these relationships with lines of varying styles, each indicating the level of engagement necessary between the agency and the stakeholder. These lines serve as guides for how each relationship should be managed.

Ideally, engagement should be strong and collaborative to establish a comprehensive stakeholder network. However, the most appropriate engagement approach is shaped by various factors, including the city's legal, political, and social contexts, as well as the maturity of its city branding initiatives. These factors influence the strength and integration of stakeholder interactions.

For cities with established city branding efforts, the agency should map the current stakeholder engagements to assess and plan for improvements. This mapping should be an ongoing process, with periodic revisions to incorporate new stakeholders and adapt to evolving city branding strategies. The map serves not only as a snapshot of current engagements but also as a planning tool for future interactions.

The Stakeholder Engagement Map is a dynamic tool that enables city branding agencies to strategically manage and enhance their interactions with various stakeholders. By providing a clear visual representation of these relationships and offering a mechanism for regular updates, this tool helps ensure that city branding efforts are comprehensive, inclusive, and aligned with the broader goals of the city.

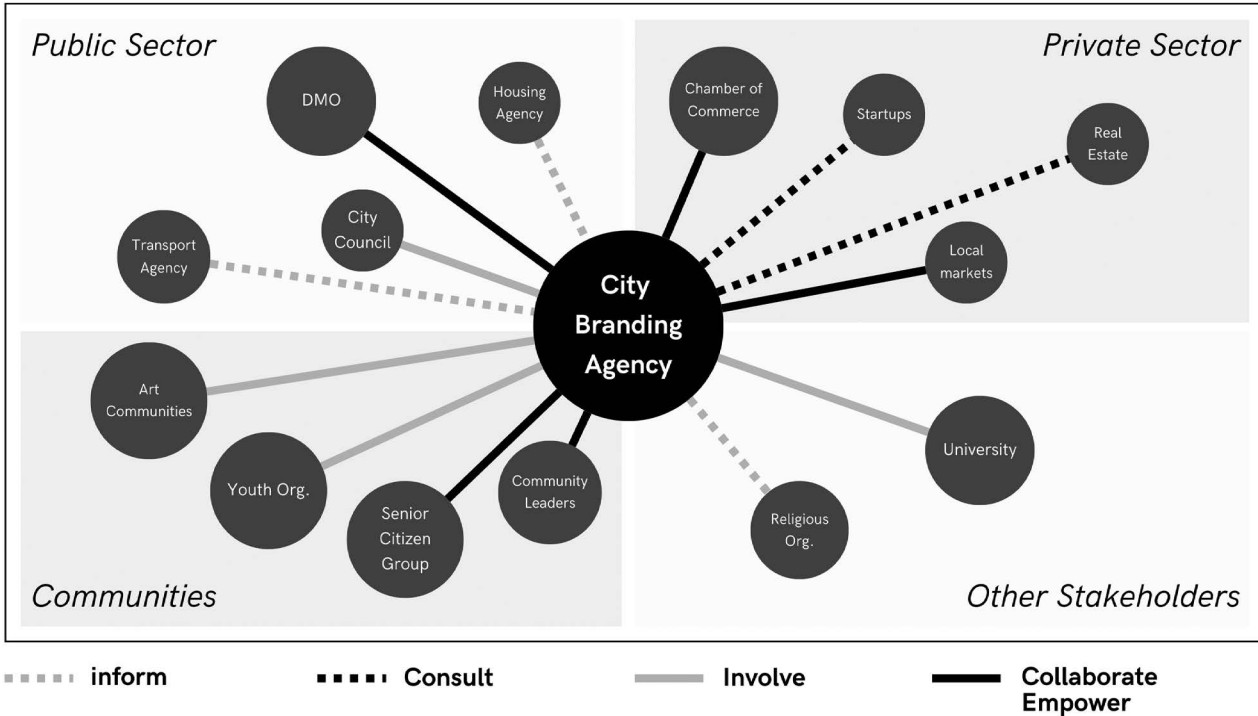


Figure 2.2 Stakeholder Engagement Map (Source: author's own creation)

2.5 Conclusion

City brand organisation is fundamental to the successful implementation of city branding efforts. This chapter has examined two critical aspects: governance and stakeholder engagement. This chapter explored various types of agencies, including local government, semi-independent organisations, and partnerships. Each type has its unique advantages and challenges. Understanding these models and their success factors is essential for cities aiming to implement effective city branding efforts. Stakeholder engagement is the core principle of city branding. This chapter identified key stakeholders and strategies for their engagement. The outcomes, desirable characteristics, and challenges of stakeholder engagement were addressed.

2.5.1 Key Takeaways

- City branding agencies typically fall into three categories: local government entities, semi-independent organisations, or partnerships between public and private sectors.
- A successful city branding agency must ensure citizen engagement and legitimacy, foster private sector collaboration, maintain a shared vision with long-term commitment, mobilise sufficient resources, exhibit autonomy and adaptability, and regularly evaluate and remain accountable for their initiatives.
- Stakeholders in city branding include the public sector, private sector, communities, and other interested parties. Effective stakeholder engagement is crucial, fostering shared ownership and decision-making, enhancing legitimacy and inclusivity, building trust and acceptance, creating a sense of identity and belonging, energising advocacy, and improving the quality of branding and policies.
- Effective stakeholder engagement in city branding should be early, broad, continuous, diverse, and meaningful and can be achieved through four key strategies: informing, consulting, involving, and collaborating/empowering.
- The Stakeholder Engagement Map helps identify and manage stakeholder involvement throughout the city branding process.

2.5.2 Key Questions for the City Branding Canvas (Organisation)

- Which governing agency should be established or enhanced to oversee city branding or collaborate on city branding tasks?
- Which key stakeholders need to be engaged and in what way?

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3 City Brand Vision

3.1 Introduction

A city's vision is crucial for uniting stakeholders around a common goal. This shared direction helps align efforts, enhances the city brand, and fosters a collective sense of purpose. When stakeholders collaborate effectively, the city becomes more appealing and dynamic. In the context of city branding, vision refers to stakeholders' deep intuition and insight regarding the city's long-term position in the competitive world (Rainisto, 2003).

Collins and Porras (1996) propose a concept of organisational vision consisting of core ideology and an envisioned future, which provides a foundation for developing a city brand vision. In city branding, the core ideology translates to brand identity. Understanding their identities allows cities to craft visions that resonate with their unique qualities. While city brand identity has been extensively studied, it should not be seen as an end in itself; rather, it should inform future planning. This chapter integrates city brand identity with an envisioned future as key components of a collective city brand vision. This approach ensures that the current identity shapes future goals, creating a cohesive strategy for city branding. By the end of this chapter, readers will know what to consider in city brand identities and how to develop a city brand vision. Figure 3.1 visually represents the city brand vision concept, including the characteristics of city brand identity and the envisioned future discussed in this chapter.

3.2 Discovering the Core Identity

3.2.1 Understanding City Brand Identity

City brand identity is linked to the broader concept of "city identity". City identity encompasses a city's holistic essence, including physical, cultural, and historical aspects. City brand identity, however, focuses specifically on communicative elements, highlighting how these features are conveyed to external audiences. Due to significant overlap, especially in city branding contexts, these terms are frequently used interchangeably (Taecharungroj, 2019).

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Figure 3.1 City Brand Vision Concept (Source: author's own creation)

The primary difference between *city brand identity* and *city brand image* is the perspective from which each is considered. City brand identity is constructed from the perspective of the city itself, encapsulating what the city aspires to present. Conversely, city brand image is the perception held by the audience, formed through their interactions and experiences with the city (Florek et al., 2006). The purpose of brand identity is to define the meaning, intention, and essence of the city, serving as the foundation for the brand image that audiences receive (Hankinson, 2004). This duality in perspectives symbolises the interactive relationship between identity and image, where identity precedes and shapes image, yet both are influenced by socio-cultural, economic, and political dynamics (Taecharungroj, 2019).

City brand identity can be defined as “a set of city’s central, distinctive characteristics” (adapted from Florek et al., 2006; Pryor & Grossbart, 2007). These definitions highlight several essential functions of city brand identity. Firstly, it *encapsulates the city’s reality* or essence, comprising its unique attributes and core values. This essence includes the city’s history, culture, and socio-economic dynamics, which together form its distinct personality (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).

Moreover, city brand identity is vital in *communicating the city's essence* to a broad audience (Hankinson, 2004). A cohesive and engaging narrative about a city's ambitions helps align diverse stakeholders' perceptions and expectations (Kavaratzis, 2004). Effectively conveying the city brand identity enhances its reputation, instils pride among residents, and attracts external parties such as tourists, investors, and potential new residents (Taecharungroj, 2019).

Furthermore, city brand identity *differentiates the city* from its competitors. In a globalised world where cities often compete for the same resources, a distinct brand identity can make a significant difference (Pryor & Grossbart, 2007). This distinction goes beyond mere uniqueness by focusing on being specifically attractive to targeted demographics, thus enhancing the city's competitive advantage (Wäckerlin et al., 2020). In essence, city brand identity encapsulates, communicates, and differentiates the city's character, playing a crucial role in shaping its brand image.

3.2.2 Defining Characteristics of City Brand Identity

This section outlines the characteristics of a city brand identity:

- **Co-creative:** The primary characteristic of city brand identity is its *co-creative* nature, involving diverse stakeholder groups, particularly residents who are seen as identity-holders (Kerr & Oliver, 2014). Rather than being a top-down construct imposed by marketers or officials, it is co-created and solidified through the engagement of multiple parties, including residents, businesses, public administrators, and special interest groups. Residents play a crucial role as they possess intrinsic views about the city. Their perceptions and interactions with the city shape the brand identity, making it essential for place branding strategies to align with these resident-held identities to ensure authenticity and acceptance (Kerr & Oliver, 2014). When residents are actively involved, the city brand becomes more reflective of the city's true essence rather than a manufactured image.
- **Pluralistic:** City brand identity is characterised by its *pluralistic* nature, meaning it is viewed from several perspectives. This diversity arises from the varied experiences and perceptions held by different stakeholders within the city (Kerr & Oliver, 2014). Stakeholder groups such as residents, businesses, visitors, and public administrators contribute diverse opinions and viewpoints, leading to a multifaceted identity (Botschen et al., 2017). This approach ensures that the city brand identity encompasses a wide range of socio-cultural meanings and is representative of the various communities within the city. For example, a long-term resident might have a different view of the city compared to a recent immigrant or a business owner. These varied viewpoints contribute to a variety of identities that cannot be easily distilled into a single narrative.

- **Dynamic:** City brand identity is *dynamic*, meaning it changes over time. This dynamism reflects the evolving social, economic, political, and cultural dynamics within the city (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). City identities are shaped by ongoing interactions and are influenced by historical, political, religious, and cultural discourses (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). As cities develop and transform, their identities shift, necessitating continuous adaptation in branding strategies to reflect these changes (Kerr & Oliver, 2014). The notion that city identity is static and can be permanently defined is outdated; instead, it should be viewed as a dynamic process that evolves with the city's growth and the changing perceptions of its stakeholders (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). This makes city brand identity a living concept that grows and transforms along with the city.
- **Interactive:** City brand identity has an *interactive* nature, emerging from various physical and non-physical elements. This perspective recognises that city brand identity is not just a sum of its parts but an integrated whole that emerges from the interplay of its different components (Kalandides, 2011b). Physical elements, such as landmarks and architecture, interact with cultural practices and social dynamics to create a unique brand identity (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). This interactivity means that changes in one aspect of the city, such as new infrastructure or a shift in cultural trends, can significantly impact the overall brand identity. Understanding city brand identity as an interwoven process allows for a more holistic view that encompasses all facets of what makes a city unique and recognisable.

In summary, city brand identity is characterised by its co-creative, pluralistic, dynamic, and interactive nature. The next sections detail the three main pillars of city brand identity as adapted from Taecharungroj (2019).

3.2.3 *The Three Pillars of City Brand Identity*

City brand identity is built on three primary pillars: physical, behavioural, and symbolic identities (adapted from Taecharungroj, 2019). These pillars form the foundation of a city's unique character, helping to establish its distinctiveness. Each pillar contributes to the overall perception and recognition of the city in different but interconnected ways.

3.2.3.1 *Physical Identities*

Physical identities refer to the tangible features of a city, including its infrastructure, landmarks, natural features, and overall geography (Taecharungroj, 2019). Physical elements such as paths—streets, rail lines, and trails—play a crucial role in shaping the image of a city (Hospers, 2011). Other significant components include edges, which are transition zones and boundaries like

waterfronts and green spaces; districts, which are distinctive neighbourhoods; nodes, which are strategic meeting points like squares; and landmarks, which serve as reference points. These elements collectively shape the visual and physical identity of the city (Hospers, 2011). They are not just physical objects, but also urban icons circulated through visual media, enhancing the city brand image and recognition.

3.2.3.2 *Behavioural Identities*

Behavioural identities encompass the practices and behaviours within a city. This includes the actions, activities, and rituals of its people, which shape the lived experiences of the place (Taecharungroj, 2019). Cultural events, social interactions, and community activities contribute significantly to this pillar. Cities are often recognised for their cultural vibrancy, which results from these behavioural identities. For instance, cultural festivals and public ceremonies not only provide aesthetic experiences but also function as economic resources by attracting tourists and fostering a creative class (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2014). Daily routines and social relations, including cooperation and competition among stakeholders, also define its behavioural identity, making it an integral aspect of the city brand identity (Taecharungroj, 2019).

3.2.3.3 *Symbolic Identities*

Symbolic identities pertain to the personality and values of a city. They include human traits attributed to the city, such as friendliness, vibrancy, innovativeness, responsibility, activity, aggressiveness, simplicity, and emotionality (Geuens et al., 2009; Taecharungroj, 2018, 2019). This pillar includes the affective, emotional, and symbolic aspects that give a city its unique character. These aspects are shaped by personal and collective experiences, providing residents and visitors with a sense of identity that combines individual and community perceptions. Symbolic identities are also linked to the historical background and traditions of a city, providing it with a character that is distinctive and enduring (Kalandides, 2011b). This connection helps create a strong and memorable city brand identity that resonates on a deeper level.

In city branding, managing physical, behavioural, and symbolic identities requires a holistic approach. The next sections explore two cases in Asia: Almaty (Box 3.1) and Amman (Box 3.2). The case of Almaty showcases conflicting symbolic identities that hinder branding progress, while the case of Amman demonstrates shifts in identities and how residents view the city. These cities show that city brand identity is not static but evolves with changes in

demographics, cultural influences, and stakeholder perceptions. Both cases highlight the importance of understanding city brand identity from multiple perspectives to determine which identities to preserve and emphasise. This on-going engagement with stakeholders is crucial for shaping a coherent city brand vision.

Box 3.1 Navigating Almaty's Conflicting City Identities

This case study explores the conflicting identities of Almaty as viewed by city officials and residents. It showcases a city with a pluralistic identity, requiring thorough understanding and stakeholder harmonisation.

Transformation of Almaty's Identities

Almaty, formerly known as Alma-Ata, served as Kazakhstan's capital from 1929 to 1997, after which the capital moved to Astana (Low & Taylor, 2006). Despite this change, Almaty remains the economic centre of Kazakhstan, facing urban development challenges and population growth, particularly from the influx of ethnic Kazakhs (Alff & Sgibnev, 2023). After Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991, Almaty underwent significant changes. The city's growth accelerated during the oil and gas boom and after the 2008 financial crisis, leading to urban differentiation and increased marginalisation (Alff & Sgibnev, 2023).

Physical Identity

Almaty is marked by stunning natural scenery, including the Zailiyskiy Alatau mountain range, numerous parks, and green spaces (Low & Taylor, 2006). The city is surrounded by attractions like the Altyn Emel and Ile-Alatau National Parks and Big Almaty Lake, which draw visitors from Kazakhstan and neighbouring countries (Zharkanova et al., 2023). However, high-rise housing developments have encroached on green spaces, affecting air quality and reducing green belts (Alff & Sgibnev, 2023).

Behavioural Identity

Almaty's ways of living are evolving as traditional markets are replaced by modern shopping malls. Historically, open-air markets, or *barakholka*, were central to Almaty's retail landscape, providing spaces for entrepreneurial activity and cultural exchange (Alff & Sgibnev, 2023). Modernisation pressures have led to many markets being

downsized or converted into Western-style malls. The city has also seen cultural and sporting events like the “Spirit of Tengri” festival and Almaty Marathon, reshaping the city’s behavioural identity (Smagulova & Fleming, 2020).

Balancing Russian Influence with Kazakh Identity

Symbolic Identity

Almaty’s *symbolic identities* are complex and contested. After the fall of the Soviet Union, there was a push towards “Kazakhisation”—a government effort to embed Kazakh culture and identity into the urban fabric (Alff & Sgibnev, 2023). This includes renaming streets and promoting Kazakh cultural symbols. For instance, the renaming of Alma-Ata to Almaty aimed to reinforce Kazakh heritage (Smagulova & Fleming, 2020). However, Almaty remains one of the most Russified cities in Kazakhstan, with Russian language and culture still holding significant socio-cultural capital. The government’s efforts to rebrand Almaty as a Kazakh cultural centre often clash with Russian and Soviet influences.

This creates a conflict between the government’s vision of a Kazakh Almaty and the enduring Russian symbolism maintained by many residents. Many residents value the Soviet past as a period of prosperity. The presence of a cosmopolitan elite, who view Almaty as an international city, contrasts with the rural Kazakh image promoted by the government (Smagulova & Fleming, 2020). This dichotomy is evident in the city’s architectural landscape, where Soviet-era buildings coexist with new Kazakh symbols, creating a mosaic of conflicting identities (Yusupova & Pfoser, 2023).

Challenges in Harmonising Almaty’s Diverse Identities

Almaty exemplifies the pluralistic and dynamic nature of city brand identity. The contrasting views of the city—ranging from its Soviet and Russian heritage to the push for Kazakhisation—highlight the nature of city brand identities. This case also emphasises the crucial role of residents as identity-holders who continually shape the city brand. Effective city branding should focus on identifying and nurturing a shared identity that resonates with all stakeholders.

Box 3.2 Amman's Identity Dilemma—Tradition vs. Progress

Amman, the capital of Jordan, is experiencing shifts in identity due to demographic changes. While some stakeholders wish to preserve Amman's heritage identity, many residents appreciate the city's modernisation and economic development. This case highlights the contrast between preservation and progress.

Modernisation of Amman's Identities

Amman, with a history dating back to the Neolithic period, is often perceived as a modern city due to its significant urban growth since the mid-20th century. The population surged from about 200,000 in 1948 to around 4,000,000 in 2019, under the management of the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM), established in 1979. However, GAM's authority does not extend to architectural styles, leading to inconsistent urban development and sprawl (Alhusban & Alhusban, 2021).

Physical Identity

Amman's architectural identities have evolved significantly, shifting from traditional styles to modern designs. In the 1930s, the city featured vernacular structures influenced by Ottoman styles. The 1950s saw a shift to modernist architecture prioritising function over ornamentation. From the 1960s to 1980s, the international style transformed Amman's skyline with simple, abstract forms. Recent globalisation introduced high-rises, international hotels, and gated communities, often compromising traditional aesthetics. This urbanisation has resulted in architectural disarray, diluting the city's distinctive character (Alhusban & Alhusban, 2021; Jacobs, 2010).

Behavioural Identity

Amman is often overlooked by tourists, who typically use the city as a gateway to attractions like Petra and Jerash. They mainly focus on the classical ruins atop the citadel and the Roman amphitheatre, missing the contemporary urban experiences that define modern Amman (Jacobs, 2010).

Residents' Views on Amman's Changing Identity

Symbolic Identity

Amman's *symbolic identities* have evolved as the city's branding campaigns have sought to balance heritage and modernity. The first major effort in 2002 aimed to establish Amman as a cultural hub, focusing on international niche markets. However, it faced criticism for prioritising visitors over residents. In 2009, a new initiative shifted the focus to residents, emphasising local needs and contemporary identity. Projects like the restoration of Rainbow Street aimed to improve liveability for residents. This approach promoted a contemporary identity that integrates historical legacy with modern values (Khirfan & Momani, 2013).

Residents have mixed perceptions of these transformations. Some feel that parts of the city have lost their unique character due to Western influences, leading to a sense of disconnection. Others, however, appreciate the efforts to enhance the city's liveability and cohesion, viewing them as reflections of modernisation and entrepreneurship that still maintain a connection to heritage (Khirfan & Momani, 2013).

Navigating Gains and Losses in City Identity

Amman illustrates how a city's identity can shift due to changing demographics and resident's preferences. Its transformation exemplifies the necessity of understanding and harmonising diverse stakeholder perspectives, including residents, visitors, and experts. While some mourn the erosion of traditional identities, many locals view changes as integral to modernisation and economic development. It is crucial to balance preserving traditional elements with fostering new identities that reflect the city's ongoing development.

The next section introduces a perceptual tool designed to help cities interactively and collectively discover their city brand identity, serving as a foundational component of the city brand vision.

3.3 City Branding Toolbox: City Brand Identity Map

The City Brand Identity Map (Figure 3.2) is a conceptual tool reflecting the pluralistic, dynamic, and interactive nature of city brand identity. This map aids cities in identifying, assessing, and managing their brand identities from

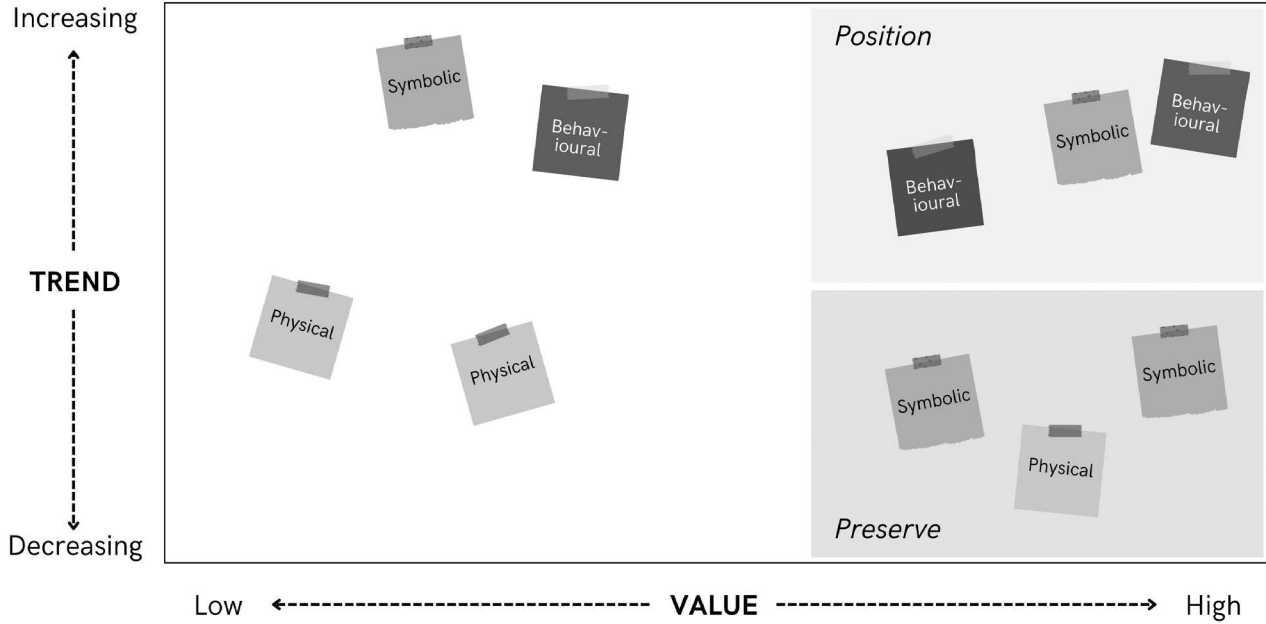


Figure 3.2 City Brand Identity Map (Source: author's own creation)

diverse stakeholder viewpoints. It features two main axes: the x-axis representing perceived identity value (low to high) and the y-axis indicating identity trends (increasing or decreasing).

Value (x-axis): This axis represents the stakeholders' perceived value of each identity. Identities with higher perceived value are positioned to the right, while those with lower perceived value are to the left. Value is defined as the stakeholders' subjective assessment of the identity's importance to the city's core, its uniqueness, and its potential to generate a positive impact on the city.

Trend (y-axis): This axis indicates whether an identity is experiencing a rise or decline. Identities with upward trends are located at the top, reflecting a tangible increase in presence, improved recognition, or enhanced quality as perceived by stakeholders. Conversely, identities with downward trends are placed at the bottom, signifying a reduction in presence, diminished significance, or deterioration in quality.

This approach effectively captures the multifaceted and dynamic aspects of city brand identities. The map categorises city identities into three main types: physical identities, behavioural identities, and symbolic identities. After identifying and assessing these identities, strategic recommendations are provided based on their positions on the map.

- **Positioning high value, increasing identities:** Identities that are both high in value and trending upwards are prime candidates for positioning the city in its branding efforts. These identities are strengths that can be leveraged to attract visitors, investors, and new residents.
- **Preserving high value, decreasing identities:** Identities that hold high value but are trending downwards need preservation efforts. These identities may require strategic interventions to revitalise and maintain their relevance and importance.
- **Addressing low value identities:** Identities with lower perceived value are less critical in the immediate strategic focus but should not be entirely disregarded. Understanding these identities can provide insights into potential areas for improvement or transformation.

The City Brand Identity Map enables cities to interactively and inclusively conceptualise and manage their identities. It involves identifying key identities, assessing their values and trends, and aligning stakeholder views for a collective brand identity.

3.4 Envisioning the Collective Future

3.4.1 The Role of Vision in City Branding

Scholars have defined vision, city vision, and city brand vision in various yet interconnected ways. Vision broadly refers to the ability to establish a clear

compelling direction that people can understand, embrace, and follow, enabling a brand to communicate consistently. In city branding, vision is essential, providing a shared future perspective for the city and its stakeholders and preventing divergent paths (Wang, 2023). This shared vision sets long-term goals and aligns with the visions of key stakeholders.

A primary function of a city brand vision is to *align diverse stakeholder perspectives*. In cities, stakeholders often have differing views on present and future directions. A clear vision offers a unified direction, reducing conflicts and confusion. Virgo and De Chernatony (2006) argue that a vision serves as a holistic framework, preventing the city brand from being divided by contradictory stakeholder actions. Vision connects various components and guiding principles, enabling measurable targets to be collectively pursued (Wang, 2023). By providing a clear, shared direction, a city brand vision helps stakeholders view the city's future consistently.

Beyond aligning perspectives, a city brand vision *fosters stakeholder buy-in*. A clear vision convinces stakeholders and instills belief and enthusiasm about the city's future. Hultman et al. (2016) highlight that understanding various stakeholders' visions is central to gauging shared vision and buy-in. When stakeholders believe in the city's future direction, they are more likely to invest their time, resources, and efforts towards common goals. This enthusiasm and commitment are crucial for the success of city branding initiatives. A compelling vision excites and engages stakeholders, making them active participants in the city's branding and development processes.

A city brand vision also *unites stakeholders' efforts*, directing strategies and activities towards the same goals. While controlling diverse stakeholder actions is challenging, a clear vision can guide and harmonise their efforts. Integrating a vision with strategies helps coordinate the efforts of different stakeholders, such as government agencies, businesses, and community groups, towards common objectives. The vision acts as a guiding star, aligning these diverse groups' activities and ensuring their efforts are complementary rather than conflicting.

3.4.2 *Typology of Envisioned Futures*

3.4.2.1 *Realistic and Ambitious Goals*

Kalandides (2011a) categorises city brand visions into *realistic* and *ambitious* goals. Effective city development strategies distinguish between these two types. Realistic goals leverage a city's existing strengths, such as enhancing a cultural identity through historic preservation and promoting local arts. Ambitious goals, on the other hand, aim for transformative change and require extensive long-term planning and political commitment. For example, positioning a city as a global leader in sustainability might require a 30-year plan that includes urban biodiversity enhancement, carbon emission reduction, and strong public engagement.

3.4.2.2 *Preferable, Probable, Plausible, and Possible Visions*

Ortegon-Sanchez and Tyler (2016) expand on the typology of city brand visions to include preferable, probable, plausible, and possible visions. *Probable* visions are based on current trends, like expanding cultural tourism by building on an existing reputation. *Plausible* visions consider what could happen given current identities and resources, such as integrating advanced public transportation systems to reduce traffic congestion. *Possible* visions explore scenarios that might arise with new identities or resources, like becoming a hub for green technology startups. *Preferable* visions combine elements of the other types, representing the most desirable future state for a city.

3.4.2.3 *Target, Benchmark, and Transformation Visions*

Adapted from Collins and Porras (1996), visions can also be categorised as target, benchmark, and transformation visions. *Target visions* set specific, measurable objectives, such as becoming a leading cultural tourism destination within ten years, with clear targets for visitor numbers and infrastructure development. *Benchmark visions* involve comparing the city with others or set standards, aiming to emulate successful cities in cultural influence or to surpass competitors in key strategic goals. *Transformation visions* focus on significant changes in identity or function, such as transitioning from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy, fostering innovation hubs, and attracting tech startups.

After exploring the functions and typology of envisioned futures, the next sections will examine two Asian cities: Macau (Box 3.3) and Abu Dhabi (Box 3.4). Macau provides a compelling vision for diversifying beyond its gaming-centric brand, while Abu Dhabi offers a vision contrasting with Dubai. Both cities face significant challenges. However, their clear visions help them navigate these challenges effectively.

Box 3.3 Macau—Placing a Bet on a New Vision

Macau, historically known for its booming gambling industry and dubbed the “Las Vegas of the East”, faces challenges in redefining its identity. The city’s vision to become a World Heritage City aims to guide activities and unite stakeholders, steering efforts away from its gaming identity. Despite difficulties in shifting perceptions, Macau’s experience illustrates how a clear vision can align efforts and secure stakeholder buy-in.

Macau's Move to World Heritage City

Historically, Macau has been dominated by its gambling sector, which flourished after the liberalisation of gaming in 2002. By 2006, Macau had surpassed Las Vegas in gambling revenue (Sou et al., 2016). However, this reliance on gambling raised social concerns and prompted a desire among residents to diversify the city's image and economy (Mei & Ying, 2017).

In response to these concerns, Macau adopted a branding strategy to promote itself as a "World Heritage City" and a "World Centre of Tourism and Leisure". This strategy aims to reduce dependency on casinos and enhance cultural identity (Chu, 2015). Macau's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage City in 2005 marked a significant step towards preserving its unique blend of Western and Chinese architectural heritage and promoting cultural tourism. The government's efforts reflect a commitment to balancing urban development with heritage conservation (Sou et al., 2016).

The new vision has been well received by residents eager to diversify the economy and preserve cultural assets. Locals view the World Heritage City status as an opportunity to shift development priorities and empower communities in managing cultural resources (Chu, 2015). Without proactive branding efforts, the vision of Macau as a cultural and leisure hub would remain unrealised, highlighting the need for concerted efforts to transform Macau's image beyond its casinos.

Cultural Heritage as a Catalyst for Change in Macau

Macau's rich cultural heritage, diverse attractions, and vibrant communities are key enablers of the new vision. Historical sites, such as the Ruins of St. Paul and A-Ma Temple, along with Portuguese-influenced architecture, form a strong foundation for cultural tourism (Panchapakesan et al., 2015). Macau's performing arts sector, including traditional Chinese opera and local theatre, adds a unique cultural dimension (Sou et al., 2016).

Organisations like the Macau Heritage Ambassador Association (MHAA) promote heritage awareness and community engagement. These grassroots initiatives are essential in advocating for better conservation policies, reshaping public discourse, and fostering a sense of ownership among residents (Chu, 2015). Such efforts highlight the importance of community involvement in supporting the government's vision.

Overcoming Barriers to Macau's New Vision

Macau's journey towards a new city brand vision highlights the challenges of transitioning from a gambling-focused identity to a diversified cultural and leisure city. While the casino industry remains significant, balancing it with cultural and leisure tourism is vital for sustainable development (Chu, 2015). Achieving this vision requires significant collaboration and effort. Grassroots initiatives, government policies, and community engagement are essential steps in this direction. Despite progress, much work remains to fully realise Macau's new vision, emphasising the need for sustained, collective efforts to drive meaningful change.

Box 3.4 Abu Dhabi's Benchmark Vision—Diverging from Dubai

Abu Dhabi's *benchmark vision* distinguishes it from its neighbour Dubai, allowing the emirate to progress with a unique identity that contrasts with Dubai's. While both cities are part of the United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi's vision highlights its focus on sustainability, culture, and heritage.

Abu Dhabi's Transformation

As the largest emirate and capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Abu Dhabi holds the world's sixth-largest proven oil reserves and is the UAE's leading oil producer, controlling 90% of the nation's oil and natural gas resources. Abu Dhabi's transformation began with the discovery of oil in the 1950s, leading to rapid urban development and economic growth. By the mid-1960s, new leadership initiated extensive infrastructure projects, modernising the city. Although stable in the 1990s, global competition and political restructuring prompted further development (Hashim, 2012).

The "Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030" initiative aims to transform the emirate into a diverse economy with sustainable sectors by 2030. The plan outlines Abu Dhabi's commitment to economic, social, and human resources development, infrastructure growth, and environmental sustainability. It aims to reduce dependency on oil by diversifying economic activities and expanding foreign markets, focusing

on key sectors like energy, petrochemicals, aviation, pharmaceuticals, tourism, and financial services. The government emphasises enhancing human capital through education and training, improving infrastructure, fostering a competitive business environment, and maintaining cultural heritage and values (De Jong et al., 2019).

Abu Dhabi's Strategic Divergence from Dubai's Path

In contrast to Dubai, Abu Dhabi's development strategy is both complementary and divergent. While Dubai is known for its liberal, extravagant, and rapid urban growth, Abu Dhabi positions itself as a more conservative counterpart, learning from Dubai's mistakes and branding itself as the "un-Dubai" (Hashim, 2012). This *benchmark vision* enables Abu Dhabi to establish its unique identity, diverging from Dubai's hyper-commercialism. Instead, Abu Dhabi focuses on sustainability, culture, heritage, a sense of belonging, and safety in their branding and development plans.

Despite its unique vision, Abu Dhabi's developments often mirror Dubai's in terms of large-scale investments and events. Abu Dhabi's push into tourism includes initiatives like Masdar City, a zero-carbon project aimed at environmental sustainability, similar to several sustainable projects in Dubai (De Jong et al., 2019). Abu Dhabi also hosts international events such as the Abu Dhabi International Motor Show, the World Future Energy Summit, and the annual Formula 1 Grand Prix, positioning itself as a global tourism and trade hub (Hazime, 2011).

Parallel Yet Distinct Development Visions

While Abu Dhabi and Dubai pursue similar goals of economic diversification and global recognition, they maintain distinct approaches reflecting their unique identities. Abu Dhabi's vision for 2030 focuses on sustainability, cultural preservation, and balanced, conservative development. This vision includes elements of target and transformation goals, aiming to achieve specific economic objectives while gradually reducing oil dependency. Although Abu Dhabi's branding and development mirror many aspects of Dubai's approach, it ensures the city's distinctive identity is preserved.

The next section introduces a tool designed to help cities articulate the range of their vision. By using this tool, cities can align their goals and aspirations, fostering a shared and cohesive vision among stakeholders.

3.5 City Branding Toolbox: City Brand Vision Board

The City Brand Vision Board (Figure 3.3) is a conceptual tool that helps stakeholders envision a city's future in both realistic and ambitious ways. It assists in outlining potential futures by considering existing and new identities and resources, enabling cities to collectively formulate their visions.

The City Brand Vision Board serves as a roadmap for a city's future. The left side represents the most realistic scenario, achievable within the next decade with minimal effort. As one moves to the right, the board explores more ambitious possibilities. These visions, categorised as probable, plausible, and possible, require varying degrees of intervention and resource allocation.

- **Probable vision:** This outlines what is likely to happen in the next ten years based on current trends and minimal intervention.
- **Plausible vision:** These visions build upon the city's current foundation but require strategic efforts to optimise existing assets and push the boundaries of what is currently achievable.
- **Possible vision:** This represents the most ambitious scenarios, potentially requiring entirely new resources and transformative changes to the city's identity. These visions often rely on significant innovation and the creation of new narratives for the city.

The City Brand Vision Board process involves three key steps:

- 1 **Outlining the visions:** The process begins with outlining the probable, plausible, and possible visions for the city. This step includes brainstorming and articulating what the city could look like under each scenario.
- 2 **Identifying enabling identities:** For plausible and possible visions, it is important to identify the enabling identities that will support these futures. Existing identities can enable plausible visions, while new identities may be required for possible visions.
- 3 **Articulating the preferable vision:** After exploring both plausible and possible futures, the next step is to identify the preferable vision for the city. This vision serves as a bridge, incorporating achievable elements from both scenarios to create an ambitious yet attainable roadmap for the next decade. The preferable vision may manifest as a target vision, a benchmark vision, or a transformation vision.

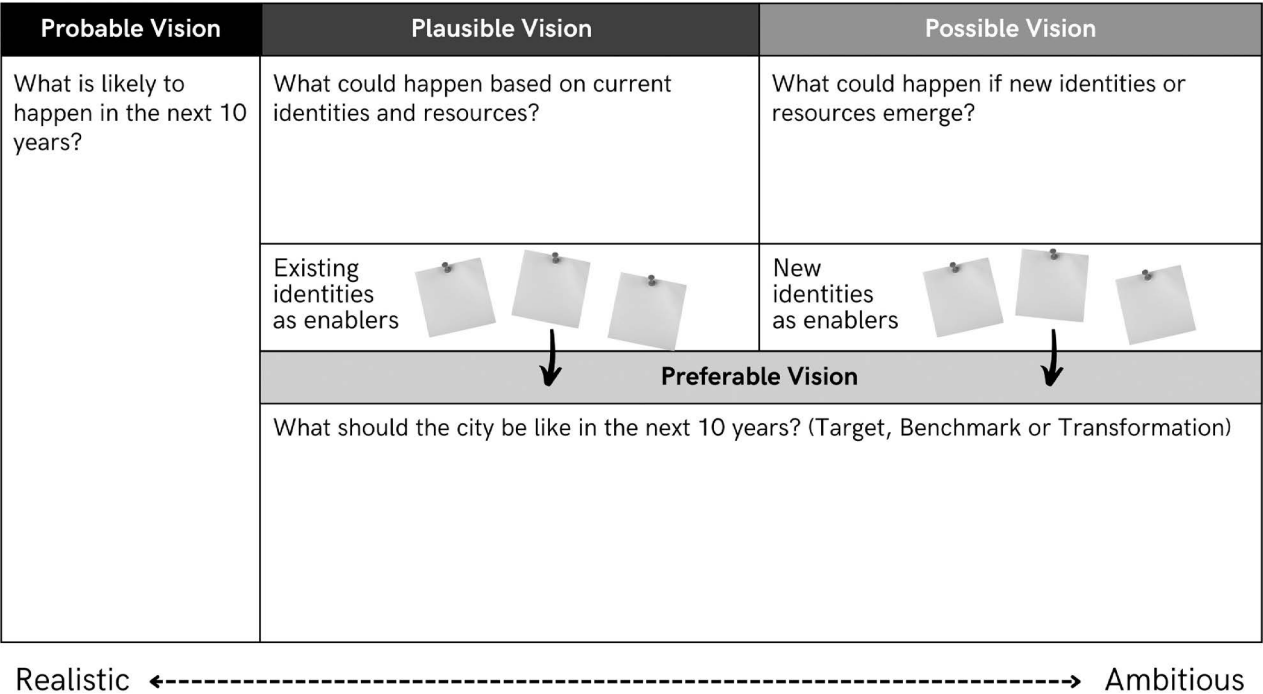


Figure 3.3 City Brand Vision Board (Source: author's own creation)

The City Brand Vision Board is a tool for cities to conceptualise their futures interactively and inclusively. By categorising visions into probable, plausible, and possible scenarios, and synthesising these into a preferable vision, stakeholders can create a comprehensive and aspirational roadmap for the city's development.

3.6 Conclusion

Creating a city brand vision involves a crucial two-step process: identifying the city brand identities and articulating its envisioned future. This chapter discusses the concept of city brand identity, explains its characteristics, and elaborates on its types. It is essential for cities to uncover their unique identities. The second step focuses on collaboratively articulating an envisioned future, encouraging stakeholders to consider both realistic and ambitious possibilities, leading to a collectively envisioned preferable future.

3.6.1 Key Takeaways

- City brand identity encompasses the core distinctive characteristics of a city, and it is shaped through a co-creative, dynamic, pluralistic, and interactive process.
- The three fundamental components of city brand identity are physical identity, behavioural identity, and symbolic identity.
- City's envisioned future is a clear direction that aligns diverse stakeholder perspectives, fosters stakeholder buy-in, and unites stakeholders' efforts.
- Different levels of vision include preferable, probable, plausible, and possible visions, while the types of vision setting are target vision, benchmark vision, and transformation vision.
- The City Brand Identity Map helps visualise the values and trends of city brand identities.
- The City Brand Vision Board helps craft a preferable vision for the city.

3.6.2 Key Questions for the City Branding Canvas (Vision)

- What is the city brand identity, including its physical, behavioural, and symbolic identities?
- What is the envisioned future or the preferable vision of the city?

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4 City Brand Position

4.1 Introduction

After defining a clear vision by identifying the core identity and future direction, the next crucial step in city branding is to establish a strong brand position. City brand positioning involves strategically placing the city in the minds of stakeholders and target audiences. This differentiation is vital as it sets the city apart from competitors and communicates its unique value proposition, attracting residents, visitors, investors, and businesses.

This chapter examines the details of a city brand position, beginning with an analysis of key target groups and their specific needs. Understanding these diverse targets—residents, tourists, businesses, and export customers—is essential for crafting a resonant positioning strategy. Various strategies for effectively positioning the city will be discussed, focusing on elements that create a unique and appealing value proposition. Additionally, different positioning profiles that cities can adopt and specific strategies to enhance their brand position will be explored.

The final section addresses leveraging city brand architecture to strengthen the overall brand position. Cities are complex entities with multiple branding layers, including umbrella brands for the entire city and sub-brands for specific districts and attractions. Managing this brand hierarchy is crucial for creating a cohesive and impactful brand position. By the end of this chapter, readers will understand how to develop and implement a strong city brand position that resonates with target audiences and supports successful city branding strategies. [Figure 4.1](#) visually represents the city brand position concept explored in this chapter, demonstrating how a city differentiates itself from competitors by crafting a value proposition tailored to target groups and implementing a brand architecture strategy that incorporates related place brands.

4.2 Identifying the Strategic Target Groups

City branding targets a diverse range of groups, unlike product, service, or corporate branding. These main groups include residents and workers, visitors,

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Figure 4.1 City Brand Position Concept (Source: author's own creation)

businesses and investors, and export markets. The goal is to appeal to these diverse groups, fostering preference and loyalty. The term “target group” is marketing-oriented, focusing on improving perceptions and encouraging positive actions. However, these groups can also be “stakeholders” of the city. Unlike commercial marketing, the distinction between target groups and stakeholders in city branding is less clear due to the co-creative nature of a city brand. The terms significantly overlap because these groups both consume the city (as target groups or customers) and co-create the brand (as stakeholders).

Residents and *workers* encompass both internal groups, such as the existing creative class, skilled workforce, and students, as well as external potential residents. *Visitors* are divided into business tourists, who travel for work, and leisure tourists, who visit for recreation. The *businesses* and *investors* group consists of internal investors and companies, along with external investors and businesses seeking opportunities in the city. *Export markets* involve consumers and foreign companies engaging with the city's goods and services, contributing to economic output (Zenker & Beckmann, 2013). While other entities like media, environmental groups, and non-profit organisations play a role (Insch, 2011), the focus is on these four primary groups.

The complexity of target groups presents a challenge for city branding. Cities involve multiple groups with varied interests and perceptions (Zenker & Braun, 2017). Successful city branding must appeal to both external audiences and residents. Additionally, it is crucial for cities to strategically target groups that are essential for achieving the city brand vision. Effective brand positioning requires a thorough understanding of these diverse target groups and the identification of those who align with the city brand vision, without overlooking the interests of other city stakeholders.

4.2.1 Attracting Residents

Among various target groups, residents are arguably the most valuable for a city, as their satisfaction and well-being contribute to a city's attractiveness and sustainability (Insch & Florek, 2008). Residents are not only customers but also an integral part of the city (Braun et al., 2013). They are crucial as loyal supporters and ambassadors but are often overlooked in favour of attracting tourists and other short-term visitors (Insch, 2011). Thus, they should be prioritised as the primary customers. By focusing on their satisfaction, cities can enhance residents' commitment and loyalty, ensuring growth (Taecharungroj, 2016). Talent, often referred to as the creative class by Florida (2003), encompasses residential groups crucial for development, innovation, and economic growth. This group includes professionals working in high-tech industries, financial services, and other knowledge-based occupations. The following attributes are key to making a city appealing to residents (Insch & Sun, 2013; Mabillard et al., 2024; Merrilees et al., 2012; Taecharungroj, 2018; Wisuchat & Taecharungroj, 2022; Zenker, 2009).

- **Activities and experiences:** Urban lifestyle offers excitement through shopping, dining, and recreation, enhancing the city's appeal and creating a lively environment. Diverse retail and entertainment options engage residents and increase satisfaction.
- **Economy and opportunities:** A prosperous economy with job prospects and business opportunities attracts residents. Economic stability is crucial for personal and professional development, making the city an attractive place to live and work.
- **Nature and well-being:** The presence of green spaces, parks, and a clean environment enhances residents' quality of life. An effective healthcare system and efforts to maintain a pollution-free city contribute to well-being, improving physical health and satisfaction.
- **Socialisation and relationships:** A supportive community fosters social bonding and a sense of belonging, making the city feel welcoming. Strong social networks are vital for residents' satisfaction and emotional well-being.

- **Accessibility and infrastructure:** Efficient public transportation, reliable internet, and well-maintained roads are critical. Ease of navigation and necessary amenities enhance convenience and quality of life.
- **Culture and vibrancy:** A rich cultural scene with arts, museums, and festivals attracts residents seeking cultural enrichment. Vibrant arts and aesthetically pleasing urban design add to the city's allure.

4.2.2 Attracting Visitors

Appealing to visitors is essential for city branding and aligns closely with destination branding. Destinations are physical spaces that include tourism products like services, attractions, and resources. They can be categorised into tourism places (designed for tourists), shared places (for both tourists and locals), and non-tourism places (primarily for residents' daily activities) (Wattanacharoensil et al., 2024). To attract visitors, cities must focus on key attributes that enhance the visitor experience (Andriotis et al., 2008; Chen & Gursoy, 2001; Chi & Qu, 2008; Henkel et al., 2006; Insch & Sun, 2013; Mabillard et al., 2024; Rittichainuwat et al., 2008; Taecharungroj & Tansitpong, 2017; Tosun et al., 2015).

- **Activities and experiences:** These include entertainment options such as dining, walking, clubbing, and recreation, providing tourists with ways to enjoy their time.
- **Attractions and facilities:** Attractions are key sites for tourists, including cultural, historical, natural, and man-made sites. The variety and appeal of these attractions are crucial for enhancing the tourist experience. Supporting facilities help maintain appealing experiences.
- **Local's attitude and hospitality:** The attitude and hospitality of residents and the quality of accommodation significantly impact a tourist's experience. Positive interactions with locals enhance satisfaction and encourage revisits. Accommodation quality ensures a comfortable stay.
- **Products and retail:** Shopping is a key tourism activity, especially in destinations known for retail offerings. The availability, variety, and quality of products and shops contribute to a fulfilling experience. Positive shopping experiences boost satisfaction and repeat visits.
- **Transport and accessibility:** Efficient transportation is critical for a seamless travel experience. This includes reliable public transport, airport services, and ease of navigating the city. Effective transport systems enhance convenience and comfort.
- **Climate and geography:** Climate and geographical features attract visitors. Pleasant weather and appealing landscapes add to a destination's allure. These natural attributes create a pleasant environment and contribute to tourist satisfaction.

4.2.3 *Attracting Businesses/Investors*

Businesses and investors are vital for a city's economic development, contributing to job creation, revenue generation, and an improved tax base. This, in turn, enhances city budgets, credit ratings, and funding for education, infrastructure, and services (Middleton, 2011). Unlike residents and visitors, businesses often engage in detailed evaluations and negotiations when selecting a city (Mabillard et al., 2024). The impact of attracting businesses is significant, leading cities to implement various strategies to appeal to this group. The following attributes highlight factors that make cities attractive to businesses and investors (Mabillard et al., 2024; Vuignier, 2018).

- **Market potential and size:** Businesses seek cities with substantial market potential and size. A large, diverse market provides opportunities for growth and expansion. A strong consumer base ensures steady demand for products and services, critical for business success.
- **Suppliers and workforce:** Access to appropriate suppliers and a skilled workforce is essential. Cities with industry clusters offer networks of suppliers and partners. The quality and flexibility of the local workforce, including skills and education, are crucial in decision-making.
- **Telecommunication and logistic infrastructure:** Businesses require reliable telecommunication and logistics infrastructure, including advanced networks and robust transportation systems like airports, railways, and road networks.
- **Regulations and incentives:** Favourable regulations and incentives attract businesses. Cities offering intellectual property protection, reasonable corporate tax rates, and cost-effective environments are more likely to attract investment. Incentives such as tax breaks, grants, and subsidies are also influential.
- **Innovation and research environment:** An environment supportive of innovation and research is appealing. Cities with strong educational institutions, research facilities, and a culture of innovation provide collaboration and development opportunities.
- **Stability and quality of life:** A city's social climate, political stability, safety, and quality of life are crucial for attracting businesses and investors. A stable and secure environment ensures smooth business operations and employee well-being.

The attributes of a city that typically attract residents, visitors, and businesses may vary. City branding agencies should carefully identify the specific attributes that resonate with their strategic target groups or explore unique characteristics of the city that may be of interest to these groups.

4.2.4 *Attracting Export Markets and the City-of-Origin Effects*

Export customers, whether domestic or international, are vital for cities as their purchases contribute to local economic wealth. “Export” refers to products and services sold to external customers, both within the country and overseas (Zenker & Beckmann, 2013). The city-of-origin effect significantly influences customers’ perceptions of products, enhancing or diminishing their market image. This effect is akin to the country-of-origin effect, where the city brand serves as an image modifier that impacts product perception. This effect can be seen through “halo effects”, where some characteristics of the city are transferred to the product, or “summary effects”, where customers form opinions based on their past experiences with products from that city (Lentz et al., 2006). The city-of-origin effect operates through three primary mechanisms: cognitive, affective, and normative (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999).

- **Cognitive mechanism:** This mechanism involves the city providing cues about product quality. A city known for technological advancements, craftsmanship, or innovation transfers these attributes to its products.
- **Affective mechanism:** This mechanism imparts emotional benefits, such as social status or national pride. Products from culturally rich or prestigious cities often carry enhanced emotional appeal.
- **Normative mechanism:** This mechanism refers to ethical and moral cues associated with purchasing from certain cities. Customers may choose products to support a city’s economy or avoid products from cities in countries with poor reputations.

While city-of-origin effects are significant, the intrinsic attributes of the products themselves also play a crucial role in export customers’ decision-making. Additionally, the type of product or service can moderate the impact of city-of-origin effects. Therefore, while a city brand image can influence product perception, it is the combination of the product’s inherent qualities and the city-of-origin effects that ultimately shapes consumer decisions.

While cities typically need to cater to a broad range of target groups, it is feasible for a city to identify and prioritise key target groups that align with its vision. The case study of King Abdullah Economic City (KAEC) in Saudi Arabia (Box 4.1) illustrates a planned city that strategically concentrates on a single target group, highlighting both the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach.

Box 4.1 KAEC's Strategic Focus on Attracting Global Investment

KAEC (pronounced “cake”) is strategically focused on attracting investors, which drives its city branding and urban planning initiatives. While this targeted approach drives development, it remains unclear how KAEC will expand its appeal to accommodate the diverse groups that cities naturally attract and require.

The Jewel in the Crown of Saudi Arabia

Located on the Red Sea coast of Saudi Arabia, about 100 kilometres north of Jeddah, KAEC is a master-planned city launched in 2005 as part of a massive investment strategy by the late King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud. KAEC is one of four new economic cities aimed at diversifying Saudi Arabia's economy beyond oil. Covering 168 square kilometres, KAEC is designed to be a multi-purpose metropolis with educational institutions, an industrial zone, a central business district, luxury resorts, a deep-sea port, and residential areas (Moser et al., 2015). This \$100 billion project, the largest single investment in Saudi Arabia, is managed by Emaar, the Economic City (EEC), a subsidiary of Dubai-based Emaar Properties. The project aims to position Saudi Arabia as a global hub for industry, research and development, education, and tourism, following the development models of Dubai and Singapore (Moser et al., 2015).

Investment Attraction Strategies in KAEC

A unique aspect of KAEC's development is its focus on foreign investors as the prime target market, with locals as a secondary focus. Unlike many cities that attract various target groups, KAEC's branding efforts significantly prioritise foreign investors. This approach is reflected in the city's economic policies, including minimal corporate taxes, 100% foreign ownership, and easy access to energy and petrochemical resources (Moser et al., 2015). KAEC markets itself to international investors through strategies such as direct marketing via trade offices, trade delegations, and relationships with multinational companies (Shoaib & Keivani, 2015).

Further, KAEC focuses on infrastructure development, quality of living, and major incentive campaigns to attract foreign investors. The city features modern infrastructure, including a deep-sea port, an industrial zone, and the Haramain High-Speed Railway connecting KAEC

to Mecca, Medina, and Jeddah. The quality of living is enhanced by luxury accommodations, schools, universities, and recreational facilities, providing an ideal urban living experience. Additionally, the city offers incentives such as equity funding and a free-market environment (Moser et al., 2015; Shoaib & Keivani, 2015).

Challenges in KAEC's Investor-Centric Development

However, KAEC faces challenges in attracting foreign investors. Governance issues, such as regulation and the city's corporate management system, create potential conflicts between corporate interests and resident governance (Moser et al., 2015). The city's focus on economic development often overlooks essential "soft" factors for long-term sustainability, such as social integration and cultural identity. This has led to a sense of placelessness and fragmented identities within KAEC, where the new built environment and conflicting stakeholders undermine a cohesive community (Shoaib & Keivani, 2015). Additionally, social and political tensions may arise from the city's liberal norms compared to the rest of Saudi Arabia, such as relaxed dress codes and mixed-gender interactions, which may contrast with the kingdom's conservative values (Osra, 2017).

The case of KAEC highlights the importance of carefully considering the target market. Focusing exclusively on foreign investors has led to targeted developments, but the complexity of investment processes and business challenges remain significant obstacles. Moreover, the city's emphasis on economic factors over social integration may limit its long-term success. This dilemma between focused targeting and broader appeal suggests considering a more balanced approach.

Cities should begin by identifying and specifying key target groups for their branding initiatives. These groups should be strategically selected to align with the city brand vision. By focusing on target groups that reflect the city's envisioned future, branding efforts can be more precise and effective. Once the target groups are identified, the next step is to develop detailed customer personas.

A city's customer persona is a fictional character created through research and analysis to embody the characteristics of the target group. This persona helps ensure that everyone involved in the city branding process shares a unified understanding of the audience. A well-crafted persona includes a name, demographic profile, behaviours, motivations, pain points, and desires. Developing these personas guides all subsequent city branding strategies and aids in developing a brand position that best appeals to the identified personas and target groups.

4.3 Positioning the City with Unique Value Proposition

After a city has identified its strategic target groups, the next essential step is to establish differentiation in the minds of these groups. Positioning involves creating a unique and distinctive image in the perceptions of these target groups, which is crucial for successful city branding in a competitive environment. This process requires a thorough understanding of the competitive landscape and differentiation from the city's primary competitors. Effective positioning aims to secure a competitive advantage by establishing a strong brand promise that guides the city's branding efforts and delivers value to its target groups.

The first function of positioning is *to tell a compelling story* about who the city is and aspires to be. This storytelling aspect is crucial for expressing the city brand identity in ways that inspire both internal and external stakeholders (Tellström, 2011). Effective city branding conveys a city's unique identity and ensures it is widely shared and accepted by stakeholders, guiding political and policy decisions (De Jong & Lu, 2022). The second function is *to communicate how the city can meet the needs* of its target audience through a well-defined value proposition, highlighting the city's unique selling propositions (USPs) that resonate with the target group's preferences and expectations. The third function is *to differentiate*; effective positioning sets the city apart from competitors in stakeholders' minds. By establishing a unique, credible, and valuable image, the city can attract the right audience and stand out in a crowded market, supporting sustainability and long-term success (Taecharungroj et al., 2024).

The following sections explain the benefits a city can use as its value proposition for brand positioning.

4.3.1 Building a Value Proposition

City brand positioning involves using functional, emotional, and experiential benefits to create an attractive value proposition.

4.3.1.1 Functional Benefits

Functional benefits are the primary advantages stakeholders gain from city brand positioning, derived from the city's infrastructure, services, and quality of life. Infrastructure and services enhance the daily lives of residents, businesses, and visitors by providing efficient transportation, reliable utilities, and accessible public services. The overall quality of life, including safety, cleanliness, and recreational opportunities, attracts diverse target groups and creates a strong, positive image and awareness of the city (Casaís & Poço, 2023).

4.3.1.2 Emotional Benefits

Emotional benefits are essential to city brand positioning. These benefits create distinctive emotional attachments for target groups by reflecting the

city's unique personality. Emotional benefits arise from the city's culture and creativity, facilitating connections through its cultural and creative offering (Dudek-Mańkowska & Grochowski, 2019). Traits such as dynamism, culture, and lifestyle can establish a coherent brand positioning and provide stakeholders with an enriching emotional response (De Carlo et al., 2009).

4.3.1.3 *Self-expressive Benefits*

Self-expressive benefits are the deeper advantages target groups experience when their interaction with a city (e.g., living, travelling, working) aligns with their self-image. Residents may feel that the city's cultural identity supports their self-concept and therefore advocate for the city. Visitors may find that their experiences align with their ideal self-image. These benefits lead to positive advocacy for the city (Styvén et al., 2020), especially important in the digital media era, where word-of-mouth spreads rapidly on social media.

Cities need to carefully consider their core identities and target groups when articulating their brand positioning. The task is to combine functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits based on the city's actual identities to establish a distinctive and appealing value proposition for each target group. Cities can either adopt a broad set of positioning benefits or develop separate positioning strategies for different target groups. The cohesiveness of the positioning strategy should align with the characteristics of the target groups and the unique identities the city can offer.

4.3.2 *Major Positioning Profiles for Cities*

This section outlines five major positioning profiles for cities, which guide the development and positioning of unique identities. These profiles help cities understand their competitive landscape and adopt multiple strategies to appeal to diverse target groups.

4.3.2.1 *Sustainable/Ecological Cities*

These cities prioritise sustainability, focusing on minimising their ecological footprint through technological measures that reduce carbon emissions and energy consumption. Supported by government policies and international agreements, they attract educated citizens and investors who favour greener environments. Variants include eco cities, low carbon cities, resilient cities, green cities, and inclusive cities (De Jong et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2024). Beyond environmental concerns, sustainable cities also support social equity and governance. For instance, inclusive cities utilise participatory approaches to enhance their attractiveness and competitiveness (Zhao et al., 2024).

4.3.2.2 *Financial/Business Cities*

These cities function as centres for financial services and business activities, featuring clusters of financial institutions, corporate offices, and service providers. They include advanced financial districts and head office clusters that attract multinational corporations ([Anttiroiko, 2015](#)). Variants encompass financial cities, business cities, and corporate headquarter cities. Financial/business cities rely on both hard and soft inputs, including corporate power, capital, business services, culture, and entertainment. Successful financial centres are characterised by open markets, free capital flow, transparent regulations, a skilled workforce, and high-quality infrastructure.

4.3.2.3 *Knowledge/Smart Cities*

These cities prioritise education, research, and technological innovation, thriving on high value-added production. Universities, research institutions, and high-tech industries play a central role, attracting international students and research projects ([Anttiroiko, 2015](#)). Variants include high-tech cities, knowledge cities, and smart cities. High-tech cities focus on R&D activities, knowledge cities emphasise universities' roles, and smart cities integrate technology to enhance urban management and efficiency ([Grebosz-Krawczyk, 2021](#)).

4.3.2.4 *Creative/Cultural Cities*

These cities leverage arts, culture, and history for development and economic growth. They foster creativity through networks of specialised creators, attractive urban environments, and supportive institutions ([Anttiroiko, 2015](#)). Variants include cultural cities, tourist cities, creative cities, fashion cities, and sports cities. Cultural cities focus on art and history, tourist cities highlight entertainment and leisure, fashion cities are noted for design-based identities, and sports cities capitalise on sports events ([Dubinsky, 2024](#)). Creative cities attract the creative class and integrate cultural assets into branding strategies ([Guo & Hsu, 2023](#)).

4.3.2.5 *Hub/Service Cities*

These cities play roles in international business and trade by serving as transport hubs and hosts for trade fairs and conferences. They invest in transport infrastructure, making them attractive to international businesses ([Anttiroiko, 2015](#)). Variants include conference cities and logistics hubs. Conference cities host exhibitions and conferences, enhancing business networking opportunities. Logistics hubs specialise in transport and warehousing, developing as global or regional centres, port cities, or airport cities.

Cities can analyse and adopt relevant positioning profiles to establish themselves within the appropriate frame of reference for their strategic target groups. These profiles provide cities with insights into the broad characteristics that appeal to their target groups and help identify key competitors. The primary task for a city is to consider these profiles and develop a unique value proposition that emphasises its strengths and distinctive characteristics. By doing so, the city can create a compelling brand and differentiate itself within the broader positioning profile(s).

The cases of Hong Kong (Box 4.2) and Phuket (Box 4.3) highlight the necessity for even the most renowned cities to continually adapt their brand positions to meet shifting target group preferences. Hong Kong should align its brand with residents' growing demands for a broader focus that includes cultural and environmental values alongside economic strengths. Meanwhile, Phuket, known for its stunning beaches and vibrant nightlife, should consider narrowing its value proposition to prioritise visitor satisfaction and sustainability over sheer visitor numbers.

Box 4.2 How Hongkongers Seek More from Their City Brand Position

Residents of Hong Kong are seeking an updated value proposition for their city that goes beyond its economic focus to include cultural and environmental aspects. While Hong Kong's strategic location has made it a key maritime trade hub, residents desire a city brand that reflects a broader spectrum of values and benefits.

Hong Kong: Asia's World City

Historically, Hong Kong was a British colony until 1997, when sovereignty was transferred to China under the principle of "one country, two systems". This political change raised concerns about Hong Kong's future identity and status. To address these concerns, the Hong Kong government introduced policies to reinforce its role as an international hub for finance, trade, investment, tourism, and communication. Brand Hong Kong (Brand HK) was launched in 2001 to promote Hong Kong as "Asia's World City", highlighting the city's dynamic, vibrant, and cosmopolitan nature (Loo et al., 2011; Mishra, 2010).

Since 2001, Hong Kong has been positioned as "Asia's World City", a brand that emphasises its status as an international city rich in opportunities, entrepreneurship, and home to numerous multinational companies. This identity capitalises on Hong Kong's mix of eastern

and western cultures, reflecting its history as a British colony and proximity to mainland China. The dragon logo of Brand HK symbolises the fusion of modern and traditional elements (Loo et al., 2011). Despite some scepticism (Shen, 2010), this positioning aligns with the general perception of Hong Kong as free, international, prosperous, and a shopping destination (Chan & Shek, 2021).

However, the emphasis on economic growth and modernity has overshadowed other aspects of the city that residents value. Studies indicate that while Hong Kong's international, shopping, and progressive identities are acknowledged, the cultural core remains significant for residents (Merrilees et al., 2018). While residents perceive Hong Kong as smart (Chan & Tsun, 2024; Chan et al., 2019), a study by Loo et al. (2011) found that the public holds cultural heritage and the environment as important brand elements. Residents want Hong Kong's position to extend to profiles and benefits that matter to them. However, the city's creative/cultural and green profiles are not robust and well developed (Chan, 2023).

Can Hong Kong Also Be Creative and Green?

Hong Kong's cultural and creative city profiles have significant untapped potential. The city has a rich history of arts and culture, with initiatives like the Hong Kong Design Centre and CreateHK promoting creative industries (Hui et al., 2020). Despite this, the cultural and creative sectors are largely market driven, with limited government intervention and support. Authentic new tourism areas and Confucian values also contribute to Hong Kong's cultural richness but are not prominently featured in its brand (King et al., 2024; Merrilees et al., 2018).

Similarly, the potential for Hong Kong's green characteristics is strong but not fully leveraged in its branding. Despite having 67% green coverage and extensive country parks, green elements are not prominently featured in the city brand position (Fok & Law, 2018). Initiatives like the Greening Master Plan and the Community Garden Programme aim to enhance urban greenery, but public awareness and exposure to these green spaces are limited. Emphasising the city's green elements could improve quality of life, attract talent and investment, and promote a healthier urban environment. However, conflicting urban development policies and a lack of coordinated long-term planning pose challenges to this green brand positioning (Fok & Law, 2018).

Repositioning by Extending the Brand Position

In summary, Hong Kong's branding as "Asia's World City" has successfully highlighted its international and economic strengths. However, there is a growing call from residents for a more inclusive brand that also embraces the city's creative, cultural, and ecological profiles. Repositioning Hong Kong to reflect its rich cultural heritage, creative potential, and green assets could address residents' needs and create a more comprehensive city brand. This case illustrates that even a strong city brand with a long-standing position requires ongoing scrutiny to adjust strategies that best suit evolving needs.

Box 4.3 Phuket Is the Most Famous Beach City, but Is It an Ideal One?

Phuket, Thailand—as one of the world's most celebrated beach cities—is known for its stunning beaches, vibrant nightlife, and diverse activities. However, it also faces tourism and environmental challenges. This case examines how Phuket should redefine its brand with a more focused and sustainable identity.

Ideal Position vs. On-Ground Realities

Phuket is often portrayed as the quintessential beach city in national promotional efforts, encapsulated by the provincial slogan, "Pearl of the Andaman, The Southern Paradise, and Golden Beaches". However, this broad and idealistic positioning has drawbacks. The idealised image of Phuket often leads to unrealistic expectations among visitors, creating a notable gap between the city's promotional image and the actual experiences. While marketing efforts highlight Phuket's picturesque scenery and luxurious beach experiences, visitors frequently encounter a reality more oriented towards active and party-centric activities, resulting in potential dissatisfaction (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019). For instance, snorkelling experiences, which are positively perceived in other beach destinations like Trang, Satun, and Krabi (Taecharungroj, 2023), often receive negative feedback in the crowded environment of Phuket (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019).

This broad and idealistic positioning is a common challenge faced by all most beach destinations in Thailand, where a generic approach

makes it difficult for individual cities to differentiate themselves (Taecharungroj, 2023). As all beach cities attempt to occupy the same generic position, Phuket, with the highest name recognition, attracts a massive influx of visitors. This influx has led to severe negative consequences, including over-commercialisation, accidents, and environmental degradation (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019).

Repositioning by Tightening the Brand Position

To address these issues, Taecharungroj and Mathayomchan (2019) propose several adjustments, including narrowing Phuket's positioning to focus on its strengths, such as maintaining cleaner beaches and reducing excessive commercialism and hedonism. The excessive commercialism and negative aspects, such as salacious shows on Bangla Road, need to be curbed. Enhancing food quality and ensuring fair pricing in markets can mitigate issues of exploitation and commercialism. Additionally, it is suggested to avoid over-promising benefits like pristine beaches and exotic sea excursions, which might not be realistic or sustainable. Promoting alternative attractions, such as hiking to viewpoints, can provide tourists with unique experiences while alleviating pressure on overcrowded beaches. This would strengthen Phuket's narrower position as a cultural beach city while meeting visitor expectations.

Phuket's case demonstrates the potential benefits of a narrower, more realistic brand positioning. By focusing on its strengths and managing tourist expectations more effectively, Phuket may enhance visitor satisfaction while promoting sustainable tourism practices. A more sustainable tourism model would not only preserve Phuket's natural beauty but also support the economic development of other less famous beach cities in Thailand. Although this approach may reduce the number of visitors in the short term, narrower positioning could lead to long-term benefits for this overcrowded city.

The next section introduces a strategic tool designed to help cities shape their brand positions effectively.

4.4 City Branding Toolbox: City Brand Position Board

The City Brand Position Board (Figure 4.2) is a visual conceptual tool designed to help cities articulate their brand position based on relevant target groups. By identifying a clear target group, cities can determine which brand positioning profiles are most relevant to them.

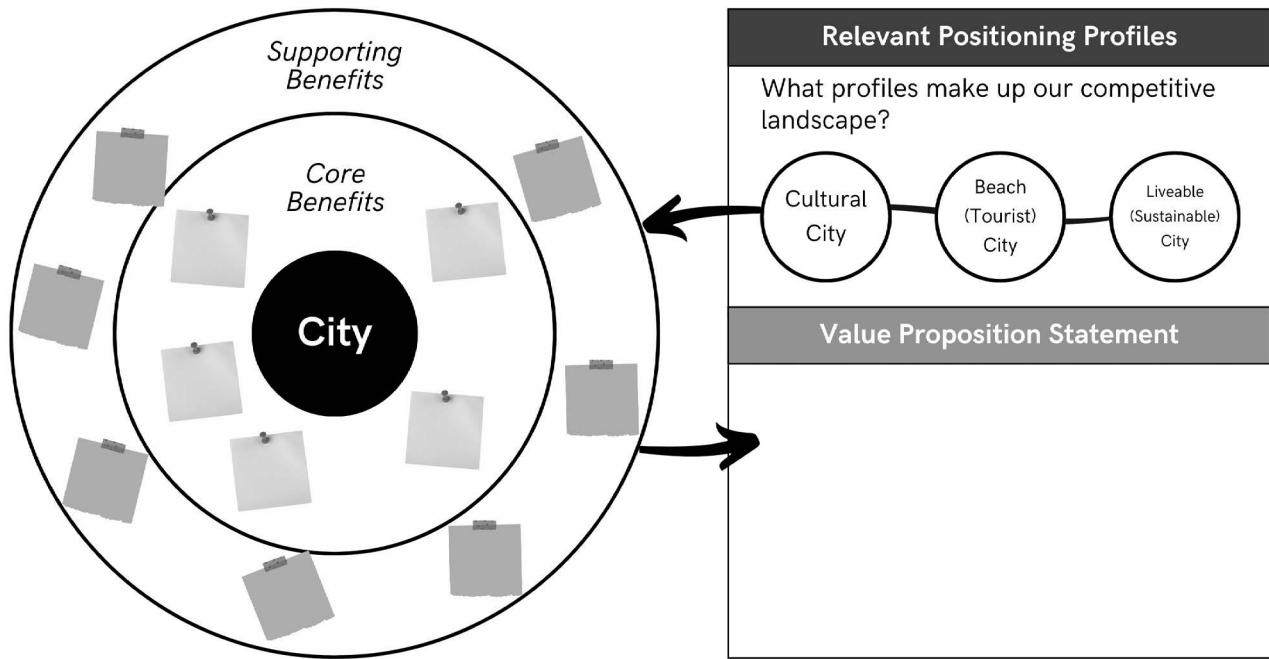


Figure 4.2 City Brand Position Board (Source: author's own creation)

The City Brand Position Board consists of the following key components:

- **Core benefits:** These are the primary benefits that align with the city brand identity and are crucial for establishing its brand positioning.
- **Supporting benefits:** These are supplementary benefits that enhance the core benefits and contribute to reinforcing the city brand position.
- **Relevant positioning profiles:** These are broad categories that cities can adopt to align with the desires and needs of their target groups. These profiles provide a framework for positioning the city in relation to its competitors.
- **Value proposition statement:** This is the unique value that the city offers to its target groups, derived from its core and supporting benefits.

The positioning profiles provide a broad frame of reference for cities among their global, national, or regional competitors. Cities are encouraged to list competing cities that occupy similar positioning profiles. For instance, Hong Kong might compete with Singapore and Shanghai for the title of a liveable and economic international city, while Phuket might compete with Bali and Cebu for being a cultural beach city in Southeast Asia.

The next step involves determining the set of city brand benefits, which are divided into core benefits and supporting benefits. These benefits are factors that make the city stand out among competing profiles in the minds of the target group. It is crucial to focus not only on benefits that are better but also those that are different. The key question for cities is whether these benefits, when combined, can provide value and serve the needs of the target market better than other competing cities.

Cities should also consider expanding or narrowing down the positioning profiles to identify the best set of benefits for the specific target group. For example, if Phuket finds that an all-encompassing positioning profile is unrealistic to achieve, it may narrow the profile's scope. Conversely, if Hong Kong's "World's City" profile does not meet the needs of residents, the city might consider expanding to other profiles that serve those needs better. While this chapter presents broad city positioning profiles, they are not limited to these five; they depend on the customers' needs and the evolving competitive set.

The final step is to summarise the core and supporting benefits into a value proposition summary. For example, Phuket might aim:

To be a *cultural beach city* (**profile**) that offers international travellers seeking relaxing experiences (**target group**) with various immersive activities while ensuring the most pleasant stay and sceneries. Phuket blends luxurious and relaxing accommodation with unique cultural experiences at temples, markets, and the walking street, along with a relaxing beach atmosphere (**value proposition**).

The value proposition statement effectively defines the specific segment of the target group—international travellers seeking relaxing experiences. It highlights how the city offers superior value to this group compared to competitors by providing a combination of pleasant accommodations, relaxing beaches, and cultural experiences. This framework aids in refining Phuket's positioning to more precisely meet the needs of its target group. The target segment can be further specified (e.g., 30–45-year-old international family travellers seeking relaxing experiences) or broadened (e.g., international travellers) depending on the city brand vision and competitive landscape.

The City Brand Position Board serves as a strategic tool that allows cities to conceptualise and articulate their brand positions in an interactive and inclusive manner. By identifying core and supporting benefits and consolidating them into a value proposition, cities can establish a compelling and competitive brand position that resonates with their target audiences and guides future strategic initiatives.

4.5 Leveraging City Brand Architecture

This section examines city brand architecture, which is crucial for developing a city brand position. Cities are structured both horizontally and vertically, existing within regions, countries, and supra-national areas. Within cities, districts and neighbourhoods also have distinct brands (Taecharungroj, 2018). City positioning must account for these interconnected brands, as they significantly influence perceptions among internal and external audiences (Syssner, 2010). The relationships among city brands, sub-brands (e.g., districts and neighbourhoods), master brands (e.g., countries and regions), and horizontal brands (e.g., other cities) create a complex branding ecosystem. This multi-level structure requires a strategic approach to managing city brands to avoid conflicts and enhance synergies (Anttiroiko, 2014).

Managing sub-brands within a city is a crucial task. These sub-brands are multifaceted. Firstly, geographical sub-brands, such as districts and neighbourhoods, contribute to the overall city brand (Taecharungroj, 2018). Secondly, cities may have conceptual sub-brands focused on specific areas such as tourism or economic development (Zelenskaya & Elkanova, 2021). Lastly, product and corporate brands within the city also influence its positioning (Dooley & Bowie, 2005). Strategic management of these sub-brands is vital for maintaining a cohesive and attractive city brand.

City brand architecture is a management concept that helps cities navigate brands from a multi-level perspective, representing a portfolio of place brands addressing the relationships among brands associated with a city (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Understanding these relationships is vital for strengthening the city brand by providing clarity and efficacy (Dooley & Bowie, 2005). Neglect can lead to inconsistencies and conflicts among brands (Hanna & Rowley, 2011; Syssner, 2010).

Cities should adopt a strategic approach to city brand architecture. Firstly, *assessing alignment* between the city brand and its sub- and umbrella-brands is essential, as these elements may diverge (Taecharungroj, 2018). Evaluating the alignment of brand identities and images is crucial, given the heterogeneity of brands (Herstein, 2012). Secondly, consideration of target groups is vital. City brand architecture can enhance the effectiveness of branding efforts by *addressing the needs of different target groups*. As shown by Ze-nker and Braun (2017) and Zelenskaya and Elkanova (2021), frameworks that target specific groups with tailored sub-brands can be highly effective. This approach enables cities to strategically appeal to diverse groups without conflating them, allowing sub-brands—whether contextual or geographical—to be managed alongside the city brand to meet the distinct needs of various targets. As a city’s target groups and brand positions expand, the importance of effective brand architecture increases. Thirdly, *extending brand positioning* is another advantage of city brand architecture. While a city brand may have limitations, cities can leverage umbrella or sub-brands as a network of associated place brands to strengthen the overall city brand (Anttiroiko, 2014).

4.5.1 *City Brand Architecture Strategies*

City brand architecture involves various strategies, each with distinct implications for managing city brands (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). The choice of strategy depends on the brand equity and the alignment between the city brand and its sub-brands. The four strategies—house of brands, endorsed brands, sub-brand, and branded house—represent a continuum, ranging from the weakest to the strongest umbrella (city) brand in relation to its sub-brands.

4.5.1.1 *House of Brands Strategy*

This strategy features multiple independent brands within a city, each targeting specific markets. It allows clear positioning in niche markets but limits the leverage of the city brand, as each sub-brand operates independently. It is suitable when there is low alignment between sub-brands and the city brand, allowing each sub-brand to establish its unique value proposition without constraints.

4.5.1.2 *Endorsed Brands Strategy*

This strategy is advisable when sub-brands are strong but could benefit from the transfer of quality and reliability associated with the city brand. In this strategy, sub-brands are reinforced by the city brand. It is particularly effective when there is moderate alignment between the city and sub-brands, allowing the sub-brands to receive support while maintaining their distinct identities.

4.5.1.3 Sub-brands Strategy

This strategy strongly connects sub-brands to the city brand, reinforcing their associations while extending into new segments using sub-brands. It is particularly effective when there is a high degree of alignment between the city brand and its sub-brands, allowing the sub-brands to enhance the city brand equity while targeting specific markets. This approach is ideal for cities aiming to diversify their offerings while maintaining a cohesive brand image.

4.5.1.4 Branded House Strategy

The city brand acts as the primary driver across various offerings, establishing a unified brand position. This strategy is most effective when the city brand has strong equity, and the sub-brands are highly aligned. It enhances clarity and creates synergy by aligning all sub-brands with the city brand position. However, it also carries risks by limiting the ability to target specific groups. This approach is advantageous for cities aiming for a strong, cohesive brand position while leveraging the city's brand equity across different target audiences.

City brand architecture is vital for developing a comprehensive and robust city brand position, managing complex relationships among various brands to ensure coherence and effectiveness. The case of Bangkok (Box 4.4) demonstrates the real-world perspective of a complex city brand architecture.

Box 4.4 The Complex City Brand of Bangkok

Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, presents unique challenges in city branding due to its complex and multifaceted identity. As a central element of Thailand's national image, Bangkok also includes various sub-brands representing its diverse districts and neighbourhoods.

Bangkok within the Brand of Thailand

Bangkok's projected image is closely tied to Thailand, reflecting many aspects of the nation brand. As Thailand's most prominent city, Bangkok juxtaposes Buddhist temples and vibrant street life with modern skyscrapers and bustling nightlife, shaping its identity and appeal, particularly in international tourism, where it serves as a gateway to Thai culture (Wattanacharoensil et al., 2023).

While some aspects of Bangkok's and Thailand's brands are similar, much of Bangkok's character differs significantly as it is often regarded as one of the world's primate cities, which has some contradictory effects on the nation as a whole (Fong, 2013; Lang et al., 2021). The phrase "Thailand is not Bangkok", voiced by locals both inside and outside the capital, reflects the overbearing and sometimes controversial influence of Bangkok's image on Thailand (Vorng, 2011). Many believe that Bangkok's image often overshadows the more multifaceted brand of Thailand. On a broader scale, the regional network of smaller towns surrounding the capital also possesses distinct characteristics, each adding unique elements to the larger metropolitan identity (Taecharungroj et al., 2019). This raises the question of how Bangkok can brand itself within the complementary and contrasting nation brand of Thailand while leveraging its regional network to highlight its strengths and support the surrounding smaller towns.

Sub-brands within Bangkok

Bangkok's city brand is further complicated by the presence of numerous sub-brands represented by its districts and neighbourhoods. These sub-brands may either align with or diverge from the overarching brand of Bangkok. Taecharungroj (2018) notes that different districts project varying images, which can either complement or conflict with Bangkok's brand. For instance, the *Chatuchak* district, with its famous weekend market, closely aligns with Bangkok's overall image, while districts such as *Bang Kapi*, *Samphanthawong*, and *Prawet* are perceived by residents as significantly divergent from Bangkok's brand.

Additionally, neighbourhood brands like *Yaowarat* (Bangkok's Chinatown) and *Khao San Road* have developed strong, internationally recognised identities that significantly contribute to Bangkok's image. *Yaowarat* is renowned for its cultural heritage and street food, while *Khao San Road* is famous for its nightlife and backpacker culture (Taecharungroj, 2019). Although these neighbourhoods possess strong brand equity, they present a challenge in how Bangkok can coherently incorporate their identities into a unified city branding strategy. This divergence presents a complex situation where a branded house strategy may prove challenging, as many sub-brands differ significantly, yet a house of brands strategy, which presents districts and neighbourhoods individually, might overlook the strong appeal of Bangkok as a whole.

The challenge for Bangkok's city brand positioning lies in managing its multiple, sometimes conflicting, images and identities into a cohesive whole. Bangkok, as a large metropolis with interconnected place brands, requires a thorough understanding of both the city's identity and various associated place brands. This understanding is crucial to developing a brand position that effectively leverages their collective strengths in a coherent manner.

The next section introduces a tool that can help cities manage and formulate strategies related to other place brands.

4.6 City Branding Toolbox: City Brand Architecture Board

The City Brand Architecture Board is a conceptual tool designed to help cities develop a coherent brand architecture and relevant strategies to strengthen their position (Figure 4.3). The starting point for this is the position that the city intends to take. If the positioning of the city varies based on different target groups, this board can be used multiple times to determine the suitability of each position. The board is divided into two maps: one for sub-brands of the city and another for horizontal brands and master brands.

Sub-brands: The left map focuses on sub-brands, which can be geographical, conceptual, or corporate/product sub-brands of the city. The x-axis represents the level of alignment between the sub-brand and the city brand in terms of positioning. High alignment indicates that the identities and images of the city brand are closely aligned with those of the specific sub-brand. The y-axis denotes the level of brand equity of the sub-brand, considering its awareness, reputation, distinction, and relevance compared to the city brand.

This map helps assess the key sub-brands of the city and guide the selection of an appropriate brand architecture strategy. If many sub-brands fall in the top-left corner, they are well known and recognised but lack alignment with the city brand. In this scenario, a house of brands strategy is advisable, where the city brand and its sub-brands operate independently. When sub-brands cluster in the top-right corner, they exhibit strong brand equity and alignment with the city brand position, making an endorsed brands strategy more suitable, where the city brand and sub-brands collaborate closely. A concentration of sub-brands in the bottom-right corner, indicating alignment but low equity, suggests a sub-brand strategy where the city brand leads, with sub-brands playing a supportive role. Finally, if most sub-brands are in the bottom-left corner—indicating they are both weak and less relevant—the board recommends a branded house strategy where the city brand takes precedence.

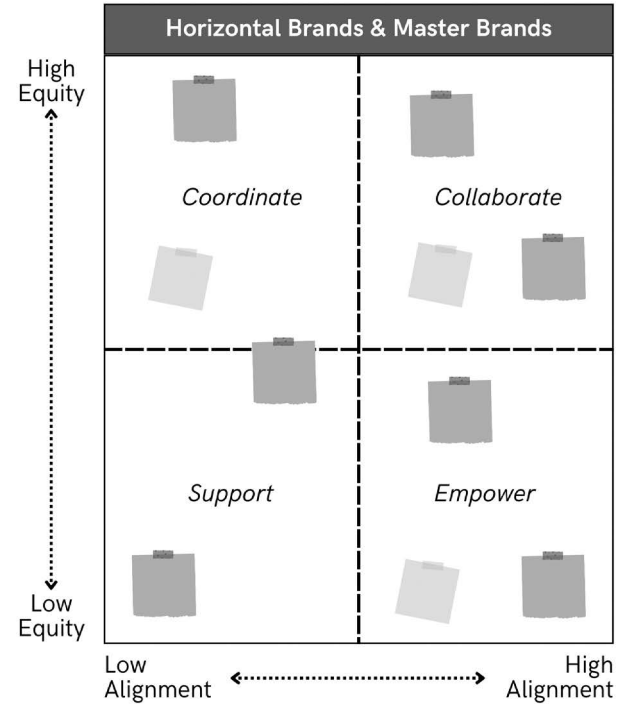
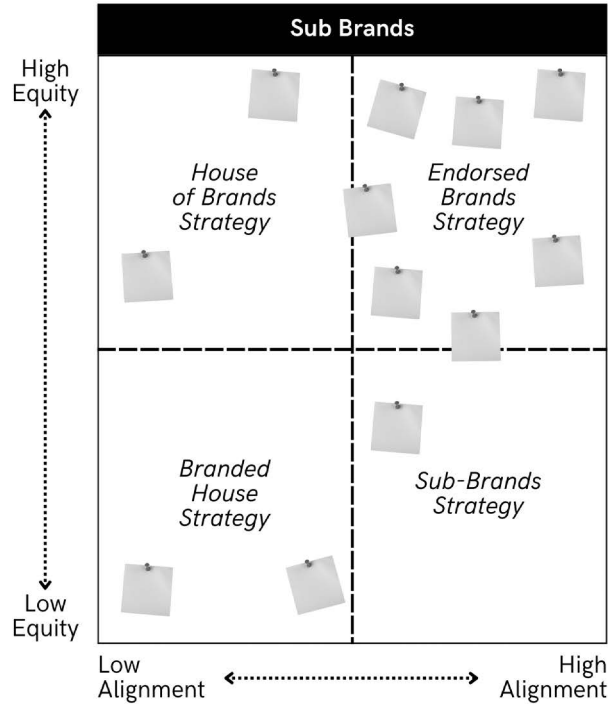


Figure 4.3 City Brand Architecture Board (Source: author's own creation)

Horizontal brands and master brands: The right map analyses the city's horizontal brands and master brands. Horizontal brands are cities in the same consideration set, while master brands are larger-scale brands such as region or nation brands. Master brands function similarly to umbrella brands, with cities acting as sub-brands of a nation brand; however, the term master brand is used here to avoid confusion. Cities must analyse and locate these brands on the map so that cities can leverage elements or identities from these brands. Unlike the left map, which recommends choosing a strategy, this map allows cities to consider several relevant strategies simultaneously, so long as they align with the desired position.

Horizontal and master brands in the top right corner (high equity and high alignment) are ideal candidates for *collaboration*. Cities can engage in co-branding initiatives, jointly host events, or collaborate on product or infrastructure development projects. These partnerships leverage the strong brand equity and alignment positioning to mutually enhance both brands.

Brands in the top left corner (high equity but low alignment) should be *coordinated* with carefully. While these brands have significant recognition and value, their alignment with the city brand position may be limited. Coordination can help avoid conflicts and ensure that branding efforts do not clash.

For brands with less equity than the city brand, strategies should focus on empowerment and support. Cities should *empower* highly aligned brands (bottom right corner) by helping them grow and strengthening the network of aligned brands. This can elevate both the city brand and the empowered brands, creating a more robust and cohesive brand position.

Brands in the bottom left corner, with both low equity and low alignment, should be *supported* to prevent their failure, which could negatively impact the city's overall brand. Support can include resource sharing, joint marketing efforts, and capacity-building initiatives to ensure these brands remain viable and do not detract from the city brand position.

The City Brand Architecture Board is a tool that allows cities to conceptualise and articulate their brand architecture in an interactive and inclusive way, resulting in strategies that strengthen the brand position and leverage connections with other place brands.

4.7 Conclusion

City brand positioning is a critical process that enables a city to establish a unique and valuable identity in the minds of its stakeholders and target audiences. This chapter explores the details of city brand positioning, focusing on identifying the right target groups and understanding their diverse needs and desires. Various strategies and benefits essential for effective city brand positioning are examined. The positioning profiles of cities illustrate the different pathways cities can take to form a distinctive place in a competitive global landscape. Leveraging city brand architecture is vital for maintaining a coherent brand position.

4.7.1 Key Takeaways

- City brand position is a strategic differentiation in the minds of target groups that sets a city apart from competitors by telling a compelling story and communicating how the city meets their needs.
- Key target groups for cities include residents, visitors, businesses or investors, and export customers, each attracted by different attributes.
- City brand positioning should include three sets of benefits—functional, emotional, and self-expressive—and can be guided by various positioning profiles, such as sustainable/ecological, financial/business, knowledge/smart, creative/cultural, and hub/service cities.
- City brand architecture involves managing city brands from a multi-level perspective to address the relationships among associated brands, using strategies such as house of brands, endorsed brands, sub-brand, and branded house.
- The City Brand Position Board helps cities develop an appealing position encompassing core and supporting benefits.
- The City Brand Architecture Board helps cities map sub-brands, horizontal, and umbrella brands and suggest respective strategies.

4.7.2 Key Questions for the City Branding Canvas (Position)

- What are the strategic target groups of the city to realise the vision?
- What value proposition should be developed to attract the target groups offering functional, emotional, or experiential benefits?
- What strategies can be employed to align the city with associated brands, including national, regional, city, district, and sub-brands?

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5 City Brand Execution

5.1 Introduction

Following the foundational steps of organising, visioning, and positioning the city brand, the critical phase of execution begins, where the tangible actions of city branding take place. This chapter examines seven broad strategies cities can adopt to effectively execute their branding efforts, pursue the vision, and strengthen the brand position.

The first three strategies are promotional in nature, aiming to create a compelling representation of the city. The first strategy involves creating a city brand communication campaign, which serves as the overarching strategy for integrated marketing communications (IMC). The second strategy, leveraging digital technologies, acknowledges the growing importance of digital platforms in branding by using digital tools to enhance interaction with the city brand. The third strategy focuses on designing visual identities, such as logos and slogans, which are crucial as they often serve as the first point of interaction with the city brand.

The next two strategies examine the nexus of physical and experiential identities of the city. The fourth strategy, elevating city experiences, emphasises the role of diverse experiences in shaping a city brand. The fifth strategy, re-imagining the city through placemaking, focuses on the physical identities of the city by exploring how urban spaces and structures can be designed or reconfigured to support the city brand.

The sixth strategy addresses the role of products and services in reinforcing the city brand identity and sustainability through the concept of “placeful business”. The final strategy involves attracting target groups with incentives, akin to sales promotions, which can accelerate the city’s progress towards its desired targets.

By the end of the chapter, readers will understand the seven strategies as a multifaceted approach to city branding, each possessing distinct characteristics that lead to different outcomes and impacts. [Figure 5.1](#) presents a visual summary of the seven strategies for city brand execution discussed in this chapter.

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Figure 5.1 Seven Strategies for City Brand Execution (Source: author's own creation)

5.2 Creating a Brand Communication Campaign

5.2.1 The Three Types of Communications in City Branding

City branding employs a multifaceted communication strategy, which can be categorised into three types: primary, secondary, and tertiary communications (Kavaratzis, 2004; Zenker & Braun, 2017).

Primary communication involves the tangible aspects of a city, such as urban design, infrastructure, and the behaviour of its residents and stakeholders. These elements shape the initial impression and experience of the city, akin to the product component in traditional marketing. For instance, a well-maintained park or an efficient public transport system communicates the city's commitment to quality of life without explicit promotional efforts.

Secondary communication includes formal and intentional marketing efforts through traditional channels like advertising, public relations, and

graphic design. This communication is similar to promotional activities in traditional marketing, using logos, slogans, and official messages to convey a cohesive brand image.

Tertiary communication encompasses word-of-mouth and media coverage, largely beyond the control of city officials. This involves perceptions and narratives shared by residents, visitors, and external media, significantly influencing the city brand image. While city authorities cannot directly manage these communications, they can foster a positive environment that encourages favourable word-of-mouth and media portrayal.

5.2.2 *Fundamentals of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)*

While concerns about the overemphasis on official communications by cities are valid (Anttiroiko, 2015; Braun et al., 2014; Kavaratzis, 2012), secondary communication—comprising official promotional activities—remains crucial in city branding. Clear, coordinated, continuous, relevant, and differentiated communications can significantly enhance a city's awareness and esteem (Middleton, 2011). Successful city branding requires integrating elements such as advertisements, public relations, direct marketing, and social network marketing to achieve strategic objectives. Rather than focusing solely on criticism, it is important to optimise official communications to make them effective in city branding.

IMC is a process that combines various communication methods to present a cohesive message. It integrates all parties involved to maximise the customer satisfaction of needs and wants (Luxton et al., 2015). IMC uses different tools to create a cohesive promotional mix that builds shared meanings with stakeholders. Driven by customer data, IMC coordinates marketing efforts across departments and channels, enhancing the use of external resources and internal capabilities. By adopting IMC, cities ensure that their brand messages are consistent, persuasive, and measurable across all platforms (Rehman et al., 2022).

Batra and Keller (2016) outline the goals of IMC as creating awareness, conveying information, building trust, inspiring action, and instilling loyalty. These goals cover communication outcomes from initial awareness to long-term advocacy.

Caemmerer (2009) outlines the IMC planning and implementation process as follows:

- 1 **Situational analysis:** Review internal and external factors, including the city's strengths, weaknesses, and market environment.
- 2 **Identification of marketing communications opportunity:** Identify opportunities by defining unique selling points and target audiences.

- 3 **Agency selection:** Create a creative brief covering the communication campaign's purpose, target audience, competitors, deliverables, big idea, mood and tones, and deadline. Engage stakeholders to ensure alignment with expectations and needs before selecting an agency to execute the campaign.
- 4 **Campaign development and implementation:** Select communication tools, execute creative elements, and choose suitable media channels.
- 5 **Campaign evaluation:** Track progress, measure effectiveness, and analyse efficiency in achieving objectives.
- 6 **Future planning:** Plan to maintain the brand's presence in consumers' minds.

5.2.3 *Building Impactful IMC Strategies*

An effective IMC strategy leverages a mix of platforms, including advertising, sales promotion, events, PR, online marketing, direct marketing, and personal selling (Batra & Keller, 2016; Mabillard et al., 2024). Each platform uniquely engages consumers at various stages of their decision-making journey. For instance, advertising creates initial awareness, while events deepen engagement and loyalty. This combination helps cities meet different consumer needs and preferences.

Success in IMC also relies on using traditional and digital touchpoints. Traditional touchpoints include TV, radio, print, direct mail, PR/events, design, cinema, out-of-home advertising, trade shows, sponsorship, retail, guerrilla marketing, and consumer involvement (Zwerin et al., 2020). Traditional media remains powerful in IMC as it plays a crucial role in enhancing brand awareness and persuading audiences (Batra & Keller, 2016). Digital touchpoints comprise search ads, display ads, websites, email, social media, and mobile marketing. Each touchpoint offers opportunities to reach and engage target audiences, making integration crucial. Strategically combining these touchpoints maximises effectiveness by consistently reinforcing the brand message.

Batra and Keller (2016) suggest using the 7Cs model to optimise IMC campaign results. This model helps optimise communications campaigns by ensuring that all efforts are *comprehensive*, efficient, and effective in reaching the target audience. *Coverage* ensures the target market is reached comprehensively, while *cost* evaluates the financial efficiency of each communication option. *Contribution* assesses the direct impact of each method, and *commonality* ensures consistent messaging across different media. *Complementarity* leverages the strengths of different options, and *cross-effects* enhance the synergistic effects of combined efforts. *Conformability* ensures that communications work for various consumers in different contexts.

To create and deliver effective communication campaigns, city branding teams need to possess strong IMC capabilities. According to [Luxton et al. \(2015\)](#), these capabilities include:

- **Synchronisation:** Ensure all marketing tools work together to achieve goals.
- **Coverage:** Develop a broad creative theme for different stakeholder groups.
- **Alignment:** Regularly discuss the communication strategy with creative agencies.
- **Coordination:** Coordinate external agencies to achieve brand objectives.
- **Clarity:** Drive strategy with clear objectives for building stakeholder relationships.
- **Insights:** Use market research insights to guide planning.
- **Analysis:** Conduct situational analyses to inform planning.
- **Leverage:** Maximise the strengths of all tools.
- **Comprehensiveness:** Understand all brand touchpoints to guide planning.
- **Evaluation:** Evaluate campaign performance.
- **Human resources:** Maintain skilled personnel.
- **Time:** Allocate adequate time for planning and execution.

Creating a brand communication campaign for city branding involves creating an IMC plan and using communication platforms and touchpoints effectively. The case of Seoul ([Box 5.1](#)), South Korea, showcases a city that evolves its campaigns by leveraging various marketing platforms and touchpoints to attract its target audience. Cities of varying sizes and objectives should tailor their IMC strategies to meet specific needs. Successful campaigns require a structured approach that allows for adaptation and utilises a diverse range of marketing platforms, tools, and touchpoints.

Box 5.1 Are You Seoul'd? The Evolution of Seoul's Branding Campaigns

This case illustrates a city that evolves its branding strategies by leveraging various marketing platforms and touchpoints to attract its target audience. Seoul, the capital of South Korea, has continuously refined its branding campaigns to enhance its global image and appeal.

“Hi Seoul”—A Series of Evolving IMC Campaigns

Seoul's branding efforts began to take shape during the 2002 Korea-Japan World Cup. The Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) used this event to foster unity among citizens and highlight the city's positive

aspects to the international community. In 2006, SMG introduced its first city slogan, “Hi Seoul”, aiming to project a friendly and inviting image. This initiative was part of a broader strategy to position Seoul as a first-class global city. Following “Hi Seoul”, campaigns like “Refresh your Soul in Seoul” and “Be @ Seoul” emphasised the city’s cultural heritage and technological advancements. The 2006 campaign, costing approximately US\$2.5 million, targeted Asia (53%), Europe (34%), and the USA (12%), utilising TV broadcasts, print, and outdoor media. This effort increased awareness, particularly in Beijing, where 70% of those who saw the advertisements had a positive impression of Seoul (Kim & Kim, 2011).

In 2007, the branding shifted towards “Emotional Modernity”, leveraging various media channels, with a significant portion (35%) of the budget focused on Southeast Asia through TV, outdoor, internet, and print media (Kim & Kim, 2011). This strategic media allocation diversified the marketing approach and resonated with Southeast Asian tourists’ digital preferences. By 2008, SMG introduced the “My Soul Story” campaign, marking a shift towards personalised and experiential branding. This campaign featured positioning in key markets—China, Japan, Southeast Asia, and the USA/Europe—with both ordinary people and celebrities sharing their experiences in Seoul. The campaign significantly boosted Seoul’s appeal as a travel destination, especially among tourists from China, Japan, and Thailand. Sponsorships, such as with Manchester United, increased brand awareness from 14% to 38% among football fans (Kim & Kim, 2011). The 2009 campaign, “Infinitely Yours, Seoul”, further integrated cultural elements like sports, Korean dramas, and music to capture global attention. Notable promotions included “Seoul Infinite Dream Story” in collaboration with Yahoo, generating 120 million hits, and the “Seoul Infinite Dream Concert”, attracting 400,000 visits. The Big Air World Cup event, “Seoul Infinite Dream Jump”, drew over 300,000 visitors and was broadcast on major sports networks, showcasing Seoul’s innovative approach to combining offline and online promotions (Kim & Kim, 2011).

From “I Seoul U” to “Seoul My Soul”—Continued Evolution

In 2015, the city adopted the “I Seoul U” slogan to emphasise citizen participation and ownership. Despite initial backlash, SMG engaged local stakeholders, making the slogan a symbol of communal identity. The project “Bitter, Sweet, Seoul” was a notable initiative under this

slogan, showcasing Seoul's authentic side through user-generated content (UGC) (Joo & Seo, 2018). Despite challenges, such as the initial failure of the "Haechi" character (Lee, 2015), Seoul has continually refined its approach. The relaunch of "Haechi" in 2024 aligned with the new slogan "Seoul My Soul" (launched in 2023).

Seoul's branding journey showcases its adaptive and persistent approach in evolving city branding campaigns. The transition from traditional media to modern digital platforms, along with active stakeholder engagement, highlights the city's dynamic branding strategy aimed at emotionally connecting with both domestic and international audiences.

A critical aspect of IMC, demonstrated by Seoul's case (Box 5.1), is the role of digital technologies in city branding. Digital advancements have transformed how cities communicate their brands, presenting both new opportunities and challenges. The next strategy will explore how cities can effectively leverage digital technologies to enhance brand communication and engagement.

5.3 Leveraging Digital Technologies

5.3.1 The Role of Digital Technologies in City Branding

Digital technologies are crucial for city branding as they facilitate engagement with target audiences in innovative ways. Platforms like online communities and social media enable cities to connect globally, shape perceptions, and influence decisions (Florek, 2011). The rise of social networking sites, mobile usage, search engine marketing, branded content, and e-commerce has transformed marketing communications (Zwerin et al., 2020).

City brand communications occur on three levels, with secondary communication (formal advertising and public relations) becoming increasingly digital (Zenker & Braun, 2017). The most significant impact of digital technology is on tertiary communication, which involves word-of-mouth interactions amplified by digital platforms. This type of communication, driven by stakeholder experiences and opinions, is widely shared on social media and online forums, enhancing its influence.

UGC plays a crucial role in city branding by offering authentic and diverse perspectives on city life. Stakeholders, including residents and visitors, contribute to the city's brand narrative through online interactions. Although UGC is uncontrollable, city branding bodies and stakeholders, referred to as "brand publics" (Lucarelli et al., 2024), can guide the conversation to foster a positive brand identity.

Digital technologies have revolutionised how cities measure branding success. Traditional metrics like awareness, image, and loyalty are now supplemented by digital-specific goals such as engagement, reach, and sentiment (Rehman et al., 2022). Key performance indicators (KPIs) on digital platforms include likes, shares, comments, and follower growth, indicating user interaction and engagement (Molinillo et al., 2019). Achieving virality, which combines likeability and shareability (Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015), is a primary objective of digital activation, ensuring the city's messages reach a broad audience.

5.3.2 *Digital Strategies for City Brand Activation*

Digital brand activation, a growing concept in marketing, involves using on-line initiatives to add and create value at consumer's digital touchpoints. This approach requires a cohesive strategy integrating digital tools and platforms for a seamless brand experience. Below are some strategies cities can use to boost their branding efforts.

5.3.2.1 *Traditional Digital Marketing*

Traditional digital marketing tools are crucial for effective city branding. A city's *website* is the primary digital touchpoint for stakeholders such as residents, tourists, investors, and potential migrants (Florek et al., 2006). A well-designed website presents a comprehensive image of the city, highlighting its attractions, amenities, and opportunities.

Effective website strategies involve Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and Search Engine Advertising (SEA), both crucial for enhancing visibility and driving traffic. *SEO* ensures that the website ranks highly on search engine results pages, which is achieved through several key practices. Firstly, the website *content* must be of high quality, precise, and regularly updated to remain relevant and engaging. Secondly, *technical* aspects such as good titles, meta descriptions, and a well-structured site architecture are critical for search engines to crawl and index the site efficiently. Lastly, building a network of high-quality *backlinks* from reputable websites can significantly boost the site's credibility and search ranking (Kingsnorth, 2022).

SEA, on the other hand, involves promoting the website through paid advertisements on search engines. Google, for instance, evaluates ads based on their *expected click-through rate* (CTR), *relevance* to users, and the quality of the *landing page experience* (Kingsnorth, 2022). Effective SEA campaigns can drive immediate traffic to the city's website and can increase its visibility among target audiences.

Email marketing remains a powerful tool, allowing cities to maintain regular contact with their audience by providing updates and news. *Digital display advertising*, such as banners and visual ads, enhances brand recognition

(Shankar et al., 2022). These ads are effective for creating awareness and fostering intent, and they can be used for retargeting to remind users of the city's offerings after engagement with digital content (Kingsnorth, 2022).

5.3.2.2 Social Media Marketing

Social media platforms revolutionise how cities engage with audiences, offering interactive channels for communication and branding. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter-X, LinkedIn, TikTok globally, and Weibo, WeChat, Douyin in China, offer opportunities to reach diverse audiences with tailored content.

Developing an effective social media strategy involves several steps (Kingsnorth, 2022) including:

- Setting goals
- Identifying the audience
- Choosing the right channels
- Timing content delivery
- Analysing competitors
- Developing a content strategy
- Planning content duration
- Designing content production
- Managing channels
- Evaluating metrics

A robust *content strategy* is essential in social media marketing, involving planning and creating content that resonates with the audience and conveys the city brand identity on social media. Content can be categorised into informational, functional, emotional, and experiential types (Taecharungroj & Pattaratanakun, 2023).

- **Informational content:** Provides valuable information about the city, such as news updates, upcoming events, and practical tips for residents and visitors.
- **Functional content:** Offers practical and useful information, like how-to guides, transportation details, and service announcements.
- **Emotional content:** Engages the audience on an emotional level, showcasing the city's cultural events, community stories, and scenic highlights to build a strong emotional connection.
- **Experiential content:** Focuses on the experiences that the city offers, such as virtual tours, interactive maps, and UGC showcasing real-life experiences in the city.

Influencer marketing, or partnering with key opinion leaders (KOLs), has become an effective strategy in social media marketing. Influencers, with their large followings and respected opinions, can significantly enhance a city's

reach and credibility (Kingsnorth, 2022). Collaborating with influencers, who align with the city's values and audience, can amplify the message and create engaging content.

Paid social media advertising, including sponsored posts, boosts visibility and engagement. These ads are highly targeted, reaching specific demographics and interests. Social media platforms offer analytics to track performance, providing insights into effectiveness and areas for improvement.

Community marketing on social media contributes to the development of a city brand by engaging target audiences within their communities, allowing them to express their membership through active participation with the city brand (Ahuja et al., 2022). Cities can facilitate this by encouraging both residents and visitors to share their experiences within these communities. This form of digital storytelling, which utilises various formats, creates narratives that not only enhance user experiences but also foster greater engagement with the city brand (Hudak, 2019).

5.3.2.3 *Emerging Digital Technological Trends for City Branding*

Emerging technologies such as Extended Reality (XR), including Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR), offer new dimensions for branding (Shankar et al., 2022). These technologies create immersive experiences that engage audiences in novel ways. Additionally, *e-commerce* and *retail media networks* provide platforms for promoting city brands. While cities themselves cannot be sold online, e-commerce of local products can enhance the city brand image.

Digital technologies offer powerful tools for city branding, enhancing traditional marketing efforts and leveraging emerging trends. By strategically activating digital tools, cities can create engaging brand experiences that resonate with diverse audiences. The following examples of Rongjiang (Box 5.2) and Xi'an (Box 5.3) showcase cities that have successfully incorporated digital technologies into their branding efforts, achieving remarkable results.

Box 5.2 The National Phenomenon of the Village Super League in Rongjiang

Rongjiang of Guizhou Province, China, gained national attention through the grassroots Village Super League football tournament. This event combined local culture and sports with the organic and powerful use of social media to capture the public's imagination.

Rongjiang County is known for its rich cultural heritage and picturesque landscapes in Guizhou Province, historically one of China's less

economically developed regions. Despite economic challenges, recent efforts have focused on leveraging the province's unique cultural and environmental assets to boost its brand and tourism. The Village Super League began as a grassroots football tournament organised by residents in Rongjiang County. Held every Saturday evening, it features local participants as players, referees, and commentators. Teams from various villages participate, showcasing local specialty products and performing ethnic shows like Dong songs and Miao Lusheng dances during halftime. This format, rooted in local traditions, blends sports and culture (Zhang & Dai, 2023).

This grassroots approach has garnered admiration and emotional attachment from the community. According to Zhang and Dai (2023) and Li and Nie (2024), the sentiment surrounding the Village Super League is overwhelmingly positive, with residents and visitors viewing it as a source of local pride and cultural identity. The League has become a symbol of community resilience and creativity, drawing attention not only from within the province but also nationally.

Social media significantly boosted the perception of Rongjiang County. From May 13 to July 29, 2023, the League generated over 30 billion online views and discussions, according to Xinhua News Agency. This attention led to over 3.38 million visitors to Rongjiang County, contributing to a tourism income of 38.34 billion yuan (Zhang & Dai, 2023). Platforms like Weibo and TikTok played a crucial role in amplifying the event's popularity, making it a trending topic and attracting significant online engagement.

The Village Super League has effectively elevated the city brand of Rongjiang and Guizhou nationally. It showcases how a locally driven initiative can become a national phenomenon through social media amplification. The success of the Village Super League in enhancing Rongjiang's city brand demonstrates the potential of community-led events in digital brand activation.

Box 5.3 Xi'an—The Tang Dynasty City Embracing the Internet Sensation

Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi Province, effectively utilises TikTok to promote the city, reshaping perceptions and attracting a global audience. This strategy aligns with the “wanghong” (Internet Celebrity) economy, helping the city maintain relevance while celebrating its historical roots.

Xi'an, one of China's oldest cities, has a history spanning over 3,000 years. Formerly known as Chang'an, it served as the capital for 13 dynasties, including the Han and Tang Dynasties, and is known for the Terracotta Warriors and ancient city walls. Recently, the Xi'an Tourism Bureau (Xi'an's city branding agency) has used TikTok to reshape the city brand, aligning with China's "wanghong" economy trend.

Wang and Feng (2023) demonstrate how the Bureau embraced digital technology to create content appealing to modern audiences. The Bureau used TikTok to rejuvenate Xi'an's image, shifting from a historical yet stagnant perception to a dynamic, youthful, and globally appealing brand. Through digital content, Xi'an has engaged a broad audience, particularly the younger generation. Phrases like "clock in" are used to promote local attractions, encouraging visits to the city's fashionable bars and shopping districts.

The strategy included creating short, engaging videos highlighting the city's stylishness, youthfulness, fantasy elements, and trending content. These videos often portray Xi'an as a fashionable and vibrant city, personified through a young, popular, and international micro-celebrity persona. For example, a TikTok campaign featured influencers exploring Xi'an's modern nightlife, trendy cafes, and shopping districts, showcasing the city's contemporary lifestyle alongside its historical sites (Wang & Feng, 2023).

Despite this modern makeover, Xi'an has not abandoned its traditional roots. The city's promotional TikTok videos also emphasise its historical and cultural heritage. The Great Tang Dynasty is recreated through festivals, parades, and performances highlighted in these videos. Local folk art and traditional crafts are showcased, providing a narrative that respects the past while celebrating the present. For instance, during the annual Chang'an Lantern Festival, videos capture illuminated city walls and traditional performances, blending these with modern light shows and music festivals. This duality is key to Xi'an's city branding strategy, merging historical symbolism with contemporary appeal (Wang & Feng, 2023).

The results of this digital transformation are significant. TikTok content has garnered millions of views, with several videos going viral and attracting media attention. This increased visibility has enhanced Xi'an's reputation as a vibrant city and boosted tourism and economic development. This case study highlights the potential for cities to use digital platforms to enhance their brand, showing that even historically rich cities can innovate and remain relevant in the modern age.

5.4 Designing Visual Identities

5.4.1 City Branding and Visual Identity: The Debate Over Logos and Slogans

Logos and slogans are common tools in city branding, often used as central elements of a place's visual identity. However, their effectiveness and significance are debated in academic circles. As [Kavaratzis and Ashworth \(2005\)](#) assert that while logos and slogans are useful in place branding, they do not constitute the strategy itself. [Govers \(2013\)](#) supports this view, arguing that the positive impact of logos and slogans in place branding is frequently overestimated. Unlike commercial products that rely on logos and slogans for differentiation, cities do not require such elements to stand out in the same way. Excessive focus on logos and slogans can lead to the misallocation of taxpayer resources and neglect of more meaningful branding strategies.

Conversely, [Hildreth \(2013\)](#) argues that despite criticisms, practitioners continue to invest in logos and slogans for several reasons. Firstly, these elements provide *a necessary feature for branding materials*, fulfilling a practical need for visual identification. Secondly, acquiring logo and slogan designs is often more *feasible* and less complex than achieving substantial goals like economic growth. Additionally, the design process can be *pleasurable* and *prestigious*, offering cities a sense of importance. Lastly, *peer pressure* among cities can drive the adoption of these visual elements, as not doing so might be perceived as a lack of sophistication. While logos and slogans are not the ultimate strategy for city branding, they are important components that require careful attention. Cities should aim to create logos and slogans that justify the time, resources, and effort invested.

The concept of visual identity extends beyond logos and slogans to encompass a broader visual identity system. This includes various brand elements such as signs, symbols, and packaging, collectively forming a cohesive representation of a brand's visual presence ([Hem & Iversen, 2004](#)). While brand identity systems may incorporate olfactory and auditory elements, the visual identity system remains the most prominent in city branding. A robust visual identity system is a powerful tool for cities to convey their unique essence and establish a recognisable brand image. It plays a crucial role in differentiating a city from its competitors by highlighting its distinct attributes and cultural significance ([Florek et al., 2006](#)).

5.4.2 Designing Effective City Logos

Logos are essential components of a brand's visual identity, functioning as visual cues that facilitate brand recognition and differentiation ([Kelly, 2017](#)). They can take various forms, including typographical, figurative, or abstract

designs, and consist of elements such as typeface, shape, and colour (Gretzel & Collier de Mendonça, 2019). The design dimensions of a logo, such as complexity, cohesiveness, and balance, significantly influence audience perception. In city branding, logos serve as communicative devices that encapsulate the city brand identity and vision (Kelly, 2017). They help build brand equity by fostering emotional connections and enhancing recognition and loyalty (Hem & Iversen, 2004).

Flexibility and adaptability are key considerations in designing city logos. The concept of *flexible identity* allows a logo to adapt to changing perspectives and applications, thereby expanding its utility beyond rigid guidelines (Kelly, 2017). This approach involves using logo elements separately or in different combinations, maintaining a visual connection to the brand without necessarily using the entire logo. This flexibility fosters a unified branding approach since city branding involves multiple stakeholders and targets various groups. This flexibility can maintain consistency while adapting to diverse needs and purposes.

Recommendations from Hildreth (2013) for effective logo design include:

- **Discovery over concoction:** Utilise authentic cultural symbols rather than artificial creations.
- **External involvement:** Incorporate outsider perspectives to enhance appeal and effectiveness.
- **Balanced design:** Achieve a balance between playful and austere elements.
- **Intelligent management:** Allow flexible and widespread use of the logo to build popularity.
- **Celebrity influence:** Consider using renowned artists or celebrities for logo design.
- **Time and familiarity:** Allow logos to grow on people and create attachment over time.
- **Market appeal:** Ensure the logo is desirable and marketable as a souvenir.

5.4.3 *Crafting Effective City Slogans*

Slogans are essential in branding as they provide concise expressions of a brand identity. Slogans are key components of brand identity, alongside logos and brand names, acting as “hooks” that capture the brand’s essence and communicate its uniqueness (Kohli et al., 2007). Slogans enhance brand awareness and image by facilitating recognition, recall, and positive associations. However, place slogans often lack originality and fail to capture the unique attributes of the places they represent (Wilson, 2021).

In crafting slogans for city branding, the concepts of *factuality* and *musicality* (Hildreth, 2013) are useful. Factuality involves incorporating interesting facts that engage the audience, while Musicality uses poetic and rhythmic

elements to create memorable slogans. Recommendations for effective city slogan creation include (Kohli et al., 2007; Wilson, 2021):

- **Strategic alignment:** Ensure the slogan aligns with the long-term brand strategy and objectives.
- **Positioning enhancement:** Use the slogan to clearly position the city in the minds of the target audience.
- **Repetition:** Consistently use the slogan across various marketing materials to reinforce brand identity.
- **Creativity:** Embrace creativity and consider moderate syntactic or semantic complexity for deeper processing and recall.

Understanding the principles of creating effective logos and slogans, the cases of Yogyakarta and Kumamoto illustrate how visual identity can be effectively utilised. The “Jogja Istimewa” campaign in Yogyakarta (Box 5.4) demonstrates how visual identities can be more than just logos and slogans; they can act as catalysts for broader city branding strategies. Conversely, Kumamoto’s use of a mascot (Box 5.5) highlights another aspect of visual identity systems. While mascots may seem simple, their success requires careful planning and execution.

Box 5.4 How “Jogja Istimewa” Sets the Stage for Other City Branding Efforts

Yogyakarta’s city branding strategy, “Jogja Istimewa”, illustrates how a logo and slogan can serve as catalysts for broader branding initiatives. This case highlights the importance of aligning branding efforts with a city’s visual identity.

Yogyakarta stands out in Indonesia as the only region that maintains a governance system rooted in a kingdom or palace. Its city identity is enriched by diverse cuisine and historical buildings tied to its cultural heritage (Siswantoro & Ikhwan, 2024). In 2014, Yogyakarta rebranded itself with the logo and tagline “Jogja Istimewa” (Jogja Special). This replaced the previous “Jogja Never Ending Asia” logo, which had successfully raised Yogyakarta’s profile both domestically and internationally. The change to “Jogja Istimewa” reflects a new focus on capturing Yogyakarta’s extraordinary nature and aligning with the Sultan Hamengku Buwono X’s vision (Pasande & Suhendra, 2017).

The “Jogja Istimewa” logo uses lowercase “jogja” in red brick on a white background, symbolising equality and brotherhood. The red brick represents the palace’s courage to embrace change while

incorporating local wisdom (Sudarmanto, 2022). The logo was designed to be flexible, allowing for use in various contexts, which is crucial for a city like Yogyakarta with its many cultural events.

Following the development of the logo, Yogyakarta initiated various activities to support its rebranding efforts. A strategic implementation roadmap was issued to establish goals and objectives, providing guidance for strategies, policy directions, and plans. Strategic planning included a roadmap with clear goals for promoting the “Jogja Istimewa” brand. The monitoring agency, comprising a steering committee and an implementation team, was established to oversee and monitor the city branding initiatives. Public participation and cultural events, like the “Pisowanan Agung” event, launched the new branding with parades and activities to engage the community (Pasande & Suhendra, 2017).

Although the “Jogja Istimewa” launch faced challenges, such as fragmented programmes, lack of integrated design, incomplete data, and bureaucratic inefficiencies (Pasande & Suhendra, 2017), the initiative demonstrates how a logo and slogan can serve as a catalyst for more impactful city branding strategies.

Box 5.5 Strategic Cuteness of Kumamon Mascot

The success of Kumamon, the mascot of Kumamoto Prefecture, highlights the effectiveness of strategic mascot design in enhancing place branding. Kumamon illustrates the significance of aligning mascots with regional identity and creating emotional connections with both residents and visitors.

Kumamoto Prefecture in southern Japan, located on Kyushu Island, is famous for its mascot, Kumamon. Launched in March 2010, Kumamon was part of a Kumamoto government marketing campaign to boost tourism and reputation. Kumamon achieved national recognition by winning the *Yuru-kyara* Grand Prix in 2011, a competition for Japanese mascots, establishing itself as a symbol of Kumamoto. As part of city/prefecture branding, mascots like Kumamon are crucial visual identity elements that personify the prefecture and engage both residents and visitors. Kumamon significantly boosted Kumamoto’s tourism and economy, with tourist arrivals rising from about 57 million in 2010 to 60 million in 2015, partly due to the mascot’s popularity and effective branding (Wattanacharoensil et al., 2021). Beyond tourism, Kumamon enhanced the local economy and instilled pride among residents.

Kumamon's success lies in its *strategic alignment* with Kumamoto's identity and image. The name "Kumamon" incorporates the local dialect, meaning "Kuma(moto) person", creating a deep regional connection (Wattanacharoensil et al., 2021). The government set clear guidelines for Kumamon's use, ensuring its consistent presence across platforms. This strategy included integrating Kumamon into transportation developments, like the Kyushu Shinkansen, making the mascot a recognisable part of the Kumamoto's branding (Soltani et al., 2018). Additionally, Kumamon's strong social media presence helped it stand out from other mascots, boosting its reach and impact through digital marketing strategies (Wattanacharoensil et al., 2021).

Kumamon's *emotional appeal* is also crucial to its success. Designed as a living character with roles and responsibilities, including having an office and business card, Kumamon creates an emotional connection with the public (Wattanacharoensil et al., 2021). This personification fosters pride and belonging among residents, as local businesses incorporate Kumamon into their products and services. The mascot's design, reflecting Kumamoto's friendly and lively personality, strengthens its emotional resonance and helps build a unique identity for the prefecture (Soltani et al., 2018).

Collaboration is another key factor in Kumamon's success. The Kumamoto government worked closely with locals and businesses to implement the mascot branding strategy. They allowed royalty-free use of Kumamon's image, encouraging widespread adoption and recognition nationally and internationally. This approach inspired civic enthusiasm and ensured Kumamon's ongoing popularity (Soltani et al., 2018; Wattanacharoensil et al., 2021).

While Kumamon's success is impressive, using mascots does not guarantee success for all place brands. Kumamoto's experience shows that successful mascot design and implementation require strategic alignment with broader branding efforts, evoking pride and emotional connections with stakeholders, and fostering strong collaboration among stakeholders.

5.5 Elevating City Experiences

5.5.1 Understanding City Experience

City experience refers to the ways people interact with and perceive urban environments. This concept views cities as places shaped by human emotions, interactions, and stories rather than just physical spaces (Cresswell, 2008; Tuan, 1979). Influenced by brand experience research, city experience

encompasses sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli (Brakus et al., 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009). Unlike retail or product experiences, city experiences are more complex due to their undefined boundaries and the involvement of many people.

City experience is closely linked to city branding, as it significantly affects a city's perception and identity. In city branding, experiences create value and differentiate cities by fostering emotional connections (Knutson et al., 2007; Rodrigues et al., 2020). Positive city experiences can result in brand advocacy and loyalty by building emotional connections and satisfaction with the place (Beckman et al., 2013). These outcomes enhance the city brand image and encourage positive actions, such as revisiting or recommending the city to others (Barnes et al., 2014). Consequently, cities aim to create enjoyable and memorable experiences to strengthen their brand and achieve lasting success.

City experiences are inherently *internal* and *interactive*. They occur when individuals “consume” the city through personal interactions, such as walking on the streets, dining, or visiting attractions (Warnaby, 2009). These experiences are unique to each person, influenced by individual traits and interactions with people and the city's environment, such as talking with locals or enjoying the atmosphere (Alves et al., 2015; Trauer & Ryan, 2005). This interaction cycle helps create and convey the city's meaning, enriching the overall experience and contributing to its unique identity.

5.5.2 The Four Facets of City Experience

The city experience can be divided into four facets: sensorial, affective, behavioural, and intellectual. This framework is proposed by Taecharungroj and Stoica (2024) and is based on the study by Godovykh and Tasci (2020).

5.5.2.1 Sensorial Experience

This facet involves stimulating the human senses through the city's features, such as sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch. Sensorial experiences can evoke nostalgia and comfort and are crucial in creating a multisensory ambience that enhances the city's aesthetic appeal.

5.5.2.2 Affective Experience

Affective experiences focus on the emotions and feelings elicited by the city, ranging from joy and excitement to frustration and anger. These experiences are fundamental to city branding as they form emotional connections and memories associated with the city, contributing to its desirability and attachment.

5.5.2.3 Behavioural Experience

This facet includes the physical actions and activities individuals engage in within the city, such as recreational activities, work, or daily routines. Behavioural experiences highlight active participation in the city's offerings, shaping perception and engagement with the urban environment.

5.5.2.4 Intellectual Experience

Intellectual experiences stimulate thought and curiosity through interactions with educational institutions, historic sites, or museums. These experiences encourage cognitive engagement and foster a deeper understanding of the city's cultural and historical significance, enriching the overall city experience.

5.5.3 Intention and Intensity of City Experiences

City experiences vary in intention and intensity, influencing how individuals engage with and perceive the city (Taecharungroj & Stoica, 2024).

5.5.3.1 Intention

City experiences can be *designed* and planned by city managers to create structured and intentional interactions, such as cultural festivals or guided tours. Conversely, *serendipitous* experiences are unplanned and spontaneous, providing unexpected joys and discoveries that add depth and richness to the city experience.

5.5.3.2 Intensity

Experiences range from *spectacular*, high-intensity events like large-scale festivals to *mundane*, everyday activities like commuting or shopping. Both spectacular and mundane experiences contribute to the city brand identity and image, with spectacular events enhancing its memorability and mundane experiences shaping the everyday urban fabric.

5.5.4 Strategies to Improve City Experiences

Cities can enhance the quality of life for residents and attract visitors by implementing strategies that improve mundane and spectacular experiences across sensorial, affective, intellectual, and behavioural facets. Here are some

strategies based on the diverse types of experiences (Taecharungroj & Rauhut Kompaniets, 2024; Taecharungroj & Stoica, 2024).

- **Food experiences:** Improve mundane food experiences by enhancing the quality of food in restaurants and grocery stores through fresh ingredients, local produce, and high hygiene standards. For spectacular experiences, organise food events and festivals celebrating local cuisine to provide a sensory feast and foster community and cultural appreciation.
- **Active experiences:** Enhance mundane active experiences by improving infrastructure for running and cycling paths, promoting physical activities and well-being. For spectacular experiences, organise marathons, cycling events, and outdoor fitness classes that offer unique activities.
- **Entertainment experiences:** Support local artists and musicians through street performances and exhibitions to create a vibrant cultural scene. On a larger scale, organise cultural festivals and shows to offer diverse and spectacular entertainment experiences.
- **Charitable experiences:** Implement programmes that support disadvantaged individuals, such as job training and social support, to improve mundane charitable experiences. For a spectacular impact, host donation events and volunteer fairs that encourage participation and foster compassion and generosity.
- **Civic experiences:** Enhance mundane civic experiences with innovative platforms for public hearings and discussions, such as digital forums and town hall meetings. For spectacular civic experiences, organise large public gatherings and events that foster civic pride, such as national holiday celebrations.
- **Transport experiences:** Improve mundane transport experiences by upgrading public transportation infrastructure and services for efficiency and comfort. For spectacular experiences, develop iconic transport hubs or scenic routes that become attractions themselves.
- **Tourism experiences:** Enhance mundane tourism experiences by improving the quality and accessibility of major attractions and accommodations. Create spectacular tourism experiences through themed tours or events with engaging narratives of the city's history and culture.
- **Professional experiences:** Improve mundane professional experiences by upgrading work and study environments with modern amenities. For spectacular experiences, host international conferences and networking events that attract global talent and foster intellectual exchange.
- **Private experiences:** Enhance mundane private experiences by creating tranquil spaces like libraries, parks, and quiet neighbourhoods for reflection. For spectacular private experiences, design serene public art installations or gardens for contemplation and retreat from urban life.

This section has examined different ways to create positive city experiences. The case study of Harbin (Box 5.6) shows how the city has made unique experiences central to its identity, continually improving and promoting them to achieve widespread success.

Box 5.6 The Viral “Ice and Snow World” Festival in Harbin

Harbin’s city branding demonstrates how experiences can enhance a city brand. While Harbin faces challenges and its approach may not work for all cities, it highlights the impact of focusing on experiences in city branding.

From Lanterns to Global Attraction: Harbin’s Festival Journey

Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang Province in northeastern China, is known for its cultural identity, shaped by Russian and European influences since its founding in 1898 with Russian funding for the Chinese Eastern Railway. This historical connection gives Harbin a distinctive architectural style, earning it nicknames like the “Paris of the East” and the “Moscow of the East” (Kong & Chen, 2018).

The Ice and Snow Festival started in the 1960s to lift residents’ spirits during harsh winters with a cultural event featuring ice lanterns. Inspired by local fishermen using ice lanterns to light winter nights, the festival began in 1963 with contributions from individuals and the government (Dewar et al., 2001). Although halted during the Cultural Revolution, it was revived in 1984 and has become one of the largest events of its kind. By 1998, it included snow and ice sculpting competitions, cultural parades, and international contests, attracting millions of visitors and generating significant tourism revenue (Dewar et al., 2001).

The Ice and Snow World continues to innovate by incorporating new themes and interactive experiences. Organisers use digital technology, like augmented reality and interactive displays, to enhance the visitor experience (Wang, 2024).

Leveraging Social Media for Harbin’s Festival Success

The Harbin Ice and Snow World has become a social media sensation due to strategic internet marketing and viral memes. In December 2023, the festival received over 5 billion views on TikTok, and

“Harbin” was searched over 53.35 million times, a 308% increase from the previous year (Wang, 2024). Success stems from engaging memes and catchy topics like “Southern Small Potato” and “Harbin is more cost-effective than Europe”, resonating with users. Influencers and tourists shared content and experiences, boosting the festival’s reach. Timely responses to issues, like the ticket refund incident, maintained a positive image and enhanced Harbin’s online presence (Wang, 2024).

This case demonstrates how spectacular city experiences can enhance Harbin’s visibility by leveraging unique cultural experiences and geographical attributes to strengthen the city brand. However, despite the festival’s success, an exclusive focus on spectacular experiences has its limitations. Harbin faces challenges in diversifying its tourism offerings beyond winter attractions (Kong & Chen, 2018) and contends with mixed perceptions from residents regarding the city’s emphasis on tourism (Wang et al., 2013).

5.6 Re-imaging the City through Placemaking

5.6.1 *The Roles of Physical Identities in City Branding*

Physical identities are vital to city branding, serving as a primary communication channel (Kavaratzis, 2004). These include landscapes, urban design, architecture, and public spaces that define a city’s visual and experiential character (De Jong & Lu, 2022). Physical identities and city’s infrastructure such as cultural centres, stations, roads, events, and public art contribute to this identity, conveying the city’s essence to residents and visitors and influencing its brand image (Braun et al., 2014; Zenker & Braun, 2017). Investment in these elements can create a “flagship” effect, attracting visitors and enhancing the brand image through positive word-of-mouth (Braun et al., 2014).

Despite the link between physical identities and city branding, efforts to enhance these aspects are less developed than those focusing on symbolic elements. While tangible features like architecture play a role in branding, they often arise from development and globalisation rather than intentional strategies (Evans, 2014). Physical environments and architecture are often underrepresented in branding, revealing a gap between their perceived and actual roles. This highlights the need for strategic interventions in the physical aspects of city branding (Evans, 2014).

5.6.2 *Placemaking as a Tool for City Brandings*

Placemaking is an important part of urban design that focuses on creating high-quality spaces where people want to live, work, play, and learn (Wyckoff, 2014).

Unlike traditional urban design, which covers large areas, placemaking targets specific locations to create welcoming spaces that enhance city image and brand (Evans, 2014). This approach connects local development with a city's overall brand, attracting tourists, businesses, and a skilled workforce (Farhat, 2019). Through placemaking, cities can showcase unique qualities, turning them into compelling stories that resonate with target audiences and contribute to a cohesive city brand (Lawton et al., 2013).

Placemaking transforms urban spaces into vibrant, engaging environments that foster community (Ebaid, 2023). It improves a city's emotional and functional benefits by promoting social cohesion, health, safety, and accessibility (Richards, 2017). It boosts economic vitality by attracting businesses and fostering local entrepreneurship (Evans, 2014). Integrating physical and social dimensions, placemaking fosters connections and engagement, reinforcing emotional ties between people and places (Lawton et al., 2013). Successful placemaking initiatives should incorporate the following attributes (Ebaid, 2023; Wyckoff, 2014):

- **Accessibility:** Ensure that spaces are easily accessible to all, including those with disabilities.
- **Diversity and inclusivity:** Create spaces that are welcoming to people from various backgrounds and cultures.
- **Safety:** Prioritise safety through appropriate lighting and well-maintained infrastructure.
- **Social interaction:** Encourage community engagement by providing gathering spaces and amenities.
- **Cultural identity:** Reflect the unique cultural heritage through art and architecture.
- **Green spaces:** Incorporate parks and gardens for relaxation and recreation.
- **Vibrancy:** Foster lively environments with events and activities.
- **Sustainability:** Emphasise sustainable practices in design and infrastructure.
- **Economic vitality:** Support local businesses and entrepreneurship.
- **Flexibility and adaptability:** Design spaces that can adapt to changing needs over time.

These attributes form the foundation of effective placemaking, ensuring public spaces are functional, attractive, and meaningful. Based on Wyckoff (2014) and Courage (2020), placemaking is classified into three main types:

Standard placemaking focuses on the incremental improvement of public spaces through community engagement and urban design. This approach seeks to create vibrant, liveable areas by gradually implementing design elements and engaging communities. While it involves small-scale improvements, it can include transformative projects to establish a strong sense of place quickly, reflecting community needs and fostering identity.

Strategic placemaking targets long-term development goals, focusing on specific urban areas like downtowns to achieve specific objectives such as attracting workers and driving economic growth. It involves comprehensive research to create a strategy integrating urban amenities, housing, and transportation. The aim is to enhance appeal and functionality, stimulating economic development often through iconic architecture or landmark projects.

Tactical placemaking combines elements of tactical and opportunistic placemaking, emphasising short-term, low-cost interventions that are collaborative and citizen-led. Known as “tactical urbanism”, this approach tests ideas before committing to larger investments. It is flexible and iterative, allowing communities to experiment and transform public spaces effectively. Opportunistic elements involve unplanned interventions responding to immediate needs, contributing to broader strategic objectives.

5.6.3 *Forms of Placemaking Interventions*

Placemaking interventions in urban environments focus on iconic architecture, designated quarters, and city amenities. Each intervention enhances city branding and appeal.

5.6.3.1 *Iconic Architecture*

Iconic structures, such as public buildings, historical monuments, and unique towers, serve as anchors in urban placemaking. They enhance visual appeal and act as landmarks that attract tourists and locals, boosting economic vitality and cultural identity (Bonakdar & Audirac, 2020; Evans, 2014).

5.6.3.2 *Urban Quarters*

The development of urban quarters, such as cultural, heritage, innovative, or creative areas, enhances the social and economic fabric of a city. These revitalised quarters mix residential, commercial, and cultural spaces, enriching the city’s cultural landscape and promoting economic development through tourism and local businesses (Evans, 2014).

5.6.3.3 *City Amenities*

City amenities are essential for enhancing urban functionality and liveability. They attract target groups and contribute to city vibrancy. Effective placemaking involves planning various amenities (Taecharungroj, 2021), including:

- **Commercial amenities:** Shops, malls, and markets that cater to daily needs and enhance economic activity.
- **Cultural amenities:** Museums, galleries, and theatres that enrich the cultural life of the city.

- **Natural amenities:** Parks and green spaces that improve environmental quality and offer recreational spaces.
- **Healthcare amenities:** Hospitals and clinics that ensure the well-being of the residents.
- **Service amenities:** Community centres and social services that support the city's social infrastructure.

Amenities include permanent features and temporary attractions like art installations, street furniture, pop-up markets, and performances. They enhance city appeal and play a crucial role in community well-being and economy.

This section highlights the importance of placemaking as a crucial element in creating a holistic city branding strategy. While placemaking traditionally focuses on physical spaces, enhancing these physical identities is essential for effective city branding and should not be overlooked. The case of George Town (Box 5.7) demonstrates how placemaking can improve a city brand, though it is not without challenges.

Box 5.7 The Opportunities and Complexities of Placemaking in George Town

The case of George Town illustrates the complexities and opportunities of placemaking within a culturally rich city, highlighting its role in city branding. Effective placemaking not only preserves and promotes historical identity but also ensures that initiatives are inclusive and reflective of the city's diverse communities.

Placemaking and Heritage Conservation in George Town

George Town, the capital of Penang, Malaysia, is situated on the north-eastern corner of Penang Island. Its strategic location on the Strait of Malacca has historically made it a thriving commercial hub, attracting a diverse population from China, India, and Southeast Asia (Khoo et al., 2017). This multicultural blend underpins George Town's cultural diversity and led to its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008 (Ismail et al., 2008).

This UNESCO designation highlighted George Town's unique cultural and historical elements. Managed by the Conservation Unit of the Penang Municipal Council, Tourism Penang, and other agencies, the status promotes the city's tangible and intangible heritage (Ismail et al., 2008). These groups, along with the private sector, play crucial roles

in preserving the city's historic architecture and multicultural identity. Events like the George Town Festival showcase its vibrant arts scene, balancing modernity with heritage preservation (Habibi, 2020).

Following its UNESCO designation, placemaking has become a key strategy in George Town's urban development, integrating cultural and historical elements. The Penang Heritage Trust promotes heritage trails, guiding visitors through significant landmarks like Khoo Kongsi, the Acheen Street Mosque, and Fort Cornwallis, reflecting the city's diverse influences (Ismail et al., 2008). However, the focus on colonial heritage can overshadow George Town's broader multicultural identity, often highlighting European and Chinese influences while neglecting Malay and Indian contributions (Ismail et al., 2008). Additionally, despite efforts to preserve heritage sites, many buildings in George Town are deteriorating, which threatens the city's image as a tourist destination and undermines its identity as a World Heritage Site (Dolah et al., 2022).

George Town's Organic Placemaking by the Locals

Beyond heritage preservation, George Town faces challenges in integrating contemporary creative scenes with its historical identity. State-led initiatives, like the "Marking George Town" project, often focus on economic development and tourism, sometimes overlooking local cultural identities. Involving external artists in public art projects can limit local talent's ability to express their cultural narratives, complicating city branding (Habibi, 2020).

In response, local creatives have independently contributed to George Town's placemaking. Places like Hin Bus Depot provide artists with spaces for collaboration, producing murals and public art that reflect local culture and critique state-sponsored projects. This grassroots approach contrasts with top-down policies, offering a more authentic representation of George Town's multicultural legacy (Habibi, 2020).

Preserving and promoting George Town's historical identity is essential, but initiatives must also be inclusive and representative of the city's diverse communities. George Town exemplifies the complexities and opportunities in placemaking within a culturally rich context, highlighting the duality of official and citizen-led initiatives. This case illustrates that effective placemaking should engage with both the physical and social aspects of the city, creating an environment that supports both heritage preservation and contemporary creativity.

5.7 Promoting Placeful Products and Services

5.7.1 *The Impact of Products and Services on City Branding*

Products and services play a critical role in city branding. One key target group in city branding is export customers—those who purchase goods and services produced within the city. Their purchases significantly influence the city brand image, forming a vital part of the city-of-origin brand (Lentz et al., 2006). This positive image can enhance the perceived value and purchase intent of the city's offerings, similar to country-of-origin effects.

The city-of-origin effect parallels country-of-origin effects, shaping consumer perceptions of products. It reflects local attachment in product marketing, offering a competitive edge or unique selling proposition in broader markets (Lentz et al., 2006). Furthermore, the authentic perception of products can enhance the intention to visit the city (Pu et al., 2019). This positive cycle improves the city brand and supports sustainable economic development.

5.7.2 *City Branding through Authentic Placeful Products and Services*

The city-of-origin effect typically develops over a long period, rooted in historical and cultural significance. However, one way to promote products and services while building this effect is by designing, developing, and marketing offerings that authentically represent the unique characteristics and values of the city. The concept of “placeful business” (Taecharungroj & Prasertsakul, 2023) introduces a novel approach for cities to focus on creating and selling such products and services. The key premise of placeful products and services is that the production, distribution, and consumption of these offerings contribute to and enhance the identity of the place.

Placeful products and services leverage local resources and distinct characteristics to create unique, authentic consumer experiences (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2006). The characteristics of placefulness include a strong sense of heritage and local pride, visual and aesthetic distinction, community engagement, and contributions to place identity and sustainability (Alexander & Hamilton, 2015; Haven-Tang & Jones, 2006). A placeful approach allows local businesses to compete with large corporations, while reinforcing the city's identity. Placefulness comprises four key characteristics (based on Taecharungroj & Prasertsakul, 2023).

5.7.2.1 *Product—Heritage and Local Pride*

Placeful products and services draw on a community's heritage and local pride, using social and cultural characteristics to offer unique products and services. These businesses provide opportunities for customers to experience

the local atmosphere, taste local produce, or participate in authentic events. A common example of placeful products is geographical indication (GI) products, which link the product name with the name of the place, thereby commanding higher value (Dogan & Gokovali, 2012).

5.7.2.2 *Presentation—Visual and Aesthetic Distinction*

Authenticity is a key component of placefulness, often expressed through distinctive architecture or art. These elements enhance the charm and appeal of both the offering and the city. Presentations manifest through service settings, packaging, and advertisements.

5.7.2.3 *Process—Community Collaboration and Co-creation*

The development of placeful products and services involves an inclusive and participatory approach that actively engages local stakeholders. This process, known as co-creation, integrates the community in ways that reinforce shared identity and enhance the authenticity of the products. Co-creation thus plays a crucial role in the collaborative development and refinement of a city's brand (Aitken & Campelo, 2011; de San Eugenio-Vela & Barniol-Carcasona, 2015).

5.7.2.4 *Payoff—Contribution to City Identity and Sustainability*

Placeful products and services contribute significantly to the enhancement of city identity and sustainability. By improving residents' quality of life, increasing local added value, and preserving the natural and cultural environment, these initiatives support the long-term viability of the city. One notable payoff is the clustering of businesses, which involves organising resources into networks, thereby enhancing the distinctiveness of local offerings. Through clustering, cities can establish connections with broader ecosystems, thereby amplifying economic vitality (Currid & Williams, 2010; Nathan et al., 2019; Pattaratanakun & Taecharungroj, 2024).

Developing and promoting placeful products and services boosts a city's economy and strengthens its brand identity. In addition to embodying placeful characteristics, businesses must exhibit key attributes such as entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation, human capital, and relational capital (Taecharungroj & Prasertsakul, 2023). These attributes are crucial for a business to remain viable and produce high-quality products and services that successfully meet market demands.

Promoting placeful products and services is vital for city branding, offering a competitive edge in global markets and enhancing local identity. The case of Xuyi (Box 5.8) illustrates how a city can successfully focus its branding efforts on a specific placeful product. Similarly, Mumbai (Box 5.9) exemplifies how a globally recognised industry brand can emerge organically from the city's identity and, in turn, enhance the city's status.

Box 5.8 How Placeful Lobsters Strengthen Identity and Prosperity for Xuyi

Xuyi, China, exemplifies how a city can leverage placeful products and services to strengthen its brand identity and stimulate economic growth, as demonstrated by its transformation into the “Lobster Capital” of China.

Located in western Jiangsu province, Xuyi County transitioned from a traditional agricultural area to a thriving economic centre, known as the “Lobster Capital” of China. This case study is based on the study by [Luo et al. \(2013\)](#). This change was driven by strategic city marketing initiatives, notably the annual “China Lobster Festival”, launched in 2001. By capitalising on local resources and innovative marketing strategies, Xuyi developed its lobster (or crayfish, often referred to as “little lobsters” in China) industry, creating a unique brand identity and boosting economic growth.

Product

Xuyi capitalised on its natural resources, such as the Huai River and Hongze Lake, ideal for lobster cultivation. While lobsters are common in the region, Xuyi differentiated itself with the “Xuyi Lobster” brand, rooted in community heritage and local pride. The “Xuyi Lobster Association” strengthened this identity by setting breeding standards and managing the brand, ensuring quality and market value. Innovation and culinary excellence further enhanced the appeal of Xuyi Lobster, with new cooking methods highlighting its unique flavours. Furthermore, Xuyi’s Lobster is recognised as a national GI product.

Presentation

The “China Lobster Festival” underlines Xuyi’s commitment to creating distinctive experiences. Initially focused on local artistic performances, the festival now includes dining, leisure, academic conferences, and business forums. It is recognised as one of China’s top ten festival brands, enhancing Xuyi’s brand image and attracting nationwide attention. The lobster has become integral to Xuyi’s image, symbolised by iconic sculptures and themed streetlamps.

Process

Community engagement has been central to developing Xuyi Lobster as a placeful product. The Lobster Festival serves as a platform for local artists, businesses, and residents to promote Xuyi Lobster.

Such co-creation is crucial to Xuyi's lobster industry, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, including the government, businesses, the local community, and media.

Payoff

The Xuyi Lobster brand has significantly contributed to Xuyi's identity and sustainability. Through innovative cooking methods, quality improvements, and product diversification, Xuyi has increased the value and demand for its lobsters, enhancing economic resilience. The brand has earned certifications such as "Famous Chinese Trademark" and "Green Products", reinforcing its market position and promoting sustainable development. The lobster industry has expanded beyond traditional pond fishing to include upstream and downstream activities, such as breeding, seasoning production, and retail sales, forming a comprehensive economic cluster. This clustering has boosted employment and economic growth while facilitating innovation and resource sharing among businesses.

Box 5.9 Bollywood—A Messy and Placeful Walk of Mumbai's Fame

This case study of Mumbai and Bollywood illustrates how a city, through its unique identity and inherent dynamism, can spontaneously generate a cultural and placeful industry that enhances its identity and economic prosperity.

Mumbai, a city of vibrant contrasts, embodies urban complexity that challenges conventional urban planning ideals. Unlike other meticulously planned cities, Mumbai thrives on its unique characteristics, often described as messy. This apparent chaos is not a flaw but a defining feature requiring a shift in perspective (Echanove & Srivastava, 2023). The city's identity is shaped by adhocracy, a flexible and adaptive approach that enables spontaneous development and organic growth within its neighbourhoods. This dynamic process fosters self-improvement and transformation, relying on the contributions and negotiations of its inhabitants (Echanove & Srivastava, 2023).

Mumbai's film industry, known as Bollywood, emerged from the city's inherently messy and adhocratic identity, combined with India's economic liberalisation and deregulation in 1991. These factors catalysed

the spatial reorganisation of manufacturing industries, creating an empty urban core that facilitated the growth of new economies focused on finance, tourism, retail, and entertainment (Sarkar, 2020). This allowed the transition from single-screen movie halls to multiplexes, thereby boosting the number of films shown and the industry's overall productivity. The term "Bollywood", a combination of "Bombay" (Mumbai's former name) and "Hollywood", reflects the industry's unique blend of Indian and Western influences. Mumbai's status as a cultural and financial hub further reinforced its position as the epicentre of Bollywood (Sarkar, 2020).

Bollywood, in contrast to Hollywood, embodies Mumbai's unique identity through its independent, bottom-up, and heterogeneous production processes. Unlike Hollywood's vertically integrated model, Bollywood operates through a "heterogeneous mode of manufacture", where various specialists independently create elements such as song and dance sequences, dialogues, and scripts, which are subsequently integrated into the final film (Sarkar, 2020). Bollywood's emergence as a placeful service industry was largely organic, thriving without substantial government support. This lack of formal backing paradoxically allowed the industry to develop its unique cultural and symbolic value, free from regulatory constraints (Sarkar, 2020).

Bollywood's growth has significantly contributed to Mumbai's development, enhancing the city's global recognition and economic prosperity through job creation and tourism. This case demonstrates how a city's unique identity can foster the emergence of an industry that, in turn, reinforces the city's identity and drives its progress.

5.8 Attracting Target Groups with Incentives

Incentives play a crucial role in city branding by attracting target groups to meet specific branding objectives, such as increasing businesses or attracting talented residents (Anttiroiko, 2015). These incentives function like "sales promotions" in marketing, aligning city branding with its goals. By strategically offering incentives, cities can signal their developmental direction and enhance their brand position. However, these incentives should be part of a broader branding strategy, not just a short-term solution. Stakeholder involvement is essential to ensure incentives support long-term branding goals and avoid merely attracting wealthy individuals for tax benefits (Mabillard et al., 2024).

Incentives are divided into monetary and non-monetary forms, each targeting specific groups. Monetary incentives, like tax breaks and financial support, effectively attract businesses and residents. For example, some regions facing population decline and reduced tax revenues offer cash incentives to attract families under certain conditions, addressing demographic and economic

issues (Mabillard et al., 2024). However, these incentives must be sustainable and part of a holistic branding strategy to ensure long-term viability.

Non-monetary incentives also play a significant role in attracting target groups. Cities can offer amenities such as enhanced public services, cultural and recreational facilities, and educational opportunities. Additionally, cities can implement innovative programmes aligned with global priorities, such as sustainability, to attract companies interested in these initiatives (Mabillard et al., 2024).

The concept of incentives in city branding is often discussed sporadically (e.g., Anttiroiko, 2014; Chou & Lien, 2012; Li & Zhang, 2020; Middleton, 2011; Montezuma & McGarrigle, 2019; Shoval et al., 2020; Weber, 2010). By examining the available types of incentives and their potential impacts, cities can develop effective strategies to attract visitors, residents, and businesses.

5.8.1 *Examples of Incentive Programmes*

Visitor Incentives (Monetary)

- **Discounts and coupons:** Offer discounted attraction access or public transportation tickets for tourists.
- **Package deals:** Collaborate with airlines and hotels to provide discounted packages that include flights, accommodations, and activities.
- **Tax rebates and refunds:** Promote tax refund programmes.
- **Loyalty programmes:** Reward repeat visitors who meet specific spending thresholds.

Visitor Incentives (Non-Monetary)

- **Exclusive access:** Offer unique opportunities for cultural experiences or attractions closed to the public.
- **Free services:** Provide free services or product samplings at the destination.
- **Local ambassador programmes:** Engage locals as ambassadors to greet visitors and provide guided tours.
- **Digital engagement via mobile applications:** Develop apps with itineraries, maps, and augmented reality experiences for tourists.

Resident Incentives (Monetary)

- **Tax incentives and rebates:** Offer tax incentives to attract specific professions or talents, such as income tax reliefs.
- **Housing subsidies:** Provide schemes to address housing affordability.
- **Relocation assistance:** Cover moving expenses and assisting with visa processes.
- **Loan forgiveness programmes:** Attract recent graduates by supporting or partially paying off student loans.

Resident Incentives (Non-Monetary)

- **Diverse housing options:** Ensure a range of housing options for different preferences and budgets.
- **Access to education, healthcare, and necessary services:** Provide high-quality education, healthcare, and essential services.
- **Training programmes:** Offer programmes to enhance residents' skills and employability.
- **Exchange programmes:** Establish cultural, educational, or professional exchange programmes to allow potential residents to experience life in the city.

Business Incentives (Monetary)

- **Tax incentives and credits:** Provide tax exemptions or reduced rates for businesses in designated areas.
- **Grants and subsidies:** Target specific industries, such as high-tech sectors or startups, with financial support.
- **Low-interest loans:** Offer financial support through low-interest loans.
- **Reduced permit and licensing fees:** Streamline processes and reducing fees for business permits and licenses.
- **Special economic zones:** Establish zones with tax breaks, reduced tariffs, and infrastructure support.
- **Public-private partnerships (PPP):** Facilitate partnerships between public and private sectors to develop projects.

Business Incentives (Non-Monetary)

- **Infrastructure development:** Invest in transportation and communication networks.
- **Business-friendly regulations:** Implement regulations that ease doing business.
- **Access to talent and suppliers:** Create an ecosystem with skilled talent and reliable suppliers.
- **Access to markets and networks:** Facilitate connections to local and global markets and networks.

Incentives can be a powerful tool to attract target groups to a city. However, the case of Shanghai (Box 5.10) demonstrates that even with a comprehensive set of incentives, challenges remain. For instance, the impact of tax reductions on desired outcomes has been shown to be inconsistent (Klemm & Van Parys, 2012). This example highlights that incentives should be part of a holistic branding strategy rather than isolated policies focused solely on economic goals.

Box 5.10 Talents of the World, Welcome to Shanghai* (*Conditions Apply)

Shanghai, China, has introduced various incentive policies to attract talent and support its evolving economic structure. While these policies are appealing and comprehensive, there is room for improvement. This case emphasises the need to refine these policies in conjunction with broader city branding strategies.

Navigating Demographic and Economic Challenges of Shanghai

China's rapid economic growth requires economic restructuring and industrial upgrading, particularly as the country faces a rapidly ageing population, making the attraction of young talent crucial for sustaining urban development (Shen & Li, 2022; Tao et al., 2022). The central government sets policy guidelines for economic upgrading, migration control, and subsidised housing, which local governments, such as Shanghai, implement. To achieve industrial upgrading, the city prioritises high-value manufacturing and high-end services while encouraging the relocation of lower-end industries (Tao et al., 2022). Acknowledging its disadvantage in high-level human capital, exacerbated by brain drain to the United States, Shanghai aims to foster a knowledge-intensive economy by offering incentives to attract elite talent (Li & Zhang, 2020).

Shanghai's Strategic Talent Initiatives and Policies

Shanghai launched its first talent development programme in 1995, targeting professionals in emerging service sectors. By 2003, the strategy evolved to focus on human capital development, emphasising attracting overseas Chinese graduates, providing vocational training for workers, and integrating migrant labour (Zhang, 2009). Shanghai's early policies focused on two strategic initiatives: the "Shanghai Talent Highland Strategy", which targeted high-level human resources, and the "Shanghai Skills Upgrading Initiative", aimed at vocational training (Zhang, 2009). This approach aimed to balance attracting new talent with upskilling the existing workforce.

By the early 2010s, Shanghai became an attractive destination for international expatriates and returning Chinese nationals, leveraging its robust industrial structure and focus on high-tech research areas

(Kim & Allen, 2018). Shanghai aimed to establish itself as a hub for high-end manufacturing and services, with a particular emphasis on attracting skilled and experienced workers (Shen & Li, 2022). Shanghai's talent attraction strategy covers key areas: immigration control, residence, taxation, funding, housing, education benefits, and government awards. Immigration control offers multiple-entry visas and assistance, while residence policies allow for extended-term Shanghai residence documents. Tax incentives include eligibility for concessions in R&D spending and innovative investment activities. Funding initiatives involve government loans and grants for innovation projects, complemented by housing benefits such as subsidised public housing and educational benefits for children, including public school admission and university entrance exams. Additionally, government awards confer social prestige on individuals who have made distinguished contributions to the city (Kim & Allen, 2018; Li & Zhang, 2020).

Obstacles in Shanghai's Approach to Attracting Talent

Despite these clear plans and policies, the results of Shanghai's talent attraction efforts are mixed, with several challenges becoming apparent. The exclusive focus on certain elite groups has led to the *exclusion* of a broader audience, potentially driving some individuals out of the city. Although Shanghai's talent-based settlement criteria included various qualifications, eligibility for *hukou*, the permanent residency system, was restricted to a few professions with rigorous wealth requirements (Li & Zhang, 2020). The *bureaucratic processes* involved in applying for these benefits can discourage potential applicants, as the residency permit (RP) status entails extensive documentation and does not function as a personal ID. Moreover, the *rigidity* of the policies limits the portability of benefits, creating significant disadvantages for talented migrants who change jobs across different cities. Finally, the *narrow focus* on material incentives without considering other "softer" aspects of citizenship status limits the policy's effectiveness, as it prioritises economic growth for the city over the genuine needs of talented migrants (Li & Zhang, 2020; Shen & Li, 2022).

Shanghai's talent attraction policies present a well-crafted and structured set of incentives targeting a specific group. However, these challenges highlight the need for comprehensive execution strategies and thorough stakeholder engagement to ensure that the incentives lead to the desired outcomes.

5.9 City Branding Toolbox: Strategic Prioritisation Map

The seven broad strategies presented in this chapter highlight the need to consider suitable strategies. The Strategic Prioritisation Map (Figure 5.2) is a tool that cities can use to assess and rank various strategic initiatives based on their potential impact and viability. This tool enables cities to navigate through complex strategic decisions.

The primary purpose of this map is to help cities allocate limited resources—such as time, money, attention, expertise, and effort—across various execution strategies effectively. It enables cities to identify initiatives that will offer the most significant benefits, are most achievable, and align with their overarching vision, enhance their position, or achieve specific goals within a defined timeframe.

Before using the map, cities must clearly define their objectives for branding efforts, which can vary depending on the stage of their branding journey. Newer cities might focus on establishing a broad vision to catalyse initial branding efforts. More established cities may aim to strengthen their position within the minds of specific target groups or address specific challenges each year. Key measures for evaluating city branding success are discussed in the next chapter, “City Brand Evaluation”.

Viability (x-axis): This axis measures the feasibility and practicality of executing a strategy, considering the required resources. Simpler tasks like creating a new logo may rank higher in viability compared to more resource-intensive projects like constructing a landmark.

Impact (y-axis): This axis assesses the potential influence of a strategy on the city’s branding goals. It combines the magnitude and intensity of the impact and the likelihood of achieving the desired outcomes. Projects are evaluated on how significantly they can advance the city’s vision, position, or specific goals, and their probability of success.

The tool promotes inclusive stakeholder engagement, enabling various parties to propose projects within the seven broad execution strategies. This collaborative approach ensures that the evaluation process remains objective while accommodating diverse perspectives. The positioning of the proposed strategies on the map informs the recommended actions.

- **Highest priority projects:** These initiatives are characterised by both high viability and significant impact. Their strategic importance and practicality make them essential for immediate implementation.
- **Quick-win projects:** Although these projects have high viability, their impact is relatively low. They are less critical but can be undertaken if additional resources permit.
- **Long-term projects:** These initiatives, while not immediately actionable due to low viability, hold strategic importance for achieving long-term

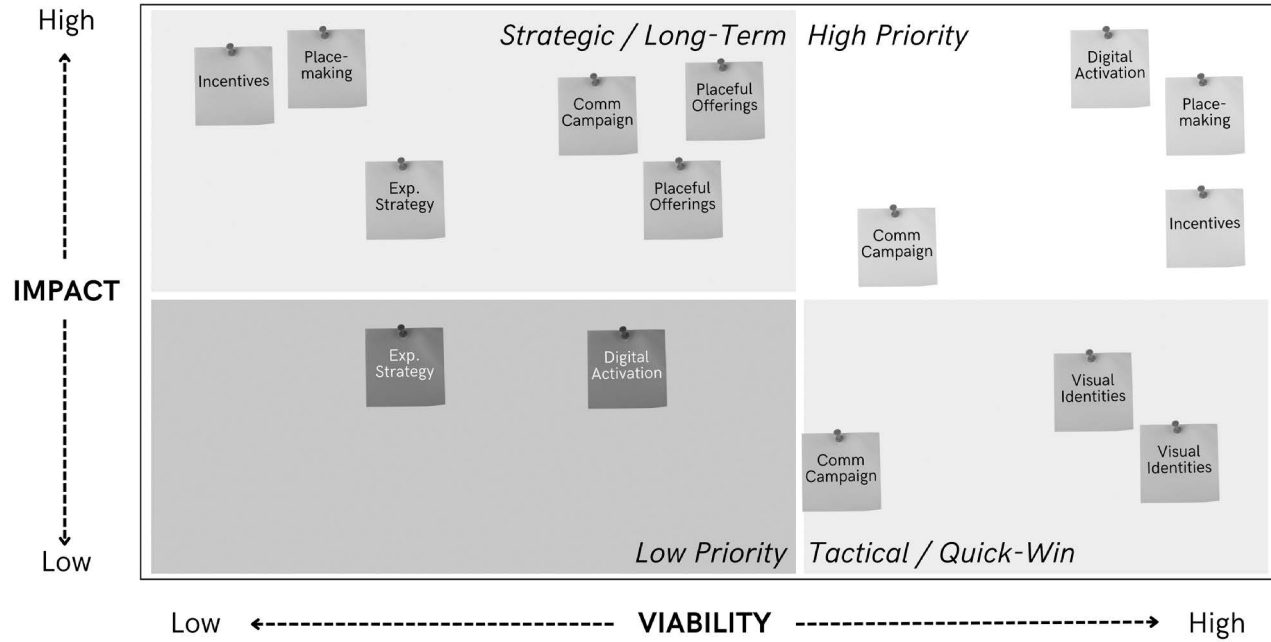


Figure 5.2 City Brand Execution Prioritisation Map (Source: author's own creation)

goals due to their potential high impact. It is advisable for cities to begin laying the groundwork for these projects.

- **Low priority projects:** Projects in this category are of the lowest priority or are discarded altogether, as they are low in both viability and impact.

The Strategic Prioritisation Map is not just a tool for strategic planning but also a framework for continuous stakeholder dialogue and decision-making. By categorising projects based on their impact and viability, city branding agencies can create a more focused and effective strategy that maximises the use of their resources and enhances the city brand in a meaningful way.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter explores seven strategies that cities can implement to deliver effective city branding efforts aligned with their position and vision. Each strategy, from crafting compelling communication campaigns to activating digital technologies and leveraging placeful products, has distinct purposes and characteristics that cities can consider.

5.10.1 Key Takeaways

- IMC ensures consistent and persuasive messaging across various platforms and touchpoints to enhance the city brand image and attract target audiences.
- Digital technologies provide innovative ways to engage with audiences, enhance city brand perceptions, and influence decisions.
- Logos and slogans play a significant but often debated role, serving as visual identity tools that help shape a city brand image, while effective design involves creating flexible, authentic, and memorable elements.
- City experiences are vital in shaping perceptions and building connections, and cities can elevate these sensorial, affective, behavioural, and intellectual experiences by implementing strategies that enhance both mundane and spectacular interactions.
- Placemaking involves the standard, strategic, and tactical enhancement of a city's physical identity and spaces, achieved through the development of architecture, quarters, and amenities.
- Promoting placeful products and services enhances city brand identity and provides a competitive edge in global markets.
- Incentives, both monetary and non-monetary, attract specific target groups such as businesses and talented residents, but they must be part of a holistic branding strategy.
- The Strategic Prioritisation Map helps city branding agencies effectively allocate resources by evaluating the impact and viability of each strategy.

5.10.2 Key Questions for the City Branding Canvas (Execution)

- What brand communication campaign can be developed to strengthen the brand position?
- Which digital technologies should be implemented to enhance the city brand?
- What visual identities are essential to support city branding efforts?
- Which city experiences should be improved for target groups?
- What placemaking initiatives should be undertaken to achieve the vision?
- Which placeful products and services should be promoted to reinforce the identity?
- What incentives can be offered to attract target groups in alignment with the goals?

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6 City Brand Evaluation

6.1 Introduction

Evaluation is a key stage in city branding and can also serve as the starting point for strategy formulation. Although typically conducted after execution, evaluation should be seen as a cyclical process that can restart the city branding cycle. This ongoing cycle of assessment ensures that branding efforts stay aligned with the city's evolving identity and goals.

According to the framework by [Hereźniak and Florek \(2024\)](#), the evaluation of city branding initiatives is based on the city's vision, identity, objectives, and goals. The measures are prioritised, and the methods, data, and timing are then determined, allowing for continuous measurement, evaluation, and adjustment to refine strategies.

[Hereźniak and Florek \(2024\)](#) highlight four key issues in developing a city branding evaluation system. Firstly, *strategy-led measurement* connects brand objectives with outcomes using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which are implemented early in the brand development process to ensure alignment with strategic goals. Secondly, a *multi-factor approach* incorporates various metrics to evaluate the branding's impact on the city, considering both social and economic dimensions. Thirdly, *co-creative logic* emphasises the importance of transparency and inclusivity in stakeholder engagement during branding activities. Lastly, *organisational maturity* refers to the political, financial, intellectual, and structural preparedness of the organisation to effectively measure and manage the city brand.

This chapter categorises city brand evaluation into three domains: city brand image, city brand outcomes, and city brand impact. The city brand image domain examines stakeholder perceptions of the city brand. The city brand outcomes domain considers changes in attitudes and behavioural intentions resulting from effective branding. The city brand impact domain assesses economic effects, using indicators such as tourist turnout and economic investment and also considers socio-political impacts, including social, political, and cultural outcomes ([Lucarelli & Olof Berg, 2011](#)). By the end of the chapter, readers will understand the three integrative domains that constitute



Figure 6.1 City Brand Evaluation Concept (Source: author’s own creation)

a city brand evaluation system. Figure 6.1 visually represents the city brand evaluation concept, linking city brand image, outcomes, and impact, along with their components discussed in this chapter.

6.2 Capturing City Brand Image

Lynch (1960) introduced the concept of “city image”, initially focusing on physical elements like paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks that help individuals navigate urban spaces. Since then, the concept has expanded to include the lived experiences, cultural events, and emotional connections that residents and visitors form with a city, moving beyond static architectural features to represent dynamic, experiential identities (Edensor & Jayne, 2012). This concept, originating in geography, has been adopted by scholars in city marketing and branding.

City brand image is defined as the combined beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people hold about a city (Gilboa et al., 2015; Jørgensen, 2015). It is the mental picture that people have of the city (Acuti et al., 2018). This image is

crucial in city branding, which aims to shape perceptions to enhance a city's attractiveness and competitiveness. Effective city branding requires the strategic management of perceptions to align the city brand identity with its desired image, ensuring it resonates with both residents and visitors. The specific strategies to achieve this are detailed in the previous chapter, "City Brand Execution".

Developing a strong city brand image is significant for cities. It fosters a sense of place and community pride for internal stakeholders. It also supports social cohesion, making cities more attractive places to live, work, and visit. A city brand image also influences target groups' decisions and behaviours. A positive image attracts investment and tourism, boosting local economies and enhancing the city's resilience against economic downturns and other crises (Braun et al., 2014; Gilboa et al., 2015).

6.2.1 The Cognitive and Affective Images of Cities

City brand image can be understood through two primary views: the holistic view and the multi-dimensional construct. The *holistic* view considers the city brand image as a singular, overall perception encompassing all aspects of the city. Conversely, the *multi-dimensional* view typically divides the city image into cognitive and affective aspects. This division acknowledges that individuals perceive cities based on factual knowledge and observable characteristics (cognitive) and emotional responses (affective). This multi-dimensional view allows for a detailed understanding of how city images influence target groups' perceptions and behaviours (Kock et al., 2016; Taecharungroj & Ma-thayomchan, 2021).

6.2.1.1 Cognitive Image

The cognitive city brand image includes the tangible, observable characteristics that shape a city brand image in people's minds. This includes the physical appearance of the city, such as attractive buildings and parks, and the general vibe it projects, like being an exciting or clean city (Manyiwa et al., 2018). The cognitive image also includes practical factors such as transportation, accommodation, shopping, service, economy, socialisation, activities, and accessibility. These elements represent the functional and logistical attributes that enhance people's perception of the city (Taecharungroj, 2016; Taecharungroj & Tansitpong, 2017). The cognitive image reflects the city's functional benefits.

6.2.1.2 Affective Image

The affective brand image of cities deals with the emotional reactions a city evokes. This aspect of city brand image includes feelings of excitement, relaxation, safety, or anxiety, which can significantly influence someone's overall

impression and connection to the city (Manyiwa et al., 2018). Affective image is less about what one sees and more about how one feels when interacting with the city (Beerli & Martín, 2004). The affective image reflects the city's emotional benefits.

Cities must evaluate their brand image by considering both cognitive and affective aspects. The cognitive image relates to tangible factors, such as infrastructure and services, while the affective image involves emotional and experiential perceptions of the city. The following section will discuss the approaches to achieving this evaluation.

6.2.2 *A Multi-Level Approach to Assess City Brand Image*

Assessing a city brand image depends on the specific level of brand image the city aims to focus on. Taecharungroj and Mathayomchan (2020) organise city brand image into a hierarchical structure with three levels: universal, categorical, and individual city images. Each level provides a unique perspective on how cities are perceived and evaluated.

6.2.2.1 *Universal City Image*

Universal city image includes broad characteristics applicable to all cities, offering a standardised way to evaluate them. Factors include climate, culture, transport, and other foundational aspects (Anholt, 2006; Gilboa et al., 2015). This concept helps develop comparative models and understand general city perceptions across different contexts (De Noni et al., 2014; Zenker, 2009). However, universal city image faces challenges such as limited generalisability and reliance on existing theories rather than empirical data.

6.2.2.2 *Categorical City Image*

Categorical city image involves categorising cities and evaluating their images based on broader classifications, such as geographic regions or socio-economic similarities. It recognises that cities often share attributes and challenges due to their regional or developmental contexts, providing a framework for understanding and comparing cities on a broader scale (Dear, 2005; King, 2015). Categorical city images provide a valuable tool for benchmarking and analysing cities, while acknowledging the unique contexts that shape each city. For instance, Southeast Asian cities might focus on evaluating tourism potential, while low-income cities may include their reliance on foreign aid in their evaluation.

6.2.2.3 *Individual City Image*

Individual city image examines the unique attributes and perceptions of specific cities, allowing a detailed understanding of a city brand image. This approach

acknowledges that each city has its distinctive image, shaped by unique characteristics and local context. Identifying individual city images can provide valuable insights for city branding practitioners, aiding in developing targeted strategies to enhance a city brand image. However, this approach is resource-intensive, lacks comparative quality, and may yield subjective findings due to its reliance on qualitative methods.

Cities must choose between comparing themselves with other cities or conducting an in-depth analysis of their unique characteristics when evaluating their brand image. The choice of approach depends on the specific objective of the evaluation. If the goal is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the city brand image, an individual (specific) approach is appropriate. Conversely, if the aim is to compare the city with its competitors to enhance competitive advantage, a categorical approach is more suitable. Additionally, if the objective is to either conceptually analyse the city or benchmark it on a larger scale, a universal approach is recommended.

6.2.3 Methods and Tools for Evaluating City Brand Image

Evaluating city brand image involves understanding how a city brand image is perceived by both residents and visitors.

6.2.3.1 Traditional Methods

Traditional methods include quantitative surveys and qualitative approaches such as interviews and focus groups. These techniques provide a structured framework to measure city brand perception by identifying specific attributes associated with the city (Kim & Lee, 2015; Manyiwa et al., 2018). Surveys often employ standardised questions, enabling comparisons across multiple cities, while interviews and focus groups provide in-depth insights through open-ended questions, typically focusing on one or a few selected cities. Additionally, content analysis of secondary data, such as official documents, aids in identifying the projected image of the city (Ahvenniemi & Huovila, 2021).

6.2.3.2 Analysis of User-Generated Content

The rise of user-generated content (UGC) has introduced novel methods for evaluating city brand image, using digital platforms to gain insights into stakeholder perceptions. Analysing textual, visual, and other media forms shared by users on social media provides a comprehensive understanding of the city brand image from diverse perspectives, including both residents and tourists (Taecharungroj, 2024). The use of big data analytics, such as data mining and machine learning (ML), allows researchers to process vast amounts of social media data, offering real-time, cost-effective insights.

Textual content can be sourced from websites, online review platforms, and social media. Images can be retrieved from photo repository websites or social media. Additionally, online videos have prompted the development of techniques for analysing them. Geographical information systems, including digital maps and volunteer-generated information, provide insights into how users perceive a city's physical identity. Cities can explore various methods to collect and analyse data using evolving techniques such as sentiment analysis, topic modelling, or ML modelling (Taecharungroj, 2024). Integrating UGC analysis with traditional methods can improve the accuracy and validity of city brand image evaluation.

6.2.3.3 *Network Analysis*

Network analysis uses visual/verbal associations to evaluate city brand image. This method, grounded in associative network theory, examines the network nature and relative importance of brand associations to infer city brand image (Wäckerlin et al., 2020). By analysing the centrality and interconnections of associations, researchers can identify top-of-mind brand associations and compare perceptions among different stakeholder groups (Zenker & Beckmann, 2013). This approach provides insights into significant associations influencing stakeholder behaviour and decision-making. Data can be gathered through surveys, interviews, or UGC. Network analysis enables city managers to identify overlaps and similarities with other cities' branding, informing decisions on brand segmentation and co-branding (Wang, 2019).

6.2.3.4 *City Brand Assessment Tools*

Secondary sources such as the City Index (Brand Finance) and the City Brands Index (Anholt-Ipsos) offer comprehensive assessments of a city brand image. For instance, the City Index evaluates seven dimensions of city brand activity—including living, studying, retiring, visiting, investing, and working both locally and remotely—and assesses perceptions based on factors like business and investment, liveability, culture and heritage, people and values, sustainability and transport, governance, and education and science. Similarly, the City Brands Index analyses aspects such as presence, place, prerequisites, people, pulse, and potential, providing a multifaceted view of a city brand.

Evaluating city brand image can involve traditional and novel methods. While surveys and interviews offer structured insights, analysing UGC and network analysis provides dynamic and comprehensive perspectives. By integrating these diverse approaches, cities can better align their branding efforts with stakeholder perceptions, enhancing the city's appeal and competitiveness. The two cases of Danang (Box 6.1) and Kuala Lumpur (Box 6.2) illustrate different approaches to evaluating city brand image.

Box 6.1 Multiple Lens to Evaluate the Image of Danang

Recent developments in Danang have altered the city brand image in various ways, prompting researchers to use multiple approaches to evaluate it. Evaluation can be conducted from an individual image approach or a universal image, with assessments being holistic or multi-dimensional. The choice of city brand image evaluation depends on the city's context, purpose, and available resources.

Danang, a coastal city in Vietnam, exemplifies urban development and city branding in Southeast Asia. Strategically located along Vietnam's north-south transport axis, Danang has enhanced its logistics infrastructure by developing Tien Sa Port and expanding Danang International Airport, now the third largest in Vietnam. These improvements have positioned Danang as a key logistics centre, facilitating trade and attracting investment. Urban projects, guided by the Master Plan 2030–2050, have transformed Danang's skyline, improved infrastructure, and addressed population growth (Scarwell & Leducq, 2021). These developments have increased interest in understanding the city brand image, leading to various studies exploring Danang's brand.

The individual city image of Danang has been evaluated using quantitative methods to create a brand conceptual map, providing insights into Danang's perception as a higher education destination. [Truong \(2020b\)](#) used Brand Concept Maps (BCMs), a simplified form of network analysis, to identify 12 core brand associations with Danang, such as the living environment, people, liveability, tourism, and prestigious university. These associations are linked to non-core attributes like dynamism, orderly traffic, and peacefulness, affirming Danang's image as a liveable tourist city ([Truong, 2020b](#)). Qualitative methods have been used to understand Danang's individual image among students. In-depth interviews with University of Danang students used metaphors and images to construct a mental map of their views on the city ([Truong, 2020a](#)). The study revealed that students perceive Danang as a liveable, dynamic, and modern city with a strong sense of community and tourism appeal. This approach to evaluating the city brand image offers an in-depth understanding of the city's strengths and areas for improvement.

Traditional quantitative surveys have been used to assess the *holistic* image of Danang, evaluating the cognitive and affective components of the city brand. One study used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to analyse Danang's image through metrics such as social perception, alignment of Danang's characteristics with the tourist's personality, and the consistency of Danang's image with the tourist's self-image

(Nguyen et al., 2023). Another study employed a multi-dimensional approach and measured both cognitive and affective images, revealing that cognitive factors like natural beauty and cleanliness and affective responses like excitement and liveliness significantly impact tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Tran et al., 2023). These studies represent a universal approach to evaluating city brand images by testing relationships using common attributes. This method allows cities to test theories and identify unique relationships, such as the impact of natural beauty, that may be specific to cities like Danang.

Box 6.2 Iconic Landmarks as a Reflection of Kuala Lumpur's Brand Image

Kuala Lumpur's physical architecture has become iconic, reflecting its evolution into a rising metropolis. This case presents various evaluation techniques that help understand target groups' perceptions and attitudes towards these landmarks to infer the city brand image.

Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, has transformed from a pre-colonial trading port to a modern metropolis. Its brand image reflects Malaysia's efforts to position itself as a developed nation while preserving cultural heritage. During the British colonial period, Kuala Lumpur developed a distinct architectural identity, characterised by administrative buildings that remain significant landmarks (Al-Shams & Badarulzaman, 2014). After independence, the city's branding focused on modernising while emphasising its identity as an Islamic nation. The 1980s saw a second wave of development under Prime Minister Mahathir, introducing mega-projects like Putrajaya (Bouchon, 2014). Iconic structures such as the Petronas Twin Towers and the development of digital towns like Cyberjaya symbolise Kuala Lumpur's aspirations for modernity and global recognition (Musa & Melewar, 2011).

Evaluating Kuala Lumpur's image involves understanding how its landmarks influence perceptions of the city. Research by Al-Shams and Badarulzaman (2014) employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, to analyse the image of Kuala Lumpur's landmarks. Their study found that historic buildings, such as the Jamek Mosque and Sultan Abdul Samad Building, were highly rated in terms of design, historic significance, and uniqueness. The study also revealed differing perceptions between locals and tourists, as well as among various ethnic groups.

Mohamad et al. (2022) examined Kuala Lumpur's brand image through online reviews from platforms like TripAdvisor. This netnographic study identified iconic landmarks, notably the Petronas Twin Towers, as central to the city brand image, concluding that these landmarks are the most significant symbols of Kuala Lumpur. Similarly, Jaafar et al. (2020) used the Volunteer Employed Photography (VEP) technique to assess the city brand image, discovering that while iconic architecture was not the primary motivator for visitors to Kuala Lumpur, it became the most frequently recorded content during their visits.

Various techniques have been used to analyse Kuala Lumpur's brand image, each offering insights into different aspects of the city. Traditional research on iconic architecture provides a foundational understanding of the city brand image, while newer analyses of online reviews and photographs offer more detailed perspectives that reinforce the importance of iconic architecture and landmarks in shaping Kuala Lumpur's brand image.

6.3 Assessing City Brand Outcomes

Improving a city brand image leads to positive branding outcomes. A key concept used to describe these outcomes is brand equity, which encompasses the perceived value and associations contributing to a brand's strength. According to Lucarelli and Olof Berg (2011), place brand equity reflects a city's success, uniqueness, and attractiveness, serving as a vital measure of a city brand value. Brand equity in city branding includes various factors, among which the city brand image plays a significant role. However, due to its prominence, city brand image is discussed separately in the previous section. Beyond city brand equity, other measures in branding and marketing constitute city brand outcomes, encompassing *attitudinal* and *behavioural intention* dimensions. While these measures are not inherently distinct from brand equity, they encompass elements both within and beyond it to form the broad domain of brand outcomes. These measures assess the perceptions of various target groups, including current and potential residents, international and domestic visitors, local and international businesspeople, and the public.

In the *attitudinal dimension* of city brand outcomes, several key measures play a crucial role (Florek, 2014; Taecharungroj, 2016; Zenker & Petersen, 2014).

- **Awareness/knowledge** refers to the recognisability and familiarity of the city brand among its target groups.
- **Satisfaction** is the degree to which people appraise the city's overall performance and fulfilment of their needs and desires.

- **Attachment** reflects the emotional bond people form with the city, often contributing to a sense of belonging and pride.
- **Identification** involves the establishment of a meaningful link between the self and the city, where people perceive the city as an expression of their identity.

These attitudinal measures capture how people perceive and relate to the city brand, offering valuable insights into the effectiveness of city branding efforts.

The *behavioural intention* dimension of city brand outcomes focuses on actions and intentions resulting from branding efforts (Herezniaik & Anders-Morawska, 2015; Taecharungroj, 2016):

- **Loyalty** is a broad measure that encompasses the degree of commitment people demonstrate towards the city brand, influencing ongoing participation in the city.
- **Advocacy** involves people's ambassadorship behaviours, where they promote the city through positive word-of-mouth communications and recommendations.
- **Revisit/relocate intention** reflects the likelihood of people returning to the city as visitors or investors and includes the intention to either relocate to the city or move away from it.
- **Contribution**, also known as citizenship behaviours, involves people voluntarily participating in activities and contributing to the city's decision-making processes, thereby promoting its effective functioning.

These behavioural outcomes reflect people's continual active participation, contributing to the city's success.

In assessing city brand outcomes, both attitudinal and behavioural intention dimensions provide a robust framework for evaluation. Integrating them serves as a foundation for developing an evaluation system for city branding. This system enables cities to monitor their branding efforts, assess the outcomes of brand-related activities, and identify areas for improvement.

6.3.1 *Methods for Evaluating City Brand Outcomes*

Traditional methods for measuring key city brand outcomes predominantly rely on quantitative surveys using standardised questionnaires. This approach is widely used due to its ability to provide consistent and comparable data across different cities and time periods (Zenker, 2011). Researchers can track the development of branding outcomes over time, identifying trends and changes in public perception. Quantitative surveys are particularly beneficial for identifying the antecedents and impacts of these outcomes, as they can be robustly analysed.

In contrast, qualitative approaches are less prominent in measuring city brand outcomes compared to their frequent use in evaluating city brand image. However, qualitative methods offer rich, detailed insights into people's perceptions and experiences, which can complement quantitative analysis well. Furthermore, digital technologies offer innovative ways to assess city brand outcomes. For instance, sentiment analysis of textual content from social media platforms can reveal public sentiment trends, while facial detection technologies can analyse images to gauge the emotions of people in the city.

6.4 Measuring the Impact of City Branding

City branding is a multifaceted strategy designed to enhance both economic value and social welfare. Consequently, evaluating the impact of city branding initiatives requires a multi-level analysis (Mabillard et al., 2024). The first level, output analysis, examines the resources committed, actions taken, and services delivered to determine if planned resources have been effectively mobilised. The second level assesses outcomes, focusing on the effects on target groups as discussed in the previous section. The third level, impact analysis, examines whether the implemented measures and actions have effectively addressed the identified public issues, such as economic or social challenges (Mabillard et al., 2024).

6.4.1 Types of Impact Measures

City branding aims to generate positive impacts on the city, including economic growth, social development, and sustainability. These impacts can be categorised into economic measures, both broad and specific, as well as other specific measures and composite indices.

6.4.1.1 Economic Measures (Broad)

Broad economic measures include metrics such as gross domestic product (GDP) of cities, GDP growth, unemployment rates, levels of poverty, average household income, tax collection, and foreign direct investment (FDI). These indicators reflect the overall economic health and growth of a city, providing a comprehensive overview of its economic environment. By enhancing the city brand, these economic measures can show improvements, as city branding can attract new investments, increase employment opportunities, and boost local economic activity (Merrilees et al., 2012).

6.4.1.2 Economic Measures (Specific)

Specific economic measures focus on more direct and tangible economic impacts of city branding, such as the number of tourists, number of businesses,

revenue from specific businesses, revenue from events, and the number of skilled professionals in the city. These measures help cities tailor their branding strategies to target specific sectors.

6.4.1.3 Other Measures

Beyond economic impacts, city branding can also influence various non-economic factors, such as air quality, green area coverage, land use diversity and density, and voter turnout ([Taecharungroj et al., 2019](#)). These measures reflect the city's commitment to sustainable development, environmental quality, and civic engagement.

6.4.1.4 Composite Index

Composite indices, such as the Global Power City Index (Mori Memorial Foundation), and the Global Liveability Index (Economist Intelligence), provide a holistic view of a city performance. These indices aggregate various economic, social, and environmental indicators to assess the overall city performance. By using composite indices, cities can benchmark their performance against other cities and identify areas for improvement.

These measures serve as general guidelines for evaluating the impact of city branding efforts. However, it is crucial for cities to understand their unique situations and align their measures with their long-term vision. For instance, cities with a vision centred on community development might emphasise social cohesion and pride, while those focused on environmental sustainability might prioritise ecological measures. The city's positioning also informs the development of measures; cities aiming to increase new businesses may focus on specific economic measures such as the number of businesses in key sectors, while those trying to become a premium destination might emphasise spending per visitor.

City branding impacts can be diverse and multifaceted, targeting various aspects of urban development. While city branding efforts have the potential to lead to broad positive impacts, empirical evidence highlighting this relationship remains scarce ([Pattaratanakun & Taecharungroj, 2024](#)). Understanding and measuring the impact of city branding is crucial for cities to refine their strategies and achieve their desired outcomes.

6.5 City Branding Toolbox: City Brand Evaluation Scorecard

The City Brand Evaluation Scorecard ([Figure 6.2](#)), inspired by the popular management tool “Balanced Scorecard”, reimagines strategic evaluation for city branding across four stages: image and strategic outputs, outcomes, impacts, and vision. At its core, this framework aligns each stage with the city's overarching brand vision.

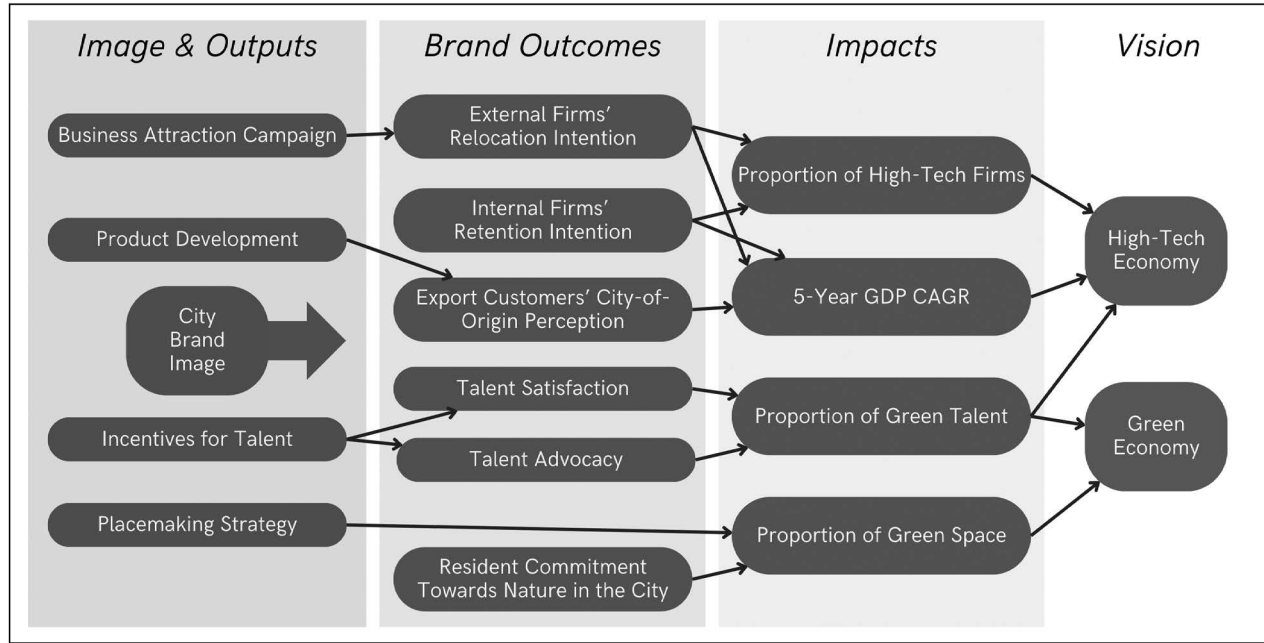


Figure 6.2 City Brand Evaluation Scorecard (Source: author's own creation)

Vision: Beginning on the right, each city brand vision serves as the cornerstone for its strategic direction. For instance, a city aspiring to become a leader in high-tech and green economy sets a vision grounded in these domains. The vision is not just aspirational but directional, guiding all subsequent actions and evaluations.

Impacts: To realise this vision, specific impacts are identified as critical milestones. These may include increasing the proportion of high-tech firms, enhancing the five-year GDP compound annual growth rate (CAGR), growing the proportion of green talent, and expanding green spaces.

Outcomes: Moving left, the next step involves defining the outcomes that will drive these impacts. This includes both perceptual outcomes, such as stakeholder satisfaction and advocacy, and behavioural outcomes, such as the relocation intentions of firms and the city-of-origin perception among export customers.

Image and strategic outputs: The foundational stage involves articulating the city brand image and strategic outputs. These outputs are derived from strategies detailed in the previous chapter on “City Brand Execution”. This stage focuses on direct outputs such as business attraction campaigns, product development, and placemaking strategies. Cities must define clear measures for each strategy. The relationship between outputs and measures in other stages can vary, and while some may have a broad influence, each strategy needs specific and measurable objective.

Central to this scorecard’s efficacy is the implementation of SMART criteria—specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. These criteria are fundamental to setting clear, achievable objectives that can be realistically accomplished within a set timeline, thereby enabling structured progress towards the vision and objectives.

The scorecard emphasises the need to quantify subjective concepts to allow for accurate tracking and evaluation. However, it is important for cities to acknowledge the significance of unquantifiable elements such as community sentiments and opinions, as not everything valuable can be measured numerically.

Lastly, the scorecard advocates for a balance between the comprehensiveness of measures and their manageability. It is imperative that the scope of these measures does not become so extensive as to inhibit action or curtail innovation. Maintaining a balance between detailed assessment and practical application ensures that the scorecard remains a facilitative rather than a restrictive tool.

6.6 Conclusion

In evaluating city brand image, outcomes, and impact, this chapter provides a comprehensive framework to assess city branding efforts. City brand image is considered the primary outcome of these efforts and encompasses a wide

range of perceptions. Beyond city brand image, the chapter examines city brand outcomes and impacts, providing a framework to measure the results of city branding efforts. City brand outcomes encompass perceptual/attitudinal and behavioural intentions such as loyalty and advocacy. These outcomes indicate how stakeholders perceive and engage with the city. On a broader scale, city brand impact measures the socio-economic and environmental changes resulting from branding.

6.6.1 Key Takeaways

- City brand image is the combined beliefs, ideas, and impressions people hold about a city, evaluated through holistic or multi-dimensional approaches, including cognitive and affective aspects.
- Evaluations of city brand image range from universal to individual levels, using traditional methods, UGC, network analysis, and brand assessment tools.
- City brand outcomes encompass attitudinal dimensions (awareness, satisfaction, attachment, identification) and behavioural intentions (loyalty, advocacy, revisit/relocate intention, contribution).
- City brand impact is categorised into broad economic measures, specific economic measures, other measures (e.g., environmental and civic engagement), and composite indices for holistic performance assessment.
- The City Brand Evaluation Board helps integrate key impact measures to provide a comprehensive view of city branding efforts and facilitate effective management.

6.6.2 Key Questions for the City Branding Canvas (Evaluation)

- How will the city brand image be evaluated?
- Which key branding outcomes need assessment and what is the best way to evaluate them?
- What are the main indicators used to measure the impact of city branding?

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7 Epilogue

7.1 Managerial Implications for City Branding Professionals

This book offers a comprehensive framework detailing the five essential steps in strategic city branding: organisation, vision, position, execution, and evaluation. Each chapter provides a thorough exploration of these steps, supported by relevant case studies from Asian cities and practical guidance on how to achieve them. Additionally, key questions at the end of each chapter are designed to help practitioners synthesise their insights into a cohesive understanding of strategic city branding. In conclusion, three primary approaches are recommended for practitioners, with the choice depending on specific strategic objectives and situational factors.

Foundational Approach: The foundational approach is suited for cities that are new to structured city branding or have disjointed efforts that need better coordination among stakeholders. This approach starts with a one-day workshop involving key stakeholders in city branding. The aim of the workshop is to ensure that everyone involved has a clear and shared understanding of city branding.

The main tool used in this workshop is the City Branding Canvas ([Figure 1.1](#)). Participants collaborate to answer key questions and fill in the canvas with their ideas. The sessions include introductions to key concepts, supported by case studies for clarity and context. The workshop ends with a review of city branding ideas across five stages, giving participants a complete view of the branding process. The focus is on open dialogue rather than consensus, recognising that differing opinions are part of the process.

Comprehensive Approach: The comprehensive approach is designed to create a complete city branding plan, similar to an organisational strategic planning process. This approach typically takes three to six months and is led by the city branding agency with continuous input from stakeholders.

The vision and position stages require a research team to gather and analyse data to contribute to the development of the city brand vision and position. This also involves a series of workshops aimed at reaching agreement on

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these critical elements. The next stages—strategy execution and evaluation—are interconnected, with evaluation outcomes guiding strategy execution and vice versa. Cooperation with other entities responsible for specific projects is crucial for successful implementation. The result of this approach is a detailed plan that can be put into action, with the option to revisit it annually to develop both medium-term and action plans for city branding.

Diagnostic Approach: The diagnostic approach is for cities that already have a city branding process but need to improve specific areas. For instance, a city might want to develop a more inclusive vision or a more efficient evaluation system.

This approach focuses on one specific stage of the City Branding Canvas. The city branding agency, working with stakeholders, studies the chosen stage in detail through a series of meetings. The tool for that stage is used to guide the development of a diagnostic and improvement plan. The goal is to improve a specific aspect of city branding and to provide a foundation for broader use in the future.

7.2 Future Research Directions for Academic Researchers

While this book primarily provides a practical framework for city branding, it identifies several research gaps that require further exploration to enhance the academic understanding and effectiveness of city branding practices.

Exploration of Under-Studied Components: City branding research has extensively covered elements such as brand identity, image, stakeholder engagement, and positioning. However, other critical components have received less attention. The role of a city brand vision in guiding branding efforts is one such area that warrants further investigation. Additionally, city brand governance remains under-researched. Comparative studies of the various types of agencies responsible for city branding, including their structures and governance models, could yield important findings on their impact on branding outcomes.

Comparative Study of Various City Branding Strategies: The city branding literature often focuses on single case studies or theoretical frameworks, resulting in a lack of comparative studies on different strategies and their effectiveness. This book outlines seven broad strategies that cities can use, highlighting the need for research comparing these strategies across different contexts. Comparative studies could reveal which strategies are most effective under varying conditions. Such research could involve quantitative analyses of multiple case studies or experimental designs to evaluate the effectiveness of different strategies.

Association between City Branding and Impacts: While the antecedents of city brand image and specific outcomes like satisfaction and loyalty are well documented in place branding literature, research on the broader economic

and social impacts of city branding remains limited. Future research should aim to clarify these relationships by examining how city branding contributes to economic development, social cohesion, and quality of life.

Exploring these under-studied components, conducting comparative studies of strategies, and investigating the broader impacts of city branding will deepen academic understanding and inform more effective city branding strategies.

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