



# HUMAN-CENTRED PLACE BRANDING

## An integrated approach to place branding

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## AUTHORSHIP DECLARATION

# HUMAN-CENTRED PLACE BRANDING An integrated approach to place branding

### Statement of Work Authorship

I declare to be the author of this work, which is unique and unprecedented. Authors and works consulted are properly cited in the text and are included in the listing of references included.

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## SUMMARY

Recently, several scholars have called for rethinking the concept of place branding (PB), articulating fundamental questions in favour of furthering its theory and practice. They have suggested the re-assessment of the applications, constructs, measures, and strategies of PB which necessitate the cross-disciplinary elaborations towards the development of the field. Place branding is, however, considered a complex social practice due to the multiplicity of stakeholders, diversity of components and approaches involved in the process, as well as the complexity of the places where the process takes place. Hence, an alternative integrated perspective is required that extends conventional approaches and frameworks beyond mere economic interests and fixed market-driven solutions. The purpose of this thesis is to conceptualise an integrated place branding (IPB) framework, to determine and demonstrate how such a framework can be developed, and to reflect upon what an integrated approach implies for the development of PB theory and practice. The research indicates that the development of such a process requires long-term negotiation and participation of internal stakeholders, an all-inclusive human-centred approach, and the application of social innovation (SI) strategies. The proposed framework is then examined through a survey of residents of six different cities in Canada, Iran, and Portugal. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is used to empirically evaluate the proposed framework. This thesis provides several theoretical and practical contributions to the field. While developing an IPB framework based on SI strategies, this study represents a practical tool for policymakers and brand managers to foster, facilitate and enhance the processes of PB, development, and transformation in an integrated way. This thesis' findings highlight the impact of IPB on several aspects of improvements in the place including sociocultural, institutional, and territorial developments. The results indicate such a framework can bring about changes in community values, beliefs, and norms, socio-political relations, and overall image of the place supporting the development of innovative practices and multi-purpose activities and fostering a creative atmosphere and competencies in the place that might improve the local economy. The findings also show the opportunities for the development of a multi-level governance system that involves disadvantaged groups in decisions, and new multi-scalar social organisations that support social inclusion and community empowerment.

## RESUMO

Recentemente, diversos estudiosos têm defendido a necessidade de repensar o conceito de place branding (PB), em prol do seu aprofundamento teórico e prático. Neste contexto, e com base em abordagens interdisciplinares, é oportuna a reavaliação de constructos, métodos de mensuração, estratégias e ações, o que poderá contribuir para o desenvolvimento desta área de investigação. Place branding é, pois, considerada uma prática social complexa devido à multiplicidade de stakeholders, componentes e abordagens envolvidas no processo de criação da marca dos lugares. O lugar é, devido à sua natureza compósita, uma entidade complexa. Consequentemente, a adoção de uma perspectiva integrada de PB, que estenda as abordagens e estruturas convencionais além de meros interesses económicos e soluções fixas voltadas para o mercado, é um fator crítico de sucesso na gestão dos lugares. O objetivo desta investigação é concetualizar um modelo integrado de place branding (IPB) e contribuir para a operacionalização do constructo. A pesquisa indica que o desenvolvimento deste processo requer negociação e participação de longo prazo entre as partes interessadas, tendo como base uma abordagem inclusiva e centrada no ser humano, através da aplicação de estratégias de inovação social (IS). O modelo integrado de place branding proposto é testado em seis cidades no Canadá, Irão e Portugal. Este estudo fornece contributos teóricos e empíricos. Os resultados apresentam-se com utilidade prática para gestores públicos, políticos e profissionais responsáveis pela criação e gestão de marcas de lugares. Além disso, destacam o impacto da abordagem integrada de gestão da marca dos lugares, sobretudo ao nível sociocultural, institucional e territorial, com impactos nos valores partilhados pela comunidade, crenças e normas, relações sociopolíticas e imagem geral do local. Pode, ainda, contribuir para o desenvolvimento de práticas inovadoras e atividades polivalentes, promovendo uma atmosfera criativa e estimulando competências no lugar com reflexos na economia local. Além disso, contribui para criar condições à implementação de um sistema de governança multinível no qual estão envolvidos grupos desfavorecidos e novas organizações sociais, uma evolução do sentido da inclusão social e do empoderamento da comunidade.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Appreciative Inquiry
ALMOLIN	Alternative Model of Local Innovation
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BENISI	Building a European Network of Incubators for Social Innovation
BEPA	Bureau of European Policy Advisers
CR	Construct Reliability
DMO	Destination Management Organisation
EASI	EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation
HCPB	Human-Centred Place Branding
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IPB	Integrated Place Branding
MSE	Mean Squared Error
MV	Manifest Variable
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PB	Place Branding
PD	Participatory Design
PLS	Partial Least Squares
PPB	Participatory Place Branding
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
RESINDEX	The Regional Social Innovation Index
SI	Social Innovation
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
TEPSIE	The Theoretical, Empirical and Policy Foundations for Social Innovation in Europe

## LATIN EXPRESSIONS

<i>apud</i>	cited by
<i>cf. (confer)</i>	compare, check out, refer to
<i>e.g. (exempli gratia)</i>	for example
<i>et al. (et alia)</i>	and other
<i>etc. (et caetera)</i>	and so on
<i>ibid. (ibidem)</i>	in the same work already referred
<i>i.e. (id est)</i>	This is



**Chapter 1.**

# **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

## 1.1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The idea of this thesis inspired by the recent transformations within PB literature which motivates and supports cross-disciplinary elaborations towards new knowledge, theories, practices, and processes. The expansion of research contexts has established a connection between PB and other fields of research including architecture (Muratovski, 2012), design (Jernsand and Kraff, 2015), innovation (Go and Govers, 2010), place development (Kalandides, 2011), public policy (Cleave *et al.*, 2017), and urban planning (Oliveira, 2015). Indeed, through the convergence of domains, new perspectives have emerged regarding what place branding entails, who is playing a role or getting involved, and how the PB process can improve the people's quality of life and the future of places. However, answering these questions requires sufficient knowledge of PB and other key related concepts.

The notion of PB consists of two interwoven concepts: *place* and *branding*. Each concept has its unique characteristics which define frameworks and considerations related to the study of the PB phenomenon. For the purposes of this thesis, therefore, we need to first address the concept of place and examine other concepts, elements, and components related to the formation of place and the development of its brand.

A place is an area that is defined by everything in it. All places have attributes and features (Hanna and Rowley, 2013a) that give them personality and distinguish them from other places and when combining with the people's presence, adds human characteristics to that place (Peighambari *et al.*, 2016).

Moreover, the place is more than just a location and can be described as a location created by human experiences. According to several authors (*e.g.*, Agnew, 1987; Martin, 2003; Massey, 1994), place is socially constructed and operating, including an interaction between people and groups, institutionalised land uses, political and economic decisions, and the language of representation. In addition, when people become established in a specific place, some unique meanings, feelings, actions, experiences, and memories are formed through interactions between them and their dwelling place. These factors comprise other concepts such as spirit of place (Brown and Campelo, 2014; Relph, 1976), sense of place (Campelo *et al.*, 2014; Saarinen *et al.*, 1982) and place attachment (Altman and Low, 1992; Mueller and Schade, 2012) which imply the way people are connected to the place and create a network of relationships and associations known as '*place identity*' (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Proshansky *et al.*, 1983).

When terms *place* and *identity* are joined together, a kind of relationship is being indicated between the places and people. In other words, the term place identity signifies the similarities and differences between places. Hence, the connection between the place meanings and identity also needs to be reviewed.

The place has been defined as location plus meaning (Altman and Low, 1992; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Harvey, 1997). Each place has a different meaning to different people and is therefore highly personal, experiential, and subjective. Furthermore, places are not isolated or separated from external influences, nor are the people who live within or pass through them. They are dynamic, ever-changing in structure and meaning, and continue to regenerate as people try to adapt to new meanings that might have detached from their culture and identity (Ujang and Zakariya, 2015).

Nevertheless, the formation of places is a social process that is derived from social interactions and activities inside it. Places have an effective role in the promotion of social ties in urban communities. In this regard, Altman and Low (1992) mention that places are a container for cultural, social, and individual relationships. Places also interact with each other and for that reason, a place identity should be considered as it is formed within a context and not in isolation of other places.

Accordingly, a place identity could be considered as a coherent set of narratives or storylines (Horlings, 2012) about the past, present and future of a place that connects the material and immaterial elements of the place (Boisen *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, the human characteristics of a place are influenced by its environmental characteristics, resources, connections with other places, the culture of its population, the economy of the place, and the decisions and actions of people and organisations over time and at different scales (Botschen *et al.*, 2017; Hernández *et al.*, 2010).

Such characteristics, however, requires more attention to the human aspects of the processes that are implemented in place for economic, social, and spatial developments. This involves the development of new people-centric – or in a broader view – human-centred approach to PB, since the process is intended to create networks of associations in the people's minds based on the different expressions of the place, which are embodied through the place stakeholders' aims, culture, and values (Zenker and Braun, 2010). Though, developing and incorporating such approaches to PB would not be so simple given the complexity of the process and the involvement of multiple stakeholders. Besides, several approaches are already available for PB, the most important of which are defined through the market-oriented, political, and participatory viewpoints.

Conceptualised by Kotler *et al* (1993), strategic place marketing is among the first to acknowledge that places can run and market themselves as business to meet challenges such as global competition, technological change, and urban decay. According to the '*marketing approach*', it is important to realise an attractive image or reputation of a place in the minds of target audiences. As marketing matured from art to science, the new chapter is called '*place marketing*', emerged and developed; the promotion of places has continued to move forward in parallel with the promotion of products and services (Anholt, 2010b). In essence, place marketing typically includes the promotion and distribution of a place attributes packaged as products and services.

Such an approach is quite common in practice given the amount of place logos and slogans developed by marketers. Place branding, however, entails more than just creating a compelling marketing campaign or a new logo. Thus, this kind of promotional materials and advertising are considered as empty by some authors (*e.g.*, Anholt, 2010a; Govers, 2013), when the constructed message is not quite based on the existing feelings, images, experiences, and identities that people attribute to a place.

Compared with place marketing, PB requires a broad set of efforts made by multiple place stakeholders (local people) towards the symbolic interpretation and communication of associations and expectations centred on the experience of place (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Freire, 2009; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011).

Conversely, the '*political approach*' stresses that good place brands are supported by good policies (Anholt, 2008; Go and Govers, 2010; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). Although, what these good policies precisely entail is not relevant to our research, the question of how or by whom these policies are formulated is. Such a branding approach reflects on PB as a political instrument or a peculiar form of urban policy (Lucarelli, 2018b), stressing the success of place branding lies upon its ability to manage the political structure and interests of its stakeholders (usually local authorities and businesses) which are competitive in terms of resources (Anholt, 2010a; Lucarelli and Giovanardi, 2016).

Nonetheless, the '*participatory approach*' aims to involve more diverse stakeholders in PB and its associated decision-making process (Kavaratzis, 2012). Such an approach intends to stimulate the creation of shared narratives to reduce social exclusion and to stimulate people's capacities through cooperation (Pasquinelli, 2010). However, for being successful, place brands need complete buy-in from all stakeholders (Ferguson and Bourke, 2013), especially local community members.

By developing a close connection with the place brand, local community are more likely to hold a positive attitude toward the brand and will play a vital role in providing support and patronage of the branded offerings of the place (Kemp *et al.*, 2012b,c). Moreover, the need to involve stakeholders are included in almost all suggestions of PB frameworks (*cf.*, François Lecompte *et al.*, 2017; Golestaneh *et al.*, 2021, Govers and Go, 2009; Kavaratzis, 2012; Lindstedt, 2015; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Muñiz Martínez, 2016; Peighambari *et al.*, 2016). Even frameworks such as public-private partnerships and leadership that adopt a more political approach to PB, mention stakeholders (Lucarelli, 2018b; Lucarelli and Giovanardi, 2016; Vasudevan, 2008).

Aitken and Campelo (2011) proposed that the place brand engages in a “*multilogue*” (Berthon *et al.*, 2007, p. 42) with a variety of stakeholders and Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) explicate how this multilogue takes place. Hanna and Rowley (2011) also emphasise the role of stakeholders in placing them at the heart of their framework. For them stakeholder engagement as a component of PB belongs to the wider brand infrastructure relationships that, together with physical infrastructure, are the space where the brand is created. Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) suggested that stakeholders should be thought of as active groups of people to be motivated towards defining their meaning of the place brand instead of passive groups of people to be consulted on this meaning. This view is reinforced by Houghton and Stevens (2011) who suggest that stakeholders should be engaged during the whole process and not treated like participants in a focus group.

Nevertheless, PB is not only a process where brands are constructed, and marketing activities are employed but also a governance process where many different actors are crucial for the success of the PB activities. These actors, while might have different perceptions about PB, usually looking for desirable ideas and solutions to solve their problems and promote and communicate a desired brand image.

Moreover, an important part of creating an effective PB strategy involves examining the needs of internal stakeholders. Without buy-in from these stakeholders, PB strategies are likely to fail (Kemp *et al.*, 2012a,c). In this regard, Braun *et al.* (2013) distinguished three types of roles that can be attributed to the residents in the development of a place brand: residents as an integrated part of a place brand, residents as ambassadors for their place brand and residents as citizens. These roles may be complemented by a fourth one, concerning residents’ involvement who considered as place’s socio-economic leaders in the process of designing the place’s identity with unique distinguishing features (Glińska and Florek, 2013a).

Kavaratzis (2012) indicates three reasons for the increased interest of participation of internal stakeholders in PB. First, the author reasoned that PB is a public management activity which needs a support from the public for various social and political reasons. Another reason of increased stakeholders' participation in PB is the recent turn towards participatory branding in general. The third reason for the increased importance of the involvement of stakeholders in PB has to do with the advancement of digital and online technologies. These factors are dramatically emphasising the significance of stakeholders opening new avenues for the research on PB and its internal stakeholders.

Furthermore, several scholars argued for rethinking the concept of PB and articulating fundamental questions in favour of advancing the theory and practice of PB (Kavaratzis *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, Go and Govers (2010) highlighted the changing conditions within a place that necessitate cross-disciplinary elaborations towards new knowledge, theories and methodologies, structures, and strategies for PB. The authors present several frames and individual cases regarding the PB process, trying to address the theme of innovation as a new perspective since they believe we are entering a 'new age of innovation'.

Although developing, this brief review has provided the research with a theoretical background on which to base the formulation of the overall research design. In light of all the above, this study seeks to answer three questions fundamental to the development of an integrated framework for PB:

1. Who are the most essential stakeholders of PB from an internal branding point of view and what role they play in the process?
2. Are there any alternatives for the dominant market-oriented, top-down approach to PB that make the process more inclusive and human-centred?
3. How can develop an all-inclusive, integrated framework for PB based on innovation strategies, especially those that emerge within sociocultural contexts, aiming for social cohesion, inclusion, and well-being of the communities?

It is expected that this concise explanation will contribute to the clarification of the candidate's decision to organise and present the research in the form of three theoretically interrelated studies. Although connected, each study is meant to represent an independent piece of research with an own topic, purpose, literature review, and methodological approach. However, the intention is that these papers shed light on various aspects of PB, concurrently helping to advance the research frontier through the identification of PB's most essential stakeholders as well as alternative approaches and frameworks.

## **1.2. RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **1.2.1. Overall objective**

The main objective of this thesis is to define and conceptualise an integrated framework for PB, using alternative approaches, constructs, and strategies.

### **1.2.2. Specific objectives**

- To identify the typology of the internal stakeholders involving in the PB process and to examine different roles they play in the process. (**Study 1**);
- To investigate different approaches employed to PB and to propose an alternative, human-centred approach to the process drawing on the fundamental concepts such as internal branding, participatory branding, and participatory design (**Study 2**);
- To develop and test a theoretical framework for PB based on social innovation strategies and key dimensions. Such framework allows for the integration of different actors (stakeholders), viewpoints, strategies, and methods in a model with the objective of promoting several aspects of development in the place, enhancing social inclusion, and improving stakeholders' quality of life (**Study 3**).

## **1.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The manifold rationale behind this thesis is denoting numerous multidisciplinary concepts, approaches, and methodologies, wherein pioneering arguments have been discussed extensively. First, this study focuses on the role of internal stakeholders in PB through a comprehensive and systematic literature review (Golestaneh *et al.*, 2021). Although, the PB literature has typically reflected the attitudes of external stakeholders (Casais and Monteiro, 2019; Wagner and Peters, 2009), yet internal stakeholders often define the brand and provide the experience's actualisation (Vasudevan, 2008).

Consequently, many scholars deemed internal stakeholders as the most integral part of the PB practices (Braun *et al.*, 2013; Compte-Pujol *et al.*, 2018; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014). Conversely, theoretical developments in PB are moving toward notions of stakeholder participation and brand co-creation (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Kavaratzis 2012), indicating novel approach like participatory PB. Thus, this thesis provides an in-depth identification of the internal stakeholders, their influences over PB, and their roles in its process, but from an inclusive perspective and, as far as authors know, for the first time. Developing such frameworks necessitate a transdisciplinary approach to PB as an iterative and dynamic process that integrates all internal stakeholders, especially those whose voices are less heard or belong to the excluded or marginalised groups.

Second, based on the concepts emphasised in the first study (*e.g.*, social inclusion, social interactions, collective experiences, affective engagements, and networking) and drawing on design-driven, participatory methodologies, this thesis calls for integrated strategies to overcome the diversity of stakeholders' perceptions, ensuring a reciprocal attitude towards brand values among all stakeholders (Ryu and Swinney, 2011) and promoting dialogue among internal stakeholders over the place-brand's meaning.

Hence, in the second study, human-centredness has been suggested as an alternative approach for PB since it questions 'the one best way' or 'one-size-fits-all' attitudes. This discussion may lay the foundation for a novel approach to PB theory and practice.

It is suggested that such an approach may contribute to the development of new social relations, the generation of new meanings and values, the expansion of society's capacity to act, and most significantly, the promotion of social innovations. Human-centredness appears to be well-suited to addressing social challenges since it is grounded in the adoption of numerous generative mindsets which are complemented by empathy (Schweitzer *et al.*, 2016), abductive reasoning (Beverland *et al.*, 2015), and tolerance of ambiguity and failure (Kolko, 2015). Novel ideas stem from different stakeholders directly involved in social challenges to be addressed when a human-centered approach is used. These ideas should then be reviewed, refined, and used to create more efficient services, systems, and environments (Bannon and Ehn, 2013).

Third, this thesis contributes to the development of PB literature by proposing the IPB framework grounded in SI strategies in the third study. This study aims to identify crucial factors for developing IPB framework, investigating whether such a framework can help to establish various aspects of development in the place, empowering community members to cope with latent social needs, and bringing about institutional and structural changes. Besides its authentic and transdisciplinary approach, the study is also unique in terms of methodology and research design.

To assess the proposed conceptual framework and research hypotheses, the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is used. Precisely, the Mixed Two-Step Approach has been applied to determine whether IPB can be outlined as a second-order construct and to evaluate the relations between this construct and other identified latent variables. The findings of the study indicated that IPB is positively and significantly related to the various aspects of developments in place.



Moreover, the proposed IPB model represents a practical tool for policymakers and place brand managers who want to transform and develop their place in an integrated way, using SI strategies. The study indicates the significance of the sociocultural, institutional, and territorial developments beyond the economic bottom line that can initiate systemic and structural changes, resulting in social cohesion and a more creative atmosphere and competencies.

Ultimately, this research is the first study (to the knowledge of authors) that employ SI strategies to develop an IPB framework. The results show that this approach holds a possibility for future research in this direction, especially the potential of IPB as an inclusive framework for community transformation and place development.

#### **1.4. STUDY DESIGN**

The research design of the current thesis is based on a mixed-method approach informed by a post-positivist paradigm (Kankam, 2019). Such an approach has been selected as it best suits and fulfil the objectives of this thesis and is in line with the methodologies employed by many studies in the PB literature (Acharya and Rahman, 2016; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011). The sampling procedure, the survey instrument, the data collection process and the statistical tools employed to the analysis of the results has been selected based on this approach.

Regarding the sampling procedure, the initial aim of the researcher was to gather a representative sample from all sectors involved with the PB process (local authorities, local businesses, and residents). However, due to the pandemic situation that caused a minimum access to the ideal sampling frame, we focused only on local residents for the purpose this thesis.

For the data collection process, the minimum sample size was established ( $n = 267$ ) for an unknown size of the target population, using the most conservative estimate for a single proportion (0.5), a confidence level of 95%, and a margin of error of 6%. A total of 267 questionnaires were distributed, and 256 valid surveys were collected, with a 95.8% response rate. But since our data analysis being based on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the adequacy of the sample size needed to be verified. Considering all recommended sample size criteria, a minimum sample size of 184 was required to proceed with SEM in the study. Thus, the sample size of 256 was considered adequate for the analysis.

In terms of data analysis, the PLS-SEM approach was selected for analysis due to its application to complex models and its ability to manage non-normal data and relatively small samples (Hair *et al.*, 2021). The SmartPLS 3.0 software was used for modelling the latent variables and testing measurement and structural models. However, before model estimation, we tested for potential Common Method Bias (CMB). Harman's (1976) single-factor test was performed using IBM SPSS (version 25.0). Accordingly, we applied an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with all items loaded into one common factor to test for potential CMB. To measure IPB as a second-order construct, the Mixed Two-Step Approach to PLS (Cataldo *et al.*, 2017) was employed in view of its better performance than the traditional approaches for measuring second-order constructs regarding the quality of the model and path significance (Cataldo *et al.*, 2021). The detailed research design can be found in each of the following three chapters (**Study 1-3**).

## **1.5. RESEARCH STRUCTURE**

This thesis is organised through five chapters. Chapter one (introduction) illustrates the general idea of the research and the most significant concepts and approaches in the field, providing a concise background to communicate the recent theoretical achievements. The following three chapters are independent pieces of research with their own topic, purpose, literature review, and methodological approach while theoretically interrelated.

Chapter two (**Study 1**) provides a comprehensive overview of PB from internal stakeholders' point of view. This chapter identifies internal stakeholders associated with PB and particularly, their roles in such a process. Through this chapter, the gaps and issues regarding the type and the role of internal stakeholders in PB identified and several items essential for developing an all-inclusive, multi-stakeholder approach to PB have indicated. This chapter calls for a transdisciplinary approach to PB that promote active engagement of all internal stakeholders.

Chapter three (**Study 2**) provides a theoretical debate on current approaches to PB. This chapter underlines the necessity of alternative approaches for engaging stakeholders, empowering them in reaching a consensus over the values, meanings, experiences, and other distinct place-brand attributes. The study outlines promising avenues for applying a design-driven human-centred approach in PB by drawing on concepts like internal and participatory branding that might serve as an intermediary for the transition towards more inclusive, integrated place brands.

Chapter four (**Study 3**) serves as an empirical study to examine the possibility of developing an IPB framework. Using a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, this study attempts to evaluate the proposed framework and hypotheses and to determine whether IPB can be outlined as a second-order construct. This chapter also provides several theoretical and practical contributions to the field. While developing an IPB framework based on SI strategies, this study represents a practical tool for policymakers and place brand managers to foster, facilitate and enhance the processes of PB, development, and transformation in an integrated way.

Chapter five corresponds to the general conclusion of the thesis based on the results of the previous chapters. The chapter highlights the most important implications and recommendations for applying the findings. The limitations of this research, together with avenues for further research, are included in this concluding chapter.

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**Chapter 2.**

**ON THE ROLE OF INTERNAL  
STAKEHOLDERS IN PLACE  
BRANDING**

## **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

Place branding, either considered an effective management tool for economic development or a strategic spatial planning instrument, is a complex social relations and communications process, which requires various stakeholders' collaboration. Although stakeholders' multiplicity could be a success driver for PB initiatives, it remains one of the significant challenges in the field because of different acceptance among stakeholders for their roles in such processes (Wagner and Peters, 2009). To overcome the discrepancies in stakeholders' perceptions, PB requires a robust internal branding strategy that shapes their views regarding a coherent and positive attitude towards the place-brand (Ryu and Swinney, 2012). Internal branding strategies try to increase the brand commitment between all internal stakeholders (Braun *et al.*, 2013) and the possibility of their participation in the co-creation of place-brands (Thelander and Säwe, 2015).

Considering the stakeholder theory's general idea (Freeman, 1984) and stakeholder analysis, attempts have been made to achieve an integrated PB approach. There is a considerable number of research and practices in PB, mostly without referencing internal stakeholders, thus, a theoretical and practical shortcoming in considering their role in the process of branding (Braun *et al.*, 2013). Ergo, to address the gap, this study attempts to identify internal stakeholders associated with and the role they play in the brand-building process.

A theoretical background — the following section — scrutinises the existing literature to gain a better perspective regarding our research's overall idea. Next, the study will describe the methodology employed to select and classify relevant literature to review, followed by results and discussions that illustrate the bibliographic analytics, methodologies, empirical foundations, and conceptual models or theoretical frameworks adopted by reviewed studies. Moreover, stakeholders' relevance and their roles and responsibilities are extensively elaborated. Concluding remarks, implications for theory and practice, and directions for further research are given in this study's final sections.

## **2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Place branding is a comprehensive term with an emphasis on the exclusive characteristics of a specific location, which stands by its image to be distinguished from other places. The understanding of PB is manifold, considering its application or purpose in developing, differentiating, and promoting places. However, there seems to be a lack of consensus in the literature regarding the application of the term 'place' and its associated



concepts like nation, region, city, and destination. While the term ‘destination’ is used in the tourism context and the concept of destination branding traditionally refers to PB’s applications in the development and promotion of tourist attractions, there is no consensus on a holistic or all-encompassing concept of place brand (Hankinson, 2015; Hanna and Rowley, 2008; Warnaby *et al.*, 2015; Zenker and Braun, 2015).

Place branding deals with the principles of branding in places and modifying these principles based on the specific characteristics and conditions of places. The most common goal of PB is to develop a network of associations with the place and differentiate it from other places (Hanna and Rowley, 2011; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014). However, destination branding is often considered as a new way for promoting tourism (Trimeche *et al.*, 2012), relying more on the substances of the destination from the perspective of tourists and potential visitors, and available tourism resources of a place (Peighambari *et al.*, 2016). Nevertheless, while both PB and destination branding concepts could include country, region, or city branding, the term ‘place’ refers to a much more holistic concept, rather than the ‘destination’. On this account, PB provides a broader perspective that would include all interactions of a place with its environment (Govers and Go, 2009). Such a broad perspective, however, includes complex interactions because as the concept of branding expands, these interactions occur among a wide range of stakeholders with multiple, diverse interests.

Despite all the differences, most approaches, definitions, and interpretations of PB emphasise the role of stakeholders and especially internal stakeholders, in the formation and communication of place-brands (Colomb and Kalandides, 2010; Kavartzis, 2012; Mueller and Schade, 2012). However, notwithstanding the importance of multiple stakeholders in PB being apparent conceptually and practically (Botschen *et al.*, 2017; Muñoz Martínez, 2016), and the growing evidence within the interdisciplinary PB literature of efforts that focus on stakeholder engagement with PB (Braun *et al.*, 2013; Daspit and Zavattaro, 2014; Hankinson, 2010; Kavartzis, 2012), empirical studies on stakeholder interactions and their dynamics in the place and destination branding literature, are still rare (Saraniemi and Komppula, 2019). Therefore, contributing to overcome this research gap is quite relevant because building a prominent place-brand depends upon complete buy-in from stakeholders (Virgo and de Chernatony, 2006).

The literature on PB is traditionally reflecting the external attitude and has been directed towards external stakeholders (Wagner and Peters, 2009). Conversely, the theoretical developments in PB that are evolving towards concepts of stakeholder

participation, co-creation, and co-production (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Kavartzis 2012), moving the notion of place-brand further away from a promotional perspective and top-down approach to creation and implementation of place-brands. Alternative approaches like participatory and stakeholder-based PB are implying that place-brands can be considered networks of multiple stakeholders (Hankinson, 2004) and that the process of PB happens through a series of interactions among them.

While most of the PB initiatives are directed externally, the internal stakeholders often define the brand and provide the experience's actualisation (Vasudevan, 2008). Indeed, without buy-in from internal stakeholders, PB initiatives are likely to fail (Kemp *et al.*, 2012b). For this reason, many scholars considered internal stakeholders as the most integral part of the PB practices (Braun *et al.*, 2013; Compte-Pujol *et al.*, 2018; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014). This view has also been acknowledged and confirmed by practitioners (Hanna and Rowley, 2013a). Based on this understanding, PB is considered a collaborative partnership among internal stakeholders, requiring active involvement and participation (Glińska and Florek, 2013b).

Consequently, there is a crucial need to move towards a more integrated approach, in which all internal stakeholders engage in the PB process to become co-creators of the brand value. Nevertheless, the definitive gaps exist in the literature regarding a holistic view to internal stakeholders, their objectives, and their role in the PB process. Therefore, this study attempts to better recognise the roles of internal stakeholders in PB by reviewing previous studies. Indeed, the study searches for the factors affecting internal stakeholders' role, trying to discover the limitations, weaknesses, and strengths of the theoretical frameworks in PB concerning internal stakeholders.

### **2.3. METHODOLOGY**

The key objective of this review is to identify the internal stakeholders associated with and particularly, the roles they play in the process of PB. To fulfil this objective, relevant studies were identified through a systematic search of four major global databases and were subjected to analysis. A systematic literature review (SLR) represents a rigorous and transparent form of literature review (Mallett *et al.*, 2012), which identifies key scientific contributions to a field or question (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). Emerged from the field of medical science (Higgins and Green, 2008) and linked to evidence-based practice (Grant and Booth, 2009; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003), systematic reviews have since pervaded into an extensive range of disciplinary fields (Petticrew, 2001).

Typically, SLR includes iterative cycles of defining appropriate search keywords, exploring the literature, and completing the analysis (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). SLR limits the bias of systematic assembly, critical assessment, and synthesis of relevant studies on a specific topic (Greener and Grimshaw, 1996), and summarises, extracts, and communicates the results of studies that could not be administered in any other way (Newell and Burnard, 2006). However, selecting relevant studies in a multidisciplinary context is challenging. The primary journals may be obvious choices but trying to identify all the journals that address or could potentially cover a specific topic is a meticulous task (Vuignier, 2017). In this manner, to maximise the chances of finding any relevant articles, the articles reviewed during this study sourced from EBSCOhost, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar (Table 2.1). These databases were selected as they are considered the most comprehensive and standardised literature databases for the exporting of data (Acharya and Rahman, 2016; Cleave and Arku, 2017; Falagas *et al.*, 2008; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Ma *et al.*, 2019).

To capture systematically all relevant studies, we searched for sources in the databases with varying concepts of PB and internal stakeholders. These concepts typically refer to a spatial label (*e.g.*, city, region, nation, destination) that are used in PB research (Ma *et al.*, 2019). We selected these terms since they are the most frequently recognised and employed terms in the academic literature of the research domain (Hanna and Rowley, 2008). Articles indexed in the databases were searched using a defined set of key word-string and the Boolean Operators “OR” and “AND”. The search string used was: (“place brand\*” OR “city brand\*” OR “destination brand\*” OR “nation brand\*” OR “region brand\*”) AND (“internal stakeholder\*”). Our selection included only studies published in English and referenced online till August 2019.

**Table 2.1 Search result for the keywords (in four online databases)**

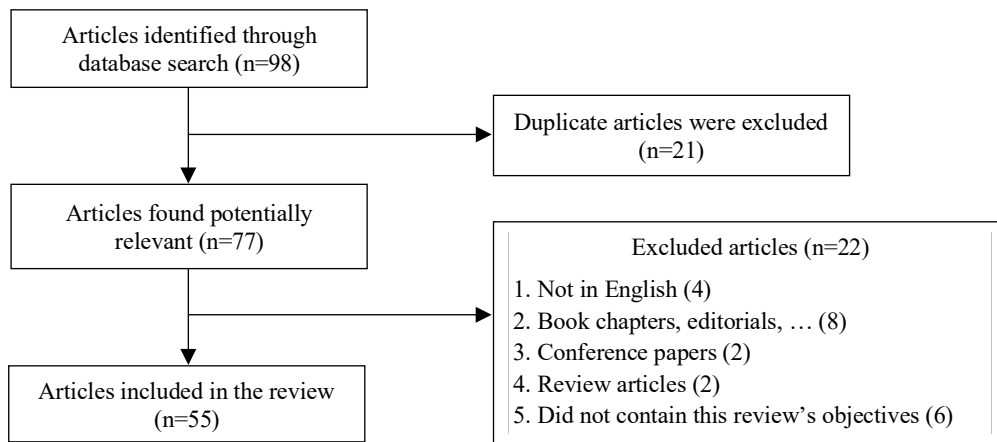
Number of articles found in				
EBSCOhost	Google Scholar	Scopus	Web of Science	Total
49	24	16	9	98

We adopted some exclusion criteria to identify and to ensure only the relevant articles that address our review objectives would be retrieved. The prerequisites of these criteria are shown in Table 2.2 The process of a systematic search for identifying relevant articles is also illustrated in Figure 2.1.

**Table 2.2 Exclusion criteria**

Criteria
1 Articles published in a language other than English
2 Books and book chapters, editorial notes, prefaces, reports, and theses
3 Conference papers
4 Review articles on related topics
5 Articles did not specify internal stakeholders or did not mention any concept of PB (This review’s objectives)

After conducting the search, collected studies (n=98) were examined for duplication, and 21 items were removed. Moreover, search engines like Google Scholar are limited when it comes to a systematic literature search (Kembellec *apud* Vuignier, 2017), therefore, to identify the most relevant articles among the remaining sources (n=77), a set of inclusion/exclusion criteria was developed. Besides the publication’s time period and language, selected articles should be published in an academic journal with peer-revision. Accordingly, they could not be a book chapter, an editorial, an opinion piece, or a review article. Conference papers were also excluded as they are not exclusively peer reviewed (Cleave and Arku, 2017). In addition, all collected articles should examine the internal stakeholders related to PB or its associated concepts. Following the application of those criteria, a final sample of 55 articles was collected for further analysis.



**Figure 2.1 Process of the systematic search for identifying relevant articles**

### 2.3.1. Classification framework

To classify articles, five categories of variables were related to our research objectives: bibliographic data, adopted methodologies, conceptual or theoretical frameworks, empirical foundation, and stakeholders’ relevance to the branding process. Classification results of characters and contents of selected articles were then introduced in a literature database built using Excel matrix. These main five categories and their related subcategories then selected for the database as described in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3 Variables used in the classification of the studies retrieved**

Bibliographic data	Methodologies adopted	Conceptual frameworks	Empirical foundation	Stakeholders' relevance
Name of author(s)	Type of study	Concept (scope) of branding	Number of places studied	Type of stakeholders
Title of article	Method of data collection	Methodological approach of branding	Geographical context of the study	Role of stakeholders
Year of publication	Method of data analysis	Conceptual models/Theoretical frameworks	Sample units	
Name of the journal				

## 2.4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

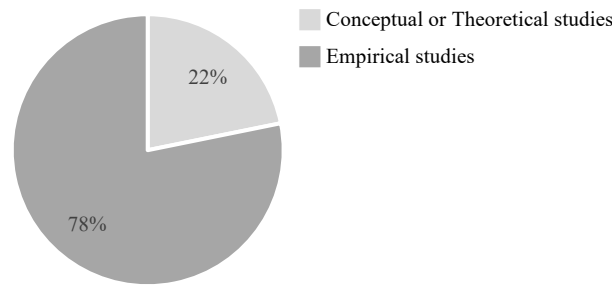
The systematic review results were presented initially by categories and subcategories used primarily in the review process, followed by results interpretation and conclusion.

### 2.4.1. Results of the bibliographic analysis

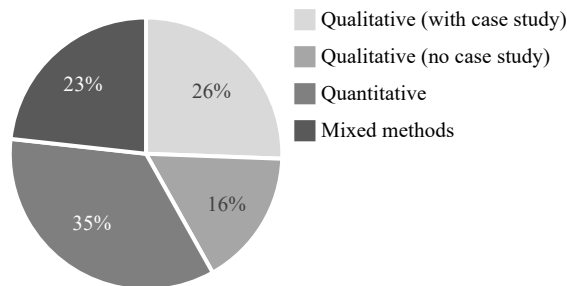
In the first step, the studies under review were classified based on the variables illustrated in Table 2.2 (bibliographic data). While selected studies came from 33 different academic journals, Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, Journal of Place Management and Development, and Journal of Marketing Management were mostly domain-specific journals, accounting for 38% of the resources. Reviewed articles had contributions by distinctive academic disciplines like Business, Design, Economics, Marketing, Management, Public Administration, Regional studies, Tourism and Hospitality, and Urban planning. The results confirm the multidisciplinary nature of PB has largely been reported in previous studies (*cf.*, Acharya and Rahman, 2016; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013; Ma *et al.*, 2019; Vuignier, 2017). The results also support the multiplicity of perspectives regarding the relevance of internal stakeholders (Sartori *et al.*, 2012; Vasudevan, 2008; Wagner and Peters, 2009). For instance, while 80% of the reviewed articles generally addressed various stakeholders within the public, private and voluntary sectors, more than 35% of the studies are exclusively focused on specific internal stakeholders like academics, destination managers, entrepreneurs, owners, *etc.*

### 2.4.2. Methodologies adopted by reviewed articles

43 out of 55 reviewed articles (78%) were empirical studies, while the other 12 papers were conceptual or theoretical (Figure 2.2). Qualitative methods (42%) were much used within these empirical studies compared to quantitative methods (35%). Only ten articles applied mixed methods in their studies. Case studies (26%) were identified as a commonly employing qualitative method (Figure 2.3).



**Figure 2.2 Different type of papers reviewed in this study**



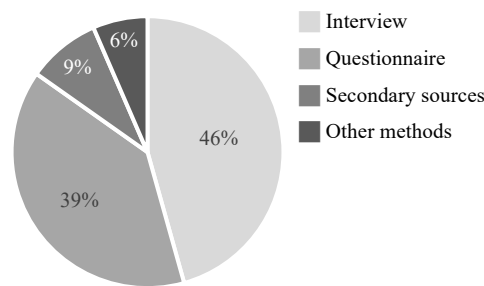
**Figure 2.3 Different methodologies used in the reviewed articles**

As the results are illustrated (Figure 2.3), qualitative research methods are the dominant methods adopted by the studies under review. Such a prevailing application of qualitative methods has been considered especially in city branding. The reasons for this dominance are twofold: First, most studies applying qualitative methods are focused on concepts like brand identity (78%), projected image (61%), brand communications (67%), and stakeholder relationships (50%). While the concepts of identity, image, and communications are also examined in quantitative studies, nevertheless, more attention has been given to these concepts in qualitative studies as they are affected by the interactions or behaviours of internal stakeholders.

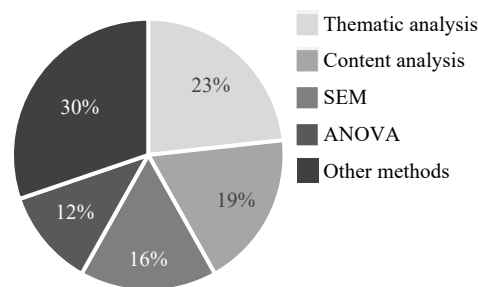
Second, a qualitative approach may yield a clear understanding of individual cases because methods like in-depth interviews and focus group discussions usually provide incredibly detailed information about the places they consider (Chan and Marafa, 2013). This can be of more importance in PB, particularly city branding, typically controlled and managed by government officials or public institutions (Zenker and Martin, 2011), where the collected data is more likely to be qualitative. Such a phenomenon has been noted in previous reviews as well. For example, Gertner (2011) and Lucarelli and Berg (2011) have acknowledged that qualitative approaches dominate the PB research domain. Most studies applying these methods have followed a participatory approach, focusing on the various aspects of PB related to internal stakeholders (*e.g.*, stakeholders' brand attitude, experiences, involvement, and commitment).

Regarding data collection methods, several types of interviews were the most-preferred data collection method (46%). The questionnaire (39%) was the second popular data collection method, followed by the usage of secondary sources (9%). Regarding data analysis, the most frequent method used was Thematic Analysis (23%). Other methods like Content Analysis (19%), Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) (16%), and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) (12%) were used, respectively. Figures 2.4 and 2.5 display detailed information about the methods used in reviewed articles.

While these methods are commonly employed in the literature, there are other methods that focus more on stakeholder relationships than place-brand constituents. For instance, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Grenni *et al.*, 2020; Hudson *et al.*, 2016; Rebelo *et al.*, 2019) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Botschen *et al.*, 2017; Braun *et al.*, 2013) are considered as practical methods when the research mainly focuses on analysing stakeholders' participation or the goal is to obtain internal stakeholders' perceptions of place-brand, especially in terms of destination branding (Wagner and Peters, 2009).



**Figure 2.4 Methods of data collection**



**Figure 2.5 Methods of data analysis**

### 2.4.3. Conceptual frameworks of reviewed articles

This category comprises three subcategories including the concept of branding, branding approach, and conceptual models/theoretical frameworks are mentioned in the articles under review. Our findings revealed that the most applied concept of branding was city branding (33%). Other concepts like destination branding (27%), place branding (20%), nation/country branding (16%), and region branding (4%) were popular in the next places, respectively.

In conjunction with main branding concepts and geographical contexts studied in reviewed articles, our results show that apart from PB as a general concept, the number of city context studies has grown, revealing scholars' increased attention in city branding and marketing context. City branding is one of the most frequent multidisciplinary concepts used in domain literature (Lucarelli and Berg, 2011), because cities are of the highest position in PB. There is a wide range of economic and social activities within cities in need of domestic and foreign investments, enforced by city branding. City branding is characterised as multidiscipline by a high degree with a more complicated process than other PB concepts. There are several groups of internal stakeholders involved in the city branding initiatives.

Accordingly, in the subcategory of the branding approach, we found 18 different approaches were used in reviewed studies (Table 2.4). Apart from traditional approaches like strategic, identity-based, and top-down, a notable part of other branding approaches is focusing attention on the participation capacity of internal stakeholders in the branding process. Stakeholder-based, participatory, and bottom-up approaches, as shown in Table 2.4, were the most frequently indicated approaches by researchers.

**Table 2.4 Branding approaches were used/introduced in reviewed articles**

Branding approach	Number of articles	Branding approach	Number of articles
Stakeholder approach	5	Consumer-led approach	1
Participatory approach	5	Design thinking approach	1
Bottom-up approach	5	Inclusive approach	1
Identity-based (driven) approach	4	Multifaceted approach	1
Three-step approach	4	Research-based approach	1
Cultural/entertainment approach	3	Resident-orientated approach	1
Relational approach	2	Top-down approach	1
Centralised brand management approach	1	Triple bottom-line approach	1
Collaborative approach	1	Two-dimensional approach	1

The stakeholder-based and bottom-up approaches are advocated by many researchers in the PB literature (Ooi and Pedersen, 2010). The former opens for an understanding of places as socially constructed, diverse, and dynamic entities wherein internal stakeholders are acknowledged as essential for developing a brand and place identity (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Thelander and Säwe, 2015).

The latter is rooted in internal branding and draws from sustainable development and organisational culture ensures buy-in to the place-brand by internal stakeholders and expresses the bottom-up philosophy of the PB (Zouganeli *et al.*, 2012). This approach



fills the gap between the place identity and place-brand identity to make them consistent by including local stakeholders in the brand-building process (Baxter *et al.*, 2013).

Another mostly referred approach is the participatory PB, which forms around the co-creation paradigm (Hatch and Schultz, 2010) and delivers the fact that brands are indeed co-created by the multiple stakeholders who encounter them (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). In this approach, the fundamental demands of stakeholder groups will be identified and integrated. Participatory PB takes shape through a series of interactions between internal stakeholders who enjoy sharing ownership of co-created place-brand.

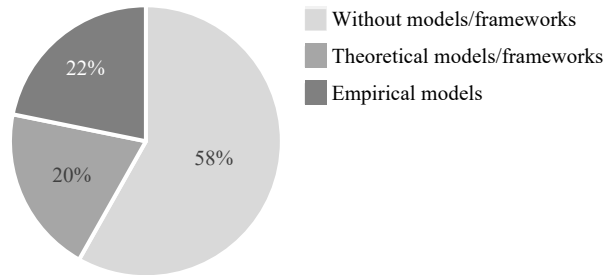
This highlights the significance of internal stakeholders and positions the branding process as a dialogue among stakeholders (Aitken and Campelo, 2011), which ultimately makes them real brand ambassadors (Braun *et al.*, 2013). For instance, internal stakeholders (primarily residents) are regularly involved in the formation of the place identity and projected image. Therefore, if their role in the branding process is ignored and their agreement upon the image is not formed, the gap between the actual and projected image can lead to dissonance and confusion for external stakeholders.

In terms of the conceptual models or theoretical frameworks, we found 23 of the 55 articles (42%) have proposed models, out of which 11 models were conceptual or theoretical, and 12 models possessed empirical nature (Figure 2.6). Regardless of their conceptual or experimental nature, a huge portion of proposed models (88%) were mainly concerned either with the constructs or relations between the PB process constituents. Most of the presented models emphasised the necessity of residents' involvement in brand co-creation. These models frequently addressed three key components of PB.

The first component, the sense of place, is inherently related to the people's knowledge, interactions, and social relations. This arises from the lived experiences of the people in the place. The sense of place is considered an influential factor in making sense of the place and promoting stakeholder and bringing them together around a shared vision.

The second component is place-brand identity, which forms through stakeholders' continuous, dynamic, and relevant interactions and distinct values, preferences, and experiences. In this regard, residents are considered determinants of the place brand's functional and emotional values that are crucial aspects of building an experiential promise. These values are rooted in the socio-cultural resources or substantial assets of a social environment and give meaning to the tangible and intangible elements that stakeholders associate with the place.

Stakeholders then apply these associations to develop a brand’s strategy, structure and communications and build the brand image. This is the third component in which stakeholders’ role is considered as advocates and ambassadors of the brand. In this regard, internal stakeholders play a vital role through interactive participation in the development and contextualisation of all resources to create or redefine immersive brand experiences.



**Figure 2.6 Conceptual models/frameworks of reviewed articles**

In addition, there are other significant items presented in the models. For instance, Hereźniak and Florek (2018) referred to the concepts like democratic, interactive participation, self-mobilisation and sharing among citizens and consider them as influential factors that encourage stakeholders for high-quality participation in the branding process. Foroudi et al. (2016) considered social changes as a crucial factor influencing the place image and its reputation. In this regard, Bisani and Choi (2016) also stressed the importance of real changes in place for motivating stakeholders to participate in the branding process. The authors have focused on contextualising the key guiding principles of design such as relevance, motivation, imagination, creativity, consistency, and continuity to PB. They believe that the inclusion of designers as facilitators at all levels of interactions ensure continually innovating ways of interactions that can redefine stakeholders’ experience in the place.

However, the proposed models/frameworks have failed to adopt an inclusive approach to examine the role of all internal stakeholders at various stages of the branding process. Such a conclusion can be derived from two significant facts: First, PB is a complex process defined by the interaction of multiple components and based on different goals and approaches. Consequently, the designation of stakeholders, involved in the branding process, is typically determined by the general approaches or the process’s objectives.

Second, regardless of the objectives or general concepts of branding (nation, region, city, or destination), the multiplicity of internal stakeholders and the diversity of their interests and needs make it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to assemble all stakeholders in a theoretical framework.

Further, while as an emerging trend, PB literature shifted away from a merely economic view of development to a relational view (Hankinson, 2004), most reviewed articles (84%) have failed to address such an effective approach in their methodologies or theoretical frameworks. The relational and networking traits are of particular importance in PB as they are required to develop a strong relationship among stakeholders and achieve support for PB activities (Helmi *et al.*, 2019). A solely economic view of PB misses the bigger picture of perceptual complexity regarding stakeholders (Zenker and Beckmann, 2013), so neglects to adopt a dynamic, relational, and integrated approach (Eshuis *et al.*, 2014).

#### 2.4.4. Empirical foundations of reviewed articles

Regarding the geographical context and place of study, we found that 56 discrete places within different geographic contexts were studied (Table 2.5). Most of the studies (75%) preferred to focus on a single place. In the studies under review, those who focused on more than one location or compared their results in multiple places are generally less frequent (18%). This has been criticised in previous reviews for the results of such studies have considered as being too shallow, over-descriptive (Lucarelli and Berg, 2011) and of a smaller generalising power (Chan and Marafa, 2013).

**Table 2.5 Geographical contexts and places studied by researchers**

Geographical context	Number of places studied	Name of the places studied
City	27	Ankara, Austin, Barcelona, Berlin, Bremen, Busan, Celje, Copenhagen, Essen, Helsingborg, Hong Kong, Koper, Lisbon, Ljubljana, Łódź, Luleå, Madison (Wisconsin), Maribor, Milan, Nova Gorica, Porto, Rio de Janeiro, Sheffield, Wollongong, Wrocław, York, Zaragoza.
Region	11	Auvergne region (France), Brittany region (France), Central Scotland (UK), Lapland (Finland), Midwestern region (USA), New South Wales (Australia), Northern Ireland (UK), Oxford (UK), Riviera Romagnola (Italy), South Tyrol (Italy), Southwest England (UK).
Country	10	Australia, Austria, Croatia, Iran, Italy, Malaysia, Serbia, Slovenia, Timór-Leste (East Timor), UK.
Destination	8	Fryslân (Netherlands), Gran Canaria (Spain), Ischgl and Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis at Alpine region of Tyrol (Austria), Kerala (India), Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Ruka (Northern Finland).

Note: Three articles were excluded due to a lack of clarity regarding the name or specific location of places studied.

Nonetheless, it is vital to understand and acknowledge the differences in the branding a nation, region, city, neighbourhood, or other types of places. For example, when researchers study PB as a complex phenomenon with many components and multiple related stakeholders involved (*e.g.*, nation or city branding), the methodological aspects, concepts, the scope, and sample size of the study may demonstrate a remarkably distinct perspective compared to studies focus on a specific destination with the certain groups of stakeholders (like tourists or investors).

Reviewed articles used different sample sets, ranging from three (Ooi and Pedersen, 2010) to 4,350 (Novčić Korać and Miletić, 2018) samples for their studies. Residents (32%) were the most used sample subjects followed by local administrative bodies (24%), public/private-sector actors (23%), tourists/visitors (8%), business/industry partners (5%), and Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) (3%). Yet other sample units like opinion leaders, representatives from the key stakeholder groups, and practitioners and academicians in the field were only around 5% in total. One of the notable results of this section is the lack of attention paid by researchers to marginalised groups (*e.g.*, ethnic minorities, immigrants, refugees, *etc.*) as part of the local community. Except for two articles (Compte-Pujol *et al.*, 2018; Hereźniak and Florek, 2018), none of the reviewed studies referred to this group of internal stakeholders and their potential role in the PB.

#### **2.4.5. Stakeholders' relevance**

Place branding has traditionally been targeted at external stakeholders only through communication tools and promotional approaches. However, it is often the internal stakeholders who define the brand and provide the actualisation of the experience (Vasudevan, 2008). In this regard, internal stakeholders should be considered as a significant group of place stakeholders who function as brand co-creators (Muñiz Martínez, 2016; Ntounis and Kavaratzis, 2017) and ambassadors (Braun *et al.*, 2013). Based on the most recent developments in the literature, increased attention is devoted to the internal stakeholders, and their crucial support has been emphasised in the works of various authors (François Lecompte *et al.*, 2017; Helmi *et al.*, 2019; Lucarelli, 2018a; Zakarevičius and Lionikaitė, 2013). Within this alternative paradigm, a substantial body of literature is dedicated to internal stakeholders and their unique role in bridging the gap between the brand idea and reality and creating an authentic place experience (Hereźniak and Florek, 2018). Whereas the reviewed articles refer to a wide range of internal stakeholders, there is neither any comprehensive categorisation nor theoretical framework that includes all internal stakeholders of PB. This is in line with Merrilees *et al.* (2012), who points out that although several studies have examined stakeholders' involvement in the PB, existing research predominantly focuses on only one stakeholder group at a time. To better understand the relevance of internal stakeholders, initially, we have classified internal stakeholders associated with PB in three distinct categories. Next, we have analysed internal stakeholders based on the roles they play in the process.

Place branding's complexity is not merely apparent in the intricacy of the places but also in terms of the variety of its stakeholders. Parties involved in the process often have diverse interests and various needs and may not follow the branding process in the same way. That is why managing all the stakeholders in complex processes like PB is a challenging task. Consequently, some methods and approaches have been introduced for stakeholder identification, classification, and management (*cf.* Bryson, 2004; Mendelow, 1981; Mitchell *et al.*, 1997). Also, based on the concept of stake referring to the interest someone has in an organisation and stakeholder theory, stakeholders are often classified into the public or private sector regarding their involvement in the process that is known as Public-Private Partnership (PPP). Nevertheless, the distinct types of internal stakeholders are not limited to these groups.

For instance, Govers (2011) asserts that an important success factor for PB is a strong internal branding, that is, public, private, and voluntary actors 'living the brand' (Ind, 2007). Accordingly, we have classified the internal stakeholders into public, private, and voluntary sectors, based on the various stakeholders identified in the reviewed articles (Figure 2.7).



**Figure 2.7 The general classification of PB internal stakeholders**

The public sector is comprised of organisations owned and operated by the government to provide services for other stakeholders. Place branding is traditionally connected to the public sector, which develops a place-brand strategy to communicate an intended image of the place. Therefore, they are often regarded as one of the most relevant actors for their supporting role in PB. However, public sector support alone is not enough if the private partners or voluntary stakeholders are not committed to the process. Our findings show that 80% of reviewed articles are considered public-sector stakeholders as influential actors in the PB.

The private sector is typically comprised of organisations run by individuals and groups who seek to generate and return a profit to their owners. These stakeholders perform a significant role in PB because they typically own a leading part of the place businesses and, therefore, exert a considerable influence on the decision-making process. They are equally essential because of the vital role they play in the development and communication of the place-brand. According to our findings, 78% of reviewed articles are considered private-sector stakeholders as influential actors in the PB.

The voluntary sector is typically included individuals or organisations whose purpose is to benefit and enrich society, often without profit as a motive and with little or no government intervention. Although this sector's influence on brand identity and the success of PB is often neglected, local communities and especially residents are so intrinsic to a place that they become a part of the place-brand experience. They are also key stakeholders because places with vigorous voluntary activities can better use branding initiatives and local resources. According to our findings, 89% of reviewed articles are considered voluntary-sector stakeholders as influential actors in the PB.

Some authors, however, have considered other stakeholders like the media and academic partners. In keeping with Henninger et al. (2016), it is vital to provide more opportunities and incorporate stakeholders who willing to participate in the process. For instance, local media can play a vital role in disseminating and communicating the brand message to other stakeholders (Vasudevan, 2008) to enhance their awareness about PB (Warnaby, 2006).

A unique role is also attributed to the universities and academic partners through educational and activation plans that could be enacted on all PB levels. These stakeholders are also relevant as they can provide other stakeholders with the proper research tools and PB methodology.

As the results show, these stakeholders can be classified into either public or private groups depending on their ownership status. Moreover, selecting relevant stakeholders for PB processes is challenging. For example, some stakeholders may be historically marginalised from management decisions, and maybe challenging to identify or involve. Pre-existing conflicts among diverse groups may hinder their willingness to join the process. Therefore, stakeholder analysis can be used to prevent conflicts, ensure the marginalisation of stakeholders is not reinforced, and the PB process fairly represents diverse interests.

The increasing attention to stakeholders' engagement in PB (Casais and Monteiro, 2019; Daspit and Zavattaro, 2014; Hanna and Rowley, 2011; Henninger *et al.*, 2016) reflects a growing recognition that internal stakeholders can and should influence decision-making processes. Stakeholder analysis can identify who has a stake in the process and prioritise them for involvement in PB decisions. However, there is little information in the literature that guides how to formulate PB strategies to facilitate internal stakeholder engagement.

There are several ways in which stakeholders can be analysed. Mitchell et al. (1997) assert that power, legitimacy, and urgency determine stakeholders' salience. Hardy (1996) suggests that power stems from resources, processes, and meaning. To begin with, it derives from the ownership of resources. Stakeholders who own some types of resources are more likely to compel others to behave according to their will. Second, power stems from the decision-making process, and stakeholders who have domination over such a process usually oblige others to apply "*procedures and political routines*" (*ibid*, p. 7). Ultimately, power is related to the ability to prevent "*conflict from emerging in the first place*" (*ibid*, p. 8); that is, some stakeholders have control over the status quo, and in doing so, they can suppress others from their cognition.

Mitchell et al. (1997) defined legitimacy as a generalised perception in which an entity's actions are considered desirable or appropriate within some socially constructed systems of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions. Consistent with them, only actors who have legitimate stakes are to be regarded as proper and relevant stakeholders. Regarding the urgency dimension, they are also argued that it has many meanings, but in terms of stakeholder management, it can be regarded because of time sensitivity and criticality. Urgency can be affected by PB identification. With increasing importance, stakeholders will understand their claims as more urgent. Put differently, stakeholders are mentioned to have urgency in a situation where their demands must be dealt with within a brief time. Bearing in mind the above-mentioned and the data extracted from the reviewed studies, the role and responsibility of internal stakeholders were categorised based on two significant variables: First, their source of influence over the PB (power, legitimacy, and urgency), and second, their roles in the branding process. Table 2.6 illustrates the influence of internal stakeholders within the public, private, and voluntary sectors over PB and their roles in the process.

**Table 2.6 Internal stakeholders' influence over PB and the roles they play in the branding process**

Roles	Responsible stakeholder and their source of influence*
Allocating, coordinating, channelling, and setting the source of funding	Public (P, L)
Assessing the overall perception of place-brand stakeholders	Public (P, L)
Co-creating a common vision for the place-brand	Public (P), Private (L), Voluntary (U)
Contributing to the development and communication of brand identity	Public (P), Private (L), Voluntary (L, U)
Developing and communicating a coherent brand message	Public (P, L), Media (L)
Developing a PB organisation - Initiating PB/marketing campaigns	Public (P, L), Private (P, L)
Developing an open system for stakeholders' interaction and knowledge sharing	Public (P, L), Private (L), Media (L)
Developing PB activation/implementation plans	Public (P, L), Academic partners (L)
Engaging and participating in a co-creative PB process	Public (P), Private (L), Voluntary (U)
Ensuring highly satisfactory and memorable place-brand experiences	Public (P), Private (L), Voluntary (U)
Examining the needs of place-brand stakeholders	Public (P), Private (L)
Examining the status of the current place-brand image	Academic partners (L)
Facilitating/Managing stakeholders' engagement	Public (P), Private (L), Media (L)
Formulating an effective and integrated PB strategy	Public (P), Private (L)
Fostering a brand culture that appreciates brand citizenship behaviour	Public (P), Voluntary (U)
Generating positive perception and communication among all internal stakeholders	Public (P), Media (L)
Identifying place-brand stakeholders	Public (P, L)
Involving in the decision-making process	Private (L), Voluntary (L, U)
Portraying the desired image of place-brand	All stakeholders (P, L, U)
Providing a platform for the co-delivery of the brand experience	Public (P), Media (P, L)
Providing educational programs to raise awareness among stakeholders	Academic partners (P, L), Media (L)
Signifying the place-brand's value, meanings, and promise	Public (P), Private (L), Voluntary (U)
Taking control of brand leadership	Public (P), Private (L)

\* Stakeholders' source of influence over the PB include Power (P), Legitimacy (L), and Urgency (U)

Our findings reveal that, in general, most scholars possess a similar view regarding the significance of internal stakeholders from all sectors. However, we found that some stakeholders hold more influence on the process. Based on conventional classifications, public-sector actors have more influence and power over the process. Nevertheless, one of the most meaningful results to be drawn is many scholars considered voluntary-sector stakeholders as more prominent than public-sector stakeholders.

The reason could be academics and practitioners' tendency to employ methodological approaches like bottom-up and participatory over traditional top-down approach. Similarly, alternative approaches like relational, inclusive, and design thinking can be useful in altering views to establish a balance among all internal stakeholders.

However, only a limited number of the reviewed articles indicated the involvement of various internal stakeholders from different sectors in the PB. Among these articles, only Henninger et al. (2016) have examined a considerable variety of stakeholders and their roles in the process. They have developed a branding strategy with multiple stakeholders involved in the process based on their affiliation. According to them, the “*need for affiliation*” incorporates not only a shared vision for the stakeholders involved in the branding process but also creates a sense of belonging among them (p. 289).



Although the reviewed articles identified several roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder, these roles are not limited to the ones mentioned. The items presented in Table 2.6 and the initial analysis are a summary of the role of internal stakeholders in the PB process. Therefore, in the following, we will analyse in detail the roles each internal stakeholder plays in this process.

Successful creation of PB requires a brand congruence among stakeholders (Ryu and Swinney, 2012; Vasudevan, 2008) and considering the diverse interests of multiple stakeholders (Konečník Ruzzier and de Chernatony, 2013). The shift towards participatory PB that focuses on internal branding strategies (Braun *et al.*, 2013), brand co-creation (Hatch and Schultz, 2010), and greater stakeholder engagement in the branding effort (Kavaratzis, 2012) is the most vivid expression of what PB needs and the direction it is heading (Hereźniak and Florek, 2018). These three concepts are of particular importance to our discussion.

Initially, the internal branding strategies are crucial since they can define the process by which internal stakeholders engage in the co-creating of PB and their views are integrated in a congruent and effective way. Second, the concept of brand co-creation is essential because it emphasises that brands are not developed through traditional communication but are co-created by internal stakeholders who encounter and appropriate them. Third, the call for greater involvement of stakeholders in branding posits the need to empower the relevant stakeholders and allow them to participate freely in the process of brand creation.

Acknowledging the interests, concerns, and aspirations of internal stakeholders is essential as just as challenging when developing a place-brand. Consequently, internal branding must be considered as a critical cornerstone for the PB strategy (Vasudevan, 2008) to increase the brand commitment among all internal stakeholders (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005) and to make them true brand ambassadors (Braun *et al.*, 2013).

Internal branding's importance in the successful execution of PB has been conceptually and empirically supported in the literature (Ryu and Swinney, 2012). Even so, the unique understanding of the notion of internal PB is still absent (Zakarevičius and Lionikaitė, 2013). One of PB's greatest internal branding challenges is that the variable of control is minimal, where internal stakeholders may be inattentive and oblivious to the brand and not necessarily motivated to live the brand (Vasudevan, 2008). Thelander and Säwe (2015) argue that the fundamental aspect that grants meaning to an internal PB strategy lies in the possibility of local communities participating in a process that leads

to a place-brand co-creation. The most recent developments in the literature are where PB is considered as an opportunity for participation of internal stakeholders and transformation of the place (Lucarelli, 2018a), and internalisation of place-brands seems possible in terms of place physique, nor merely marketing collaterals as the internal stakeholders re-aligned their policies with that of the place-brand (Helmi *et al.*, 2019).

As a public management activity, PB requires a process of co-creating an effective strategy with its internal stakeholders who contribute to its value creation more than ever (Peighambari *et al.*, 2016; Saraniemi and Komppula, 2019). Konečnik Ruzzier and de Chernatony (2013) argue that PB strategies should derive from internal stakeholders, as they have a major impact on the way the place-brand promise occurs (Baxter *et al.*, 2013).

Only if internal stakeholders understand and adopt the brand promise will the desired brand-consistent behaviour be accomplished (Rehmet and Dinnie, 2013). Hence, they should be engaged in both the brand development process and its implementation. However, one criticism regarding the participatory approach to PB stems from the complexities involved in process management. These complexities can be the result of the multiplicity of stakeholders pursuing their interests (François Lecompte, 2017; Konečnik Ruzzier and Petek, 2012a,b), variety of perspectives on PB goals, and outcomes (Baker and Cameron, 2008; Hereźniak and Florek, 2018; Jeuring, 2016), or the overemphasis on the roles of only one stakeholder group involved in the process.

Whatever the reason for this complexity, it might result in a “*closing up*” of the policy process to other stakeholders (Paddison and Biggins, 2017, p. 3). Although clarifying the role of internal stakeholders and their participation in place-brand co-creation is necessary (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013), engaging a diverse range of stakeholders creates a challenge for place-brand identity development (Saraniemi and Komppula, 2019). Therefore, the process of place-brand formation should be managed through the identity view, which stresses the vital role of internal stakeholder groups. It is important to involve diverse internal stakeholder groups already in the brand development and later in the brand implementation and maintenance phases (Konečnik Ruzzier, 2015; Konečnik Ruzzier and Petek, 2012b). In this regard, public authorities, and place-brand managers’ role is to understand how to incorporate stakeholders’ participation in the PB strategy.

There are several examples in the literature about the co-creation of a place-brand from the participatory approach (Kavaratzis, 2012) to the importance of strategic place-brand management (Hanna and Rowley, 2011) and the effectiveness of brand communication in stakeholders’ engagement with PB process (Casais and Monteiro, 2019; Martin and

Capelli, 2017). Nonetheless, official brand communication is inevitably only one of the inputs in this process of co-creation (Braun *et al.*, 2013). Thus, government authorities, place-brand managers, and DMOs (in case of destinations) should be even more conscious about their role in PB and the ways they attempt to position their places by accounting for the interests and perspectives of other stakeholders (Jeuring, 2016). They also should explore the various identities of a place, co-create brand identity with other internal stakeholders, develop the personality of the place as a brand, and motivate them to support that brand identity (Peighambari *et al.*, 2016).

However, the challenge of bringing internal stakeholders together in the process of co-creation increases when new or multiple rationales are invoked concerning the difficulty of using communication for co-creating meaning even with internal stakeholders (Thelander and Säwe, 2015). Thereby, place-brand managers and public authorities must embrace social networks and online technologies to engage other stakeholders and operate in an open system that increases interaction and knowledge sharing (Zavattaro, 2013). Besides, according to Merrilees *et al.* (2018), internal stakeholders and especially residents, infer place-brand meaning through social bonding that emerges as the dominant influence of how they discover meaning in a place-brand. Thus, the role of place-brand managers and branding consultants is to design and then communicate the place-brand identity to influence and convey the unique and distinct meaning of the place to the people who matter to the future of the place (Baxter *et al.*, 2013; Henninger *et al.*, 2016).

The place brand's meanings may differ according to the multiple stakeholders (Merrilees *et al.*, 2018), their identification with the place-brand, and a distance with some values communicated (Compte-Pujol *et al.*, 2018). In this case, internal stakeholders' understanding, and support seem to lack coordination, which has consequences for the co-creative strategy addressed to them (Thelander and Säwe, 2015). Hence, a clear understanding of meanings, values, and goals should be achieved first by place-brand leaders. This means that public officials, influential politicians, business owners/managers, and charismatic local entrepreneurs should take control of the brand leadership (Saraniemi and Komppula, 2019). Moreover, internal stakeholders with envisioned brand values play an essential role in delivering consistent brand messages and transmitting its vision, efforts, and promises to others. Thus, government authorities should consider how they can provide stimuli to relevant internal stakeholder groups (*e.g.*, businesses and residents) to understand better the brand's values, beliefs, and vision.

Given that a place-brand identity projects an ideal and desired image of the place, it needs to be supported by key internal stakeholders to ensure the place's reality is consistent with the communicated identity (Helmi *et al.*, 2019). Starting with an inward focus (Kemp *et al.*, 2012a,b,c), government authorities and other responsible partners (*e.g.*, academic partners, branding consultants, and marketing professionals) need to devote more attention to the alignment of place-brand vision among other stakeholders. It ensures the brand vision and promises are in harmony with local community needs and expectations (Balakrishnan, 2009) and whether the place-brand promise and brand reality are consistent (Henninger *et al.*, 2016; Rehmet and Dinnie, 2013).

Strategic alignment is critical for ensuring a developed shared vision among internal stakeholders concerning place-brand identity (Torland *et al.*, 2015). In pursuit of this goal and to reduce the identity-image gap, public officials should change in their approach to PB strategy from the communication-dominant to a participation-dominant approach (Braun *et al.*, 2013) and develop their brand identity with residents' input, to give it a more robust connection to the place (Kavaratzis, 2012; Peighambari *et al.*, 2016).

Residents' involvement in the co-creation of a city brand is a complex task because various stakeholders identify multiple identities for a place (Insch and Walters, 2018), and place identities tend to vary across the time (Baxter *et al.*, 2013). However, more involved residents can show their efforts and responsibility for the development, sustainable management, and better reputation of the place-brand (Kemp *et al.*, 2012c). By facilitating their engagement, raising their awareness, and enabling their ownership over the place-brand, residents and community members will begin aligned with the brand and become increasingly advocates for the brand (Kemp *et al.*, 2012a,b), which will eventually make them true brand ambassadors (Bisani and Choi, 2016; Rehmet and Dinnie, 2013).

Effective community involvement depends on the partnership among the local community, public, and private sectors. Hence, they should not be excluded from the decision-making process, but rather, innovative mechanisms for community engagement should be explored (Balakrishnan, 2009; Paddison and Biggins, 2017). Indeed, there must be a proper infrastructure within the dedicated brand development programmes (Hereźniak and Anders-Morawska, 2015) to organise internal stakeholders' participation and reinforce their sense of community, civic engagement, social capital, and citizenship (Trimeche *et al.*, 2012).

Internal stakeholders' philosophical engagement is reflected by their moral support, future engagement intention, as well as positive citizenship behaviour (Bisani and Choi, 2016; Cleave *et al.*, 2017) and ambassadorship (Braun *et al.*, 2013; Maheshwari *et al.*, 2019; Rehmet and Dinnie, 2013). Concrete engagement, conversely, is reflected by the place-brand partnership and internalisation of PB strategy (Kemp *et al.*, 2012a,c; Sartori *et al.*, 2012). In a participatory PB, government authorities should engage with other internal stakeholders to gain support for branding strategy (Helmi *et al.*, 2019). The role of the public officials (*e.g.*, local council members and municipal government) has been essential to initiate and maintain a cooperative atmosphere. Nevertheless, this is not only their responsibility, but also that of other internal stakeholders like local business owners, place developers, entrepreneurs, researchers, and residents who together co-creating an "experience lab" (Kylanen and Mariani, 2012, p. 67).

In terms of developing guidelines and systematic definition and use of the place-brand, opinion leaders, local entrepreneurs, and community leaders are responsible as they have the best knowledge of the brand's content (Casais and Monteiro, 2019; Konečnik Ruzzier *et al.*, 2015). Branding consultants and marketing professionals participate in the creation of a branding campaign to get further insights about place-brand and its relevant stakeholders (Novčić Korać and Miletić, 2018; Petek and Konečnik Ruzzier, 2013). In addition to participating in the overall brand strategy development, place-brand managers and DMOs can function as organisers and coordinators stakeholders' engagement by providing them with adequate collaboration infrastructures and facilitating their engagement (Bornhorst *et al.*, 2010; Ćorić and Vukasović, 2016; Currie, 2018; Paddison and Biggins, 2017; Ryu and Swinney, 2011).

The decision-makers and policymakers need to consider perceptions and attitudes of internal stakeholders and especially local community members to co-create a branding strategy that all stakeholders can align to (Henninger *et al.*, 2016), to assist them to gain awareness (Kylanen and Mariani, 2012), and increase the potential for their involvement in the planning process (Maheshwari *et al.*, 2019). They are also responsible for coordinating the implementation and better promotion of place-brand (Ćorić and Vukasović, 2016), defining the present situation and develop a coherent strategic vision regarding the future development of place (Trimeche *et al.*, 2012), and providing public authorities with an alternative approach to improve the economic conditions of place-brand communities (Ryu and Swinney, 2011).

Although PB has been practiced for many years, limited studies have examined its economic performance impacts from business owners' perspectives (Ryu and Swinney, 2012). Places and businesses within them share a common economic destiny (Ryu and Swinney, 2011), and that is why business leaders, local business owners, and industry associations should involve closely in decision-making and planning processes (Baker and Cameron, 2008).

Local businesses can better display the variety of place-brand assets and support internal stakeholders to gain awareness that they are dealing with a portfolio of assets that should be carefully and effectively managed (Kylanen and Mariani, 2012). Indeed, the benefits of PB need to be shared by its business owners as they are in close interaction with other internal stakeholders and deliver the brand values to them (Sartori *et al.*, 2012).

Increasing the chances of PB success requires residents' involvement in the branding process (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Eshuis *et al.*, 2014). Residents are considered as vital participants in the branding process since they are integrated part of the place-brand, possible ambassadors of the place-brand, and, finally, citizens who legitimise and finance most of the efforts and expenses involved in PB initiatives (Zenker and Martin, 2011).

Like so, place-brand managers' challenge is to decide how, and to what extent, residents could and should be engaged in PB activities (Hereźniak and Florek, 2018). Residents construct self-brand connections with the place-brand through brand associations, which include residents' attitudes towards the PB efforts, the perceived quality of the place-brand, and the brand's perceived uniqueness. Properly developed and positioned, place-brands are more likely to result in resident attachment and, ultimately, their brand advocacy (Kemp *et al.*, 2012b).

Other relevant actors in developing stakeholders' participation are the media partners. Media moderate the "place branding-image" relationship (Foroudi *et al.*, 2016, p. 255), lead the stakeholders to perceive the benefits of place-brand development (Maheshwari *et al.*, 2019), raise their awareness and create a "buzz" about what is happening in the place (Warnaby, 2006, p. 199).

The media's role in exposure and maximising internal branding impacts is exact (Rehmet and Dinnie, 2013). However, with the increasing development of online technologies, the expansion of the use of the Internet, and the widespread use of smart devices, digital media is gradually performing a more prominent role in stakeholder participation than traditional communication channels.



Hereźniak and Florek (2018) believe there seems to be no answer to stakeholders' involvement without the Internet. Digital media and social platforms can help personalised interactions and effectively influence stakeholder engagement, sharing strategic priorities, and gaining stakeholders' feedback as a mechanism for change (Zavattaro, 2013). They also have an essential role in communicating the message of the brand (Vasudevan, 2008), projecting a unique and positive image and reputation for the place (Trimeche *et al.*, 2012), and co-delivery of the brand experience (Bisani and Choi, 2016). But there appears to be a lack of understanding of online technologies and their potential reach within the government authorities (Cleave *et al.*, 2017).

Academic partners are also engaged in the branding process by defining the process of brand identity building (Petek and Konečnik Ruzzier, 2013), examining the status of the current place-brand image (Peighambari *et al.*, 2016), developing PB activation plans, providing educational programs to raise awareness among other place-brand stakeholders (Hereźniak and Florek, 2018), and enhancing the relevance and authenticity of PB initiatives (Merrilees *et al.*, 2018).

Although many scholars (Braun *et al.*, 2013; Kavartzis, 2012; Ntounis and Kavartzis, 2017; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014) have emphasised that a participatory approach to PB can shed light on the substantial roles of internal stakeholders, there is a lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework or model which is defined based on the roles of all internal stakeholders in the PB process.

Another critical item to be addressed is how to develop a participatory PB strategy while including internal stakeholders, fostering legitimacy, and ensures the success and sustainability of the place-brand. One can reasonably conclude that any place-brand initiative's key success factor is to engage internal stakeholders at an initial stage of the process to formulate a reliable vision and strategy based on their shared beliefs and values. This provides internal stakeholders with a sense of ownership regarding the brand to continue to support it over time while experiencing it.

Trust and commitment to place-brand can persuade internal stakeholders to become so attached that they become advocates, ambassadors, and owners of the brand to encourage others to engage in the process. An efficient way to reinforce the link between a place-brand and its stakeholders to gain their trust and commitment is to diminish the extant gaps between place-brand constructs and stakeholders' perceptions. For example, decreasing the gaps between the place identity and place-brand identity (Baxter *et al.*, 2013), the gaps between the brand identity and brand image (Peighambari *et al.*, 2016),

and the gaps between projected brand image and the reality of the place-brand experienced by stakeholders (Hayden and Sevin, 2012; Rodríguez Díaz and Espino Rodríguez, 2016) might lead to more stakeholder engagement in the PB process and cause commitment and patronage increment.

Furthermore, differences among public, private, and civil sector visions (Casais and Monteiro, 2019; Martin and Capelli, 2017; Torland *et al.*, 2015) and the knowledge gap (Zavattaro, 2013, 2018) regarding knowledge for brand development accomplishments, communications, and evaluation processes, all can make it challenging to achieve an integrated approach and a long-term strategy. Other gaps also exist in terms of brand potential (Wagner and Peters, 2009) and innovation capabilities (Baxter *et al.*, 2013; Kasabov and Sundaram, 2013; Trimeche *et al.*, 2012). Both concepts have a major influence on brand equity. However, the former relies on the place's valuable resources, the sense of place, and characteristics of local communities, while the latter involves the stakeholders' awareness and commitment to the brand and their perceived image.

## **2.5. CONCLUSION**

While most PB initiatives and communications are directed externally and focused more on external stakeholders, it is often the internal stakeholders who define the brand and provide the brand experience's actualisation. However, PB processes that focus on internal branding strategies and stakeholder engagement face many challenges, the most important of which are the multidimensional nature of places, the heterogeneity of internal stakeholders, and the multiplicity of their perceptions and interests. Therefore, one of the most necessary steps in achieving an integrated place brand is identifying internal stakeholders and their roles in the branding process.

The present study's initial objectives were to identify internal stakeholders associated with PB and analyse the roles they play in the branding process. These objectives have been conducted by adopting a systematic literature review and the survey of 55 research studies referring to the internal stakeholders, Place branding, Nation branding, Region branding, City branding, and Destination branding. In the analysis, five categories of variables related to our research objectives are explored, considering the bibliographic data, adopted methodologies, theoretical frameworks, empirical foundation, and stakeholders' relevance to the PB process.

Our study's findings suggest some critical factors should be considered for developing an integrated PB strategy. The first one is the notion of internal branding. By adopting an



internal PB strategy and providing a strong connection between PB, public relations, and public diplomacy, there is a chance of a fit between place-brand identity and its image, which may increase internal stakeholders' sense of place and their place attachment and encourage them to live the brand. The second concept is co-creation, which involves the process of providing a space for dialogue among internal stakeholders to enhance alignment and consensus regarding the place brand's vision and meaning. This is a fundamental concept since internal stakeholders are co-creators of place-brand values, the whole place-brand products, and place-brand experiences. The third factor is the greater participation of internal stakeholders in the process. The PB's participatory approach is vital because it highlights the significance of internal stakeholders and shows what place-brands should look like and how they should be built. Participatory PB not only integrates internal stakeholders into the branding process but also allows them to perform other substantial roles like brand ambassadorship and citizenship.

Promoting a participatory process among internal stakeholders is considered mandatory for building strong place-brands as they are co-created by many people who encounter and appropriate them. However, developing a PB strategy with a participatory approach seems challenging. In addition to the proper infrastructure and the possibility of extensive use of digital and online technologies to attract and empower internal stakeholders for engagement, such a process requires their commitment, trust, and loyalty to the brand.

The present review has several implications for academics and practitioners and adds to PB literature in many ways. To begin with, the study provides an in-depth identification of internal stakeholders, their influences over PB, and their roles in the branding process. Second, this review can function as a valuable instrument to better recognise and analyse important research themes, including internal branding, co-creation, and participatory PB. Ultimately, this study highlights the need to place more emphasis on the process itself. Place branding is a complex, cost-intensive, and time-consuming process. Therefore, it is necessary to provide branding frameworks, which, while integrated and democratic, could be prototyped and assessed before the final implementation phase. Arguably, such frameworks require a transdisciplinary approach to PB as a strategic, iterative, and dynamic process that involves active engagement and support of all internal stakeholders.

In that sense, some reviewed studies highlight the advantages of integrating multi-stakeholder orientation in brand creation, those whose voices are less heard or belong to the excluded or marginalised groups. These studies have highlighted the concept of social

inclusion as a prerequisite to jointly conducting contingent activities that consequently bring about congruent networks and sustainable relations among internal stakeholders. Social interactions, collective experiences, and affective engagements can increase internal stakeholders' awareness, sense of place, and help them give meaning to the places. Besides, brand identity emerges through the social interactions of stakeholders holding distinct roles. From this perspective, the brand identity is a dynamic entity that exists under constant change and ongoing negotiations between stakeholders and the place.

Making real changes in the place and its social environment is related to empowering stakeholders and increasing their innovation capacity. But stakeholders' participation in the branding process or their desire for change is not enough to make them relevant. Hence, stakeholders' relevance will be achieved by providing them with motivational and emotional incentives to be involved in PB. More importantly, to be the brands' advocates and ambassadors, stakeholders must believe in the brand's core values, live the brand, and proactively contribute to PB initiatives. To this end, several studies have focused on capturing the stakeholders' creativity and imagination and encourage them to partake in the branding process.

To conclude, from the literature analysis, some secondary direction for the future can be drawn. The PB literature is still open for development, and there are gaps in terms of approaches, theoretical frameworks, and empirical foundations regarding internal stakeholders: Regardless of the methodologic limitations of examining specific groups of internal stakeholders in a given place that make it difficult to generalise the results to other places or stakeholders, further studies are needed to address the level of internal stakeholders' knowledge of PB, brand citizenship behaviour, and the role of other influential concepts like culture, meanings, values and personality of the place-brands from internal stakeholders' perspective.

Another limitation is related to the time factor. This is a substantial factor because tangible characteristics of a place change over time and its intangible characteristics and associations that are related to the stakeholders may change considerably. Therefore, longitudinal studies are required through which changes in a place can be observed and measured. Besides, understanding change is a significant factor for developing and sustaining a place-brand. As a result, we encourage further studies to investigate PB as a transformational tool and an opportunity for internal stakeholders to involve and change the place's physical and social structure.

For this purpose, it is necessary to conduct more studies with a participatory and citizen-centric (people-centred) approach, aiming at identifying the necessary opportunities and motivations to integrate more internal stakeholders into the decision-making process. In this regard, forthcoming studies could be more focused on concepts like creativity and innovation to evaluate their impacts on the socio-economic development of the place, the improvement of infrastructure and institutional settings, the promotion of the place brand's image, the development of human capital and cultural change. Finally, A more integrated approach towards the whole PB process yet to be scrutinised, which undoubtedly can broaden the scope and illustrate a bigger picture of such a topic.

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**Chapter 3.**

**DESIGN-DRIVEN PLACE BRANDING:  
A HUMAN-CENTRED APPROACH**

### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

Most PB strategies reflect an external promotion attitude towards external stakeholders to attract more tourists and investors (Casais and Monteiro, 2019). This attitude is established as a result of a communication-dominant approach instead of prioritising internal issues (Hankinson, 2010), ignoring cultural diversity and place identities, and lacking an integrated branding strategy based on internal stakeholders' involvement. Such an approach leads to different perceptions of the brand (Wagner and Peters, 2009), minimises the sense of brand ownership (Aitken and Campelo, 2011), and makes it difficult to achieve a collective vision, which is a substantial component in developing a successful and legitimate PB strategy (Braun *et al.*, 2013).

An integrated branding strategy is necessary to overcome diversity of stakeholders' perceptions, ensuring a reciprocal attitude towards brand values among all stakeholders (Ryu and Swinney, 2011) and promoting dialogue among internal stakeholders over the brand's meaning. Such a strategy should be developed based on internal stakeholders' sense of belonging and shared purpose (Govers, 2013, 2020) while considering their interests and understanding of place brand through a shared vision and core brand values (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008; Moilanen, 2015). However, Govers (2011) stated that an effective PB requires a strong internal branding strategy, that is, internal stakeholders living the brand. Besides, the key aspect of internal branding that makes it a potentially successful branding strategy lies in the possibility of internal stakeholders' participation and involvement in the brand co-creation process, both of which are considered as the cornerstones of PPB (Kavaratzis, 2012).

Participatory place branding is a concept that has recently enticed the attention of scholars in the field. Several authors have considered inclusive methodologies for PPB and proposed different models that address various aspects of the process (Florek *et al.*, 2019; Hereźniak and Florek, 2018; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Ntounis and Kavaratzis, 2017; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014). However, among these studies, Jernsand and Kraff (2015) contemplated the concept of PPB from a different angle and called for innovative methods to approach the branding process by integrating design as an empathetic process that can promote community participation. The authors have proposed several incentives for this integration, tracking the roots of PPB and stakeholder participation in the concept of PD. Following Jernsand and Kraff (2015), this study attempts to present a design-driven branding process that, while drawing from the concepts such as co-creation and stakeholder participation, adheres to human-centred design mindsets.

This study outlines promising avenues for the application of a design-driven human-centred approach in PB. First, through a brief review of literature on PPB and PD, common themes between the two concepts are identified. Then, the evolution of design from creating physical artefacts to designing socio-material assemblies and its transformation towards a strategic process for approaching the most pressing issues of our time is thoroughly discussed. Ultimately, suggestions have been made to develop theoretical frames based on human-centredness as an alternative approach for PB. It is indicated that such an approach may help develop new social relations, generate new meanings and values, increase society's capacity to act, and, most importantly, promote social innovations.

### **3.2. THE SHIFT TOWARDS PARTICIPATORY PLACE BRANDING**

An essential part of creating an effective PB strategy is addressing the needs of internal stakeholders whose interactions enrich and deepen the brand's quality by providing innovative ideas, opinions, and perspectives (Glińska and Florek, 2013b). Place branding can no longer be considered solely as a task for the public sector but as a series of interactions and collaborative endeavours among all place stakeholders. In fact, without buy-in from the host community and internal stakeholders, any PB strategy is likely to fail (Kemp *et al.*, 2012).

Latterly, there has been a growing interest in stakeholders' participation in PB. This remarkable growth and shift towards a participatory approach to PB can be associated with the development of the concept of internal branding, the prioritising to overcome the brand's internal issues before prompting it externally (Fredholm and Olsson, 2018; Hankinson, 2010), the need for public support and the increasing advance of digital and online technologies (Kavaratzis, 2012).

Within the current paradigm, much of the literature is devoted to the significance of internal stakeholders and their role in co-creation, development, and management of the place-brands, bridging the gap between brand ideas and realities in place and creating an authentic place experience (Hereźniak and Florek, 2018; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014). This way, PPB can be considered a process that flourishes through a set of interactions among multiple stakeholders engaged in the proper context and encouraged to collaborate (Ntounis and Kavaratzis, 2017) in promoting a greater synergy (Kavaratzis, 2009). Such a process takes shape based on the lived experience (Löfgren, 2014) and broader

engagement of place stakeholders (Kavaratzis, 2012), and the exchange of ideas, information, and perspectives among them (Hereźniak and Florek, 2018).

Undoubtedly, local stakeholders' participation, especially residents, in the branding process and their distinct role as place-brand ambassadors is one of the most valuable assets of a place brand. However, a participatory branding approach, in addition to stakeholder engagement, requires a shared vision for the place, (infra)structures to facilitate participation and support mechanisms regarding branding projects and initiatives (Zenker and Erfgen, 2014).

Within a broad, yet thorough definition, PPB can be considered as a process that; 1) Highlights the issues of the places and focuses on the unmet problems and needs of internal stakeholders that arise from the realities of the place and the lived experience of its stakeholders, not the expectations of the place officials; 2) Maximises participation of internal stakeholders (local community) as the real owners of the brand by empowering them through increased dialogue, involving them in co-creation of place-brand meanings and experiences; 3) Promotes a more democratic and integrated process that relocates power to internal stakeholders by facilitating social interactions among them and defining new roles and responsibilities to ensure they are equally engaged throughout the process; 4) Provides stakeholders with sound tools and proper platforms for the exchange of experiences, expertise, ideas, and knowledge, and skills, supporting them to realise their potential for development.

Among the numerous studies that have addressed the concept of PPB in recent years, Jernsand and Kraff (2015) have called for evolutionary ways of approaching the branding process by integrating design as an empathic and intuitive process that can promote community participation. Their proposed framework is relevant since it is considered a continuous, open-to-change process based on innovation, fundamental to our further discussion in this study.

The study suggests a creative way of thinking and an integrated approach that empowers the community members to take charge of the process and can lead to greater community participation and commitment as well as authenticity and long-term sustainability of place-brand. The authors discussed several incentives for integrating design and PB processes and traced the roots of PPB and stakeholder participation in the concept of PD. In line with Jernsand and Kraff (2015) we have also examined the PD, but focusing on its origin and scopes, and most importantly, searching for the common themes between the two concepts of PD and PPB.

### 3.3. PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

As a field of study, PD has been active for several decades. The foundation of PD lies in the various socio-political movements of the 1960s and 1970s, in which individuals and members of Western societies sought to have their voices heard in decision-making processes related to various aspects of their lives by participating in collective actions around shared interests and values (Robertson and Simonsen, 2012).

Participatory design is a set of theories, principles, and practices encouraging direct involvement of people in the co-design of tools, products, environments, businesses, and social institutions and activities (Björgvinsson *et al.*, 2012; Brandt *et al.*, 2013). Traditionally, one of the most substantial factors influencing the PD is considered the development of local knowledge and how it is exchanged between the people who experience the products, services, environments, and systems and those who design them (Luck, 2018; Manzini and Rizzo, 2011; van der Velden and Mörtberg, 2014).

Throughout the PD, the traditional sphere of design has evolved as a social process entwined with a variety of areas, such as community development (Bannon and Ehn, 2013), public policy (Forlano and Mathew, 2014), sustainable development (Acero López *et al.*, 2019; Chick, 2012), and urban development (Frediani, 2016; Huybrechts *et al.*, 2017). Also, PD has been increasingly used to address sociological and structural issues, including new forms of marginalisation as well as geopolitical crises, such as climate change, migration, and rising authoritarian governments (Bannon *et al.*, 2018).

Participatory design is distinctive in that it is driven by social interactions in which all stakeholders learn together to create, develop, articulate, and evaluate their ideas and visions (Robertson and Simonsen, 2013). Therefore, the relevance of PD is in its ability to provide people with ideas and inspiration to challenge some of the taken-for-granted assumptions we adopt to our society (Bannon and Ehn, 2013). To be specific, the PD represents a practical approach for developing a platform through which diverse stakeholders can exchange their ideas, become exposed to the others' ideas, and generate novel ideas (Forlano and Mathew, 2014).

Participatory design is a process with a wide range of action and multidisciplinary collaborations based on a mutual understanding of stakeholders to build value and increase a sense of ownership, acceptance, and ultimately unique experiences for them. Such a process is identical to PPB, which essentially follows the same goals. A simple comparison shows that despite the differences in their development and applications, both PD and PPB concepts have common themes that define their characteristics (Table 3.1).

These themes can be considered the basis for integrating design with branding and developing a design-driven PB process.

**Table 3.1 Common themes of participatory design and participatory place branding**

Aspects	Description	Sources (PD)*	Sources (PB)**
Multiplicity of stakeholders	Both concepts are open-ended, long-term, and continuous processes where diverse stakeholders can move from being merely informants to legitimate and acknowledged participants, exchanging their ideas, innovating together, and confronting social issues.	Björgvinsson <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Robertson and Simonsen, 2013; Smith <i>et al.</i> , 2017; van der Veldena and Mörtberg, 2014.	Hereźniak and Florek, 2018; Jernsand and Kraff, 2015; Kavaratzis, 2012.
Democratic nature	Both paradigms are inherently democratic since they are considered the practices of designing (developing) socio-technological systems involving human interactions wherein all stakeholders are inclusively involved and contribute to the process.	Robertson and Simonsen, 2013; Smith <i>et al.</i> , 2017; van der Veldena and Mörtberg, 2014.	Braun <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Hereźniak and Florek, 2018; Kavaratzis, 2012; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014.
Political climate	Participatory design and participatory place branding possess an explicit political characteristic as they share specific aspects like involving marginalised voices and diverse stakeholders with multiple interests, equalising power relations among involved stakeholders while empowering them to have increased ownership over the result.	Bannon and Ehn, 2013; Drain <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Forlano and Mathew, 2014; Huybrechts <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Smith <i>et al.</i> , 2017; van der Veldena and Mörtberg, 2014.	Braun <i>et al.</i> 2013; Hereźniak and Florek 2018; Kavaratzis 2012; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014.
Value-driven	Both practices are experiential and substantially follow the established principle of value co-creation. This value, created through social interactions, entails establishing a co-creational initiative and gives primacy to human experience, which will allow meaning- and decision-making to emerge as collective actions.	Björgvinsson <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Forlano and Mathew, 2014; Smith <i>et al.</i> , 2017; van der Veldena and Mörtberg, 2014.	Hereźniak and Florek, 2018; Jernsand and Kraff, 2015; Kavaratzis, 2012.
Knowledge-intensive	Successful participatory design and participatory place branding depend upon the knowledge exchange through investigating and defining problems, supporting mutual learning among stakeholders in collective actions, and developing ideas for change and more robust and sustainable solutions.	Björgvinsson <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Drain <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Robertson and Simonsen, 2013; Smith <i>et al.</i> , 2017; van der Veldena and Mörtberg, 2014.	Fredholm and Olsson, 2018; Hereźniak and Florek, 2018; Ntounis and Kavaratzis, 2017; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014.

\* Sources referenced from the Participatory Design literature.

\*\* Sources referenced from the Place Branding literature.

As shown in Table 3.1, there are common grounds and joint prospects between PPB and PD. Besides, both concepts have broad applications in other practices such as decision making and policy design, urban planning and development, community design and development, and organisational, socio-cultural, and technological innovations. However, as the complexity of modern life's problems and challenges have increased, so has the scope of activities and capabilities of design to solve these problems. Participatory design approaches that reflect design as a social process illustrating that the scope of design activities extends beyond designing physical products to designing alternative systems related to novel ideas and values.

A dramatic shift in the prioritisation of people-centred decisions over technology, organisation, or market-oriented preferences can be considered a concrete example of this evolution in design and its impact on other fields of practice. From this view, the PD attempts to harmonise all stakeholders' experiences, insights, and knowledge towards a shared vision and to develop outcomes that benefit everyone. Indeed, to establish a strong link with civil society, the PD had to expand its focus and approach to embrace more broad questions of human-centred social change (Robertson and Wagner, 2013).

In such an approach to design – often referred to as human-centred – participation aims to improve communication in the design process and generating responsive and innovative solutions that could also be sustained over time. The debate here focuses on stakeholder relations, arguing that co-creation (or co-design) has the potential to generate solutions and possibilities that only can emerge through empathy, knowledge exchange, iterative experimentations, and learning by failing.

In line with that debate, we argue that adding a human-centred focus to the existing frameworks and approaches of PB might benefit the process by fostering new social relations, developing new meanings and values, facilitating mutual exchanges of perspectives, imaginations, knowledge, and experiences, and strengthening the opportunities of human development. Our premise is that generalising a human-centred approach to the branding process will make it possible to advise specific mindsets to be considered in developing an integrated PB strategy.

### **3.4. HUMAN-CENTREDNESS: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH**

The world around us is increasingly facing complex problems such as the ageing population, climate change, environmental disasters, global health crises, inequality, inflation, labour issues, poverty, security threats, and the impact of innovative technologies. It is widely acknowledged that tackling these problems requires novel approaches and methods, and design – especially human-centred design – can provide opportunities for developing such methods (Forlano, 2016). Indeed, human-centredness transcends the limitations of the techno-centric systems through adopting concepts such as creativity, dialogue, equality, social cohesion, and sustainability while reflecting on the philosophies of democratic participation, emancipation, and valorisation of diversity (Gill, 1996).

Human-centredness is a core quality of design (van der Bijl-Brouwer and Dorst, 2017) that expands its focus and applications from simply designing an artefact or experience

to generating more innovative solutions to address deeper societal problems (Baker and Moukhliiss, 2020), which generally referred to as wicked problems (Rittel and Webber, 1973). The general philosophy of human-centredness is based on socio-cultural developments, inclusion, and innovation. The human-centred approach is an aspect of the contested theory that development needs to be human-centred and justified by a contemporary theory of human rights and development (Nagan, 2016).

Given that humans are so diverse, the human-centredness questions ‘the one best way’ or ‘one-size-fits-all’ approaches. In this context, human-centredness is considered as an inclusive, purposive, and essentially multidisciplinary approach to human development reflected in the process of dialogue among all stakeholders and concerns itself to discover socially desirable, technically feasible, and economically viable ideas (Gill, 1996; Schweitzer *et al.*, 2016).

Hence, a human-centred solution would enable stakeholders to negotiate their roles and purposes, value cultural diversity, creativity, and inclusiveness, and supports knowledge transfer, mutual learning, and social cohesion. Therefore, human-centredness appears well-suited to address social challenges since it is grounded in the adoption of several generative mindsets, underpinned by empathy and creative confidence (Schweitzer *et al.*, 2016), abductive reasoning (Beverland *et al.*, 2015; Martin, 2010), and tolerance of ambiguity and failure (Brown, 2009; Kolko, 2015).

Several scholars have referred to empathy as a core value of human-centredness (Carlgren *et al.*, 2016; Liedtka, 2015). From a human-centred perspective, empathy refers to appreciating the perspectives of others through direct interaction with people, examining their behaviours, and identifying their aspirations, needs, and dreams (Schweitzer *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, in human-centred design philosophy, empathy is considered an attitude, method, and practice that assumes the people’s point of view and incorporates meaningful human feedback looks for the best solutions to respond directly to their needs. However, generating new and innovative solutions is a challenging task that needs a capacity for reframing and challenging existing practices and assumptions, and configuring novel ideas by overcoming mental blocks and competency traps (Nakata and Hwang, 2020). In a human-centred approach, this capacity is defined through abductive reasoning.

As a signature trait of human-centredness, abduction fosters ideation by adopting the frame of imagined possibility instead of objective constraints, focusing more on assertion than evidence, and suspending rational analytical thinking before exploring alternative



ideas (Liedtka, 2015). Abduction reasoning, as an alternative approach to deductive and inductive reasoning, takes the form of a “logical leap of the mind” or “inference to the best explanation” to imagine a heuristic for understanding the mystery (Martin, 2010, p. 41) and clarifying ambiguities. Abduction allows for creating new knowledge and insight (Kolko 2010), promoting the attitudes towards practical solutions and innovation development (Dorst, 2011).

Where the mindset of avoiding mistakes permeates, solutions will be less innovative by default (Carlgren *et al.*, 2016). Conversely, abductive reasoning encourages individuals’ creativity and imagination and helps them to face ambiguity and uncertainty. This indeed gives people the courage to take risks and deal with early failures and learn from them. This way, abduction not only affects the process of ideation but also provides the basis for the third human-centred mindset, tolerance of ambiguity and failure.

Ambiguity is an inherent constituent of wicked problems, therefore, addressing and resolving such problems requires the ability and capacity to embrace uncertainty and early failure. In this regard, human-centred design processes increase such capacity to tolerate failure, facilitate embracing the ambiguity, and provide opportunities for more effective solutions by establishing iterative cycles of trial-and-error experiments and feedback. Such experiments help to gather insights for development and quickly determine which solution works and which does not (Beverland *et al.*, 2015). Indeed, rapid prototyping, exposing them to stakeholders, and getting feedback breaks through mental blocks and encourages stakeholders to question and evaluate all concepts.

The learning-by-failing mindset, instead of stepwise reduction of errors by making appropriate choices, promotes risk-taking and failing early and often as the most critical step in widening the vista of exploration, leading to unexpected solutions. In this case, experimentation acts as a form of idea generation/validation that, while being inclusive, motivating, and empowering, allows a shared understanding to evolve among stakeholders (Carlgren *et al.*, 2016).

As such, failures are considered a valuable resource for learning as they provide opportunities to improve proposed solutions or generating the alternative hypothesis that has not previously emerged. The significance of these mindsets has been proven in the design-driven human-centred processes. However, the point here is how and to what extent these mindsets can help make a PB process human-centred. Therefore, in the following section, we will discuss these mindsets more and their impact on the constructs or the entire process.

### 3.5. DISCUSSION

Place branding is the process by which meanings and values are co-created in relationship networks and through a set of social interactions among all stakeholders who encounter, use, and live the brands. This means that a place brand to be successful and sustainable requires the active participation of stakeholders in all stages of designing, developing, implementing, and preserving the brand. Such a process should be formed through shared knowledge and experience, shared purpose and vision, shared ownership, and shared roles and responsibility of the place-brand stakeholders.

However, creating conditions for long-term participation requires novel approaches and methodologies that, while engaging and empowering stakeholders, helps them reach a consensus over the values, meanings, experiences, and other distinct place-brand attributes. We believe generalising the human-centred approach, and its mindsets can provide this capability to PB.

Primarily, human-centredness calls upon empathy to acknowledge and address the tacit needs of the people. Hence, applying an empathic mindset helps realise human experiences and increases the ability to imagine, sense, and share other people's aspirations and desires. It is a subjective process involving the discovery and interpretation of meanings people attach to the world around them. By fostering networking and new social relations, promoting dialogue among stakeholders, and facilitating articulating their views, empathy acts as a frame of reference for the context, bringing together disparate opinions to create a clear view of their impressions regarding the place brand.

Therefore, establishing empathy as a mindset drives branding attitudes and discussions when creating a wide variety of hypotheses or solutions to overcome conflicting preferences and desires or improve the condition, relations, and experiences of the place-brand stakeholders. Unlike traditional marketing research, wherein rationalistic, objective-based methods on customer insights are dominant, empathy is more focused on the emotional and motivational aspects of human activities (Pedersen, 2021), amplifying the importance of developing a human-centred branding approach.

Rooted in the speculative mode of designing wherein innovative solutions are created by challenging the status quo, abduction evokes the original ideas, often by reconsidering constraints and constantly generating and abandoning hypotheses until no better solution can be developed. Abduction enriches the quality of the branding discussions by introducing novel ideas and mediating different voices and views to a unique place-brand

narrative. Such reasoning has two advantages: First, it helps to determine the current situation and prospective challenges of the place and identifies its potential for future developments. Second, it enables developing a shared vision for the place-brand based on the core elements of the place and its authentic values perceived by the stakeholders.

This mindset enables stakeholders to influence the content and objectives of branding and develop new communication methods and tools. By revealing unmet requirements and highlighting individuals' diverse perceptions regarding the brand, the abduction reasoning creates a mutual understanding. It aligns the stakeholders' attitudes towards a strategic vision for the place, paving the way for the emergence of alternative ideas and solutions for developing and promoting a co-created place brand. However, achieving a shared vision or innovative ideas for place development is not an end.

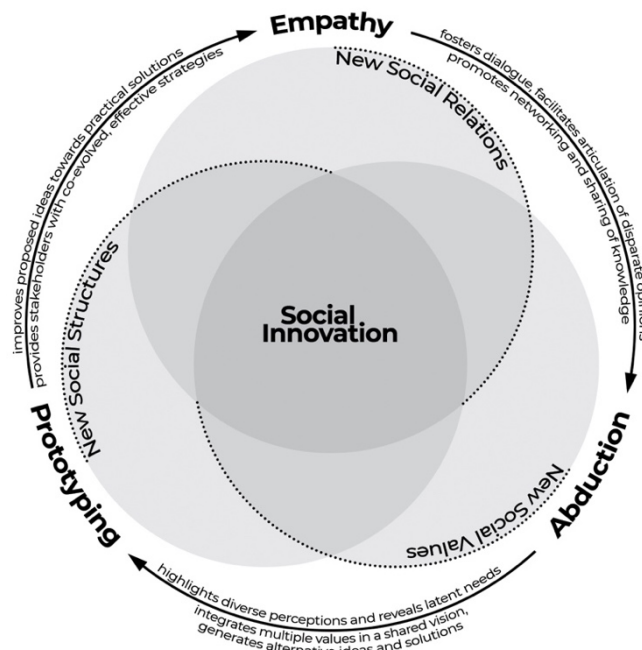
Branding is a dynamic and iterative process whose effective implementation requires a detailed strategic plan with specified objectives. Nevertheless, such plans and strategies are better get evaluated in small-scale experiments before their final implementation. In this regard, the mindset of learning-by-failing provides a framework for participating in the materialisation of ideas and challenging proposed solutions.

This prototyping process allows stakeholders to learn about the proposed ideas' strengths and weaknesses and identify new directions to develop an effective strategy. Prototyping acts as an iterative process of defining the problem-definition/solution-proposition co-evolution (Tonkinwise, 2011) by sharing knowledge and experiences. During the process, stakeholders are empowered to challenge the current situation and provide more effective solutions and inclusive initiatives. Here, the proposed ideas and solutions are challenged against the realities of the place and its available resources and internal and external factors influencing the branding process. Prototyping thus fulfils a significant role as they provide critical insights towards effective solutions.

The integration of the human-centred approach and these three mindsets into the branding process provides the basis for the development of an inclusive strategy. Such a human-centred place branding (HCPB) strategy can be achieved through providing a collaborative atmosphere for diverse perspectives to be shared, new insights to emerge, new knowledge to be created, and empowering stakeholders in the co-creation of a shared vision (Figure 3.1). With such an approach, PB is considered an innovation process that embraces diversity and ambiguity and is context-sensitive, considers human knowledge, experience, and perceptual skills as critical drivers to change existing situations into preferred ones, introducing new values to society.

The most distinctive contribution of human-centredness to PB is the up-scaling effect by mobilising, engaging, and empowering stakeholders in value co-creation processes and making changes in existing conditions. Indeed, embodied social needs and demands lead to changes in social relations between individuals, institutions, and other stakeholders.

These changes can involve a wide range of innovations from an idea, an intervention, a social movement, or a combination of these possibilities in the form of a structural change in social relations. These innovations not only meet social needs and develop desirable outcomes but also enhance society’s capacity to act.



**Figure 3.1 Human-centred place branding framework**

From this perspective, the HCPB can be thought of as a strategic yet inclusive process that engages and empowers actors and stakeholders interested in solving social problems and generates new social capital through the pervasion of innovation in social relations. Such a design-led approach can have an enormous impact on PB’s socio-political aspects because it has the potential to be particularly valuable in addressing social challenges.

For instance, without a change in public organisations and transformation in governance practices—as part of social relations—it would not be possible to benefit from the local stakeholders’ knowledge, experience, skills, and competencies. Similarly, without such changes, the formation of new socio-material assemblies that can identify and mobilise the necessary resources to develop effective solutions to overcome social challenges and offer new social values is almost impossible.

The human-centred paradigm implies that at the heart of any PB activity is identifying innovative social values that should be offered to the people. Such a view suggests that PB activities should concentrate primarily on clarification of purpose, setting off motivation, and promoting the dialogue among stakeholders before proceeding to identify the means of implementation. By applying a human-centred approach, novel ideas emerge from a variety of stakeholders directly involved in social challenges that need to be addressed. These ideas then should be evaluated, improved, and turned to more efficient solutions—in terms of innovative services, systems, and environments—supporting more sustainable lifestyles (Bannon and Ehn, 2013).

In this sense, human-centred PD is no longer just a tool for developing innovative functions or user-centred products. Instead, it is increasingly considered as a driver for fundamental change in socio-technological systems and structures. In fact, in this way, the human-centred paradigm acts as an intermediary for the transition towards sustainable branding methods that bring about fundamental changes in various levels from small-scale everyday life solutions to the large-scale transformations where the changes happen to the whole cities, regions, nations. Such a process in the design literature is referred to as ‘social innovation’ (Manzini and Rizzo, 2011).

Social innovation is considered to create social change and institutionalisation of social practices (Howaldt *et al.*, 2015), confronting external shocks to maintain and enhancing social relations and the community wellbeing (Jessop *et al.*, 2013) and a key source of social integration and capacity building in social institutions and organisations (Franz *et al.*, 2012). Recently, attempts have been made to integrate SI into broader interdisciplinary theorising in social, economic, environmental, and planning policies and to apply these to interdisciplinary practices such as participatory planning, action research, and stakeholder engagement (Mehmood, 2016; Moulaert *et al.*, 2013).

Examples of these efforts can be traced in various initiatives, platforms, programmes dedicated to SI, including Building a European Network of Incubators for Social Innovation (BENISI), Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA), EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), The SI-DRIVE Project, The Theoretical, Empirical and Policy Foundations for Social Innovation in Europe (TEPSIE), and URBACT II Capitalisation: Social Innovation in Cities. In political discourses, SI has been seen as a promising solution to fill gaps caused by inefficient economic policies or to meet the so-called grand challenges of the twenty-first century (Neumeier, 2017).

Social innovation, whether considered a process or a result that brings about positive social changes and social inclusion, is a broad field involving various agendas ranging from policy attempts to grass-roots initiatives aiming at community empowerment and capacity building and responding to local challenges. Therefore, the main aspect of SI is its unique capacity to simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relations (Manzini and Rizzo, 2011), which makes it a significant component of the HCPB process.

### **3.6. CONCLUSION**

This chapter intended to articulate a human-centred approach for PB. In this regard, the concepts of internal stakeholders and internal branding are initially examined as the key bases for the discussion on the necessity of taking a human-centred view to PB that goes beyond the dominant communication-based perspective. For this matter, the participation paradigm in both branding and design disciplines was underlined and the common themes of PD and PPB have been identified in detail. Subsequently, human-centredness was introduced as an approach that increases participation and enhances the development of alternative ideas and solutions for the place and may also bring new values to PB.

Our emphasis in the argument is that successful adoption of the human-centred approach can facilitate and accelerate efforts towards strategic innovations, bringing novel values to stakeholders in all public, private, and civic sectors by making changes in the existing systems and structures. However, to create value through innovation, it is necessary to identify stakeholders' latent needs who cannot express them. To this end, human-centredness calls upon empathy to acknowledge and address the tacit needs of the people by helping them to articulate their lived experiences and enhancing their ability to imagine, sense, and share their aspirations and desires. Empathy provides stakeholders with new networks and social relations, promoting dialogue among them. This also acts as a frame of reference to bring together different opinions and create a clear view of stakeholders' impressions regarding the place brand.

It is also important to create ideas that respond to those latent needs. Here, the other two mindsets of human-centredness play essential roles. First, abduction reasoning enriches the quality of the branding discussions by introducing novel ideas and mediating different voices and views to a unique brand narrative. By revealing unmet requirements and highlighting diverse perceptions of individuals regarding the brand, the abduction reasoning create a mutual understanding and aligns the stakeholders' attitudes towards a strategic vision for the place-brand.

Next, the learning-by-failing mindset provides a framework for participating in the materialisation of ideas and challenging proposed solutions. This process allows stakeholders to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed ideas and identify new directions to develop effective strategies. Through the iterative process of prototyping, stakeholders are empowered to challenge the current situation and provide more effective solutions by challenging proposed solutions against the realities of the place and its available resources.

Moreover, the human-centred approach paves the way for innovation in a place that might lead to a wide range of solution proposals from products and services to processes and procedures, and policies and strategies. Like so, human-centredness can be considered as an alternative approach for PB that transcends the limitations of the traditional, market-oriented approaches by adopting concepts like creativity, dialogue, equality, knowledge transfer, responsibility, and social cohesion. This approach thereby offers a novel PB framework based on inclusion, socio-cultural development, and SI. In this manner, the goals of HCPB should be congruent with stakeholders' explicit or latent needs and motivations, social values, and the reality of the place. This can be achieved by integrating what is truly meaningful to people and socially desirable with what is strategically and technically feasible and organisationally sustainable.

This study provides a clear description of human-centredness as an alternative approach for PB. Although the role of PD in PB has already been stated, this study introduces the concept of HCPB and provides an inclusive PB approach. This discussion may lay the foundation for a novel approach to the theory and practice of the field. This conceptual study introduces a novel approach to PB. If such an approach proves to be effective, it may lead to a more innovative and inclusive PB.

We hope that the topics presented in this study will bring more discussion to PB's theory and practice. However, further research is needed to ensure whether this approach is indeed effective, and the use of case studies will be an imperative tool for investigating this line of enquiry. This opens new avenues for future research, where the application of human-centred mindsets and PD tools might provide additional insights into the theory and practice of PB. There is also considerable scope for research on PB and SI. The concept of SI thus could be further researched, regarding how it can be used to make social changes and transformations, how it can lead to community development and social cohesion, and what would look like an integrated PB process based on SI.

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**Chapter 4.**

**TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED PLACE  
BRANDING**

#### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, a stakeholder-oriented approach has emerged in place branding literature that challenges the conventional top-down approach. A call for rethinking place branding has paved the way for a shift in mainstream approaches, concepts, and construct (Kavaratzis *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, PB is considered as an internal, collaborative, and participatory process based on the interactions of diverse stakeholders to (re)define new meaning and values for the place. Taking the participatory approach to branding implies that PB is a social process that extends beyond merely economic interests, by highlighting stakeholder involvement and their integration in decisions concerning the future of their place (Kavaratzis, 2017; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014).

Such an approach is represented by the concept of PPB, which aspires to increase stakeholder participation in brand co-creation and transparency of branding efforts while keeping tensions between stakeholder groups to a minimum (Hereźniak and Florek, 2018; Kavaratzis, 2012). Although the participatory approach introduces PB as an inclusive and socially responsible process, several gaps and discrepancies are still evident between the theoretical conceptualisation and the practical implementation of a participatory branding framework (Florek *et al.*, 2019). For instance, several scholars have pointed out the lack of a cohesive framework that fosters the integration of local actors into the PB process (Donner *et al.*, 2017; Rebelo *et al.*, 2020), enabling an integrated approach to PB by legitimising emerging social groups (Grenni *et al.*, 2020), empowering marginalised and deprived stakeholders (Hudak, 2019), and aligning stakeholders with diverse interests around a joint vision (Domínguez García *et al.*, 2013).

Other researchers have indicated the absence of strategic methods that leverage the experiential knowledge of local communities to enhance the branding capacities to foster endogenous development and make a room for institutional change (Lichrou *et al.*, 2017; Pasquinelli, 2010). Moreover, there are authors concerned with the focus of conventional frameworks on fixed market-driven solutions and mere economic profits (Ashworth, 2012; Boisen *et al.*, 2018; Colomb, 2011). To avoid such a view and to reach inclusivity and integration, it has been suggested that PB frameworks should be created through the long-term negotiation as well as involvement of stakeholders in PB process, recognising the local capacities and assets, and building on social structures and identities of the place (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Rebelo *et al.*, 2020).

What emerges from these arguments is the necessity to consider PB as a process that is shaped in a network of social relations through the practices of value co-creation for

the place and its stakeholders (Florek *et al.*, 2019; Kavartzis and Kalandides, 2015). Accordingly, most models and frameworks developed with a participatory approach include several concepts and constructs that follow this paradigm. For instance, Kavartzis and Kalandides (2015) have considered the place brand as a network of place associations that is the subject of constant change and is formed through ongoing, open-ended processes that are interconnected with the process of interactions that takes place between place associations, allowing people to generate meanings and a sense of place.

Zenker and Erfgen (2014), Ntounis and Kavartzis (2017), and Hereźniak and Florek (2018) have proposed theoretical frameworks that focus on mobilising all internal stakeholders and their active participation in all stages of the branding process. The authors highlighted several steps for developing an inclusive, participatory place brand. These steps include the identification of key components of the place, development of a shared vision, strategies, and proper infrastructures for participation, communication, evaluation, and improvement of the brand. Aitken and Campelo (2011) have also emphasised community engagement and social networking based on the social capital and social constructions of the people and the place to promote the sense of brand ownership.

Besides, there are other components to consider when developing an integrated place brand. These components may lead to the development of alternative strategies that help brands evolve and remain sustainable. They can also promote stakeholders' engagement, networking, and endogenous development that in turn increase social capital and bring about social cohesion (Paganoni, 2012; Richards, 2017). In this regard, Anholt (2006) stated that place brands need to be managed for the long term, and four basic qualities should be considered as the essential motivations for brand development. According to the author, these four qualities are wisdom, patience, care, and imagination, the last of which is important because it is the foundation of creativity and innovation that can develop genuine progress, change the brand, and keep it healthy.

Moreover, integrating absorptive capacity and innovation capability into the PB process provides opportunities to establish a culture of innovation, to learn from stakeholder engagement and to exploit innovative practices (Daspit and Zavattaro, 2014). Innovation can support local actors to overcome stereotypical and traditional self-images and may bring future changes (Glińska and Florek, 2013a; Pasquinelli, 2010). It also can help to increase the visibility of the place and raise people's awareness regarding the qualities of their place, which in turn, can enhance innovations (Horlings, 2012).

A coherent innovation can provide places with a distinct pattern of development and desired progress (Anholt, 2008), economic growth and success (Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski, 2019; Taecharungroj *et al.*, 2019), and endogenous development (Domínguez García *et al.*, 2013; Donner *et al.*, 2017).

Nevertheless, co-creation and participation are no longer only some branding concepts that have prevailed in the literature, but also are important foundations that can be used to develop innovation (Jernsand and Kraff, 2015) or, even in a broader sense, a distinct perspective to create innovative products, services, experiences, and strategies (Grenni *et al.*, 2020; Hudak, 2019; Ripoll Gonzalez and Gale, 2020). Within this view, PB is considered as an integrated process aimed at development beyond the economic bottom line that nurtures a more creative atmosphere and competencies. This line of reasoning corresponds to Go and Govers' view that:

*we are entering a “new age of innovation”, in which social forms will change in fundamental ways, our reliance on familiar organizational structures of all kinds will diminish [, and] researchers and practitioners encounter an unfamiliar landscape and face challenges that necessitate the crossing of disciplinary boundaries. Following the science disciplines, the field must embark on an enriching hybridization process, following a synthesis approach, to co-create new conceptualizations and methodological constellations that will advance the place branding knowledge domain beyond “marketing magic” (Go and Govers, 2010: pp. x, xiii).*

Drawing on such perspectives, this study aims to identify crucial factors for developing an IPB framework. The study also investigates whether such a framework can help to establish various aspects of development in the place that while keeping place brand's competitive advantage, enable community members to cope with latent social needs, and bring about institutional and structural changes.

More specifically, this study attempts to address two research questions: (1) What constitutes an IPB? and (2) What are the consequences of IPB? To answer these questions, the study scrutinises the role of IPB in promoting social inclusion and overall community well-being based on SI strategies.

The remainder of this study is structured as follows. The next section presents a literature review on SI and discusses its importance and relevance to develop an IPB strategy. Then, the procedures for the development of constructs, research survey, data collection, and data analysis are described in the methodology section, followed by the

results and discussion sections. Lastly, in the concluding section, theoretical and practical implications of the study along with its limitations and suggestions for future research are highlighted.

## **4.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **4.2.1. Social innovation**

The concept of SI has democratised the generation of solutions by calling on all stakeholders to participate in the attention of social issues, responding to a specific social problem, or contributing to the development of alternative solutions for satisfying unmet social needs (Nicholls *et al.*, 2015; Sørensen and Torfing, 2015). Social innovation is considered an all-encompassing, inclusive endeavour aimed at social transformation by creating new social structures and relationships and new modes of decision-making based on a shared vision and collective action in a given social system (Martinelli *et al.*, 2010). Social innovation aims to create a systemic change that involves social interactions, business models, laws and regulations, infrastructures, and entirely new ways of thinking and doing things (Unceta *et al.*, 2020). Social innovation has also been stated as a simultaneous action to create public good by identifying social problems and using innovative ideas or methods to bring positive social change and improve social well-being (Nicholls and Murdock, 2012; Nicholls *et al.*, 2015).

Social innovation arose in the last two decades as an alternative to the traditional economic-oriented paradigms and due to the incapacity of existing structures and policies to solve the most pressing economic and social problems that are traditionally the responsibility of the public and private sectors (Correia *et al.*, 2016). Social innovation has emerged over the need for deliberate social change. It is realised by creating innovative alternatives to tackle the global community's significant social challenges (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2017; Portales, 2019). These challenges range from climate change to ageing societies, pandemics and epidemic diseases, material poverty, migration, social exclusion, and social conflicts that can be manifested globally or on a smaller scale within local communities (Konda *et al.*, 2015). Social innovation enables social transformation through practices and initiatives that generate new ways of social organisation, allowing community members to change existing social structures and relations and develop new social systems (Baker and Mehmood, 2015). It also has the potential to empower stakeholders to foster novel approaches and solutions to social challenges (Franz *et al.*, 2012; Moulaert *et al.*, 2013; Nicholls *et al.*, 2015).

#### **4.2.2. The application of social innovation**

Social innovations are innovations that are social in both their ends and their means (Konda *et al.*, 2015). However, the significance of such innovations is in their capacity to solve complex social, economic, environmental, and institutional problems (Neumeier, 2017). Such a process can generate long-term social change (Baker and Mehmood, 2015) that affect social interactions and may lead to the formation of new social relations, social practices, social institutions, and social capital (Parra, 2013).

Social innovation has been applied in many disciplines such as community development, economics, place development, public administration, sustainability, and tourism planning (Baker and Mehmood, 2015; Krlev *et al.*, 2018; Moulaert, 2010; Moulaert and Mehmood, 2020). However, what makes it substantial to our discussion is its crucial aspects and impacts on social structures, which from a strategic point of view have much in common with PB – especially PPB. These aspects include promoting greater stakeholders' participation and engagement in the process, changing social structures and relations, and increasing society's socio-political capacity to act (Portales, 2019).

#### **4.2.3. Key aspects (dimensions) of social innovation**

Although addressed in a disperse way in early research, six critical aspects of SI, below discussed, can contribute to developing an IPB: 1) social needs and demands; 2) association capacity; 3) supporting infrastructures; 4) absorptive capacity; 5) practices and processes; and 6) institutional support.

*Social needs and demands.* One of the most important aspects of SI reflects on its ability to develop new products, services, or models to satisfy social needs and demands and create new social relations (Murray *et al.*, 2010). Such a definition introduces SI as a means that serves social needs and demands which neither the state nor markets would or can meet and a process in which new practices, rules, and standards are institutionalised to gain social cohesion (Krlev *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, innovative solutions seem essential when social needs are urgent and cannot be met using established practices (Bund *et al.*, 2015). There are always issues related to the legitimacy and urgency of social needs, values, and norms. However, according to Krlev *et al.* (2014), the elements of legitimacy and urgency can be supported by the level of interest in shared social needs, the intensity of discourses around specific issues, and the sufficiency of requests for resolving social challenges.



*Association capacity.* The process of SI follows several objectives, from identifying social needs to developing novel solutions and promoting social inclusion and well-being. However, to accomplish the objectives, the process depends upon the association capacity of the community members. This means the process should meet three requirements: First, the diverse actors with complementary skills and experiences act in a democratic and participatory fashion (Moulaert and Mehmood, 2020). This item underlines the significance of collaboration and strategic allegiance among multiple actors, highlighting their capacity of participation and providing them with the ability to satisfy their long-term needs (Correia *et al.*, 2016). Second, actors' openness for something new and their positive attitude towards taking risks (Krlev *et al.*, 2014). The actors' risk-taking tendency and their attitude towards engagement are often considered vigorous components of SI (Bund *et al.*, 2015). Third, the actors' capacity for socialisation. Social innovation is a deliberative decision-making process with a transformative power that might occur at the different societal levels of society and diverse spatial scales. It cannot be isolated from awareness-raising, mobilisation of resources, and internal knowledge exchange activities (Jessop *et al.*, 2013).

*Absorptive capacity.* Another important aspect of SI is its ability to empower actors to identify, absorb, alter, and apply external knowledge-based upon collected internal knowledge (Unceta *et al.*, 2016). From this viewpoint, SI always requires a certain level of absorptive capacity that fosters three key competencies, including the interpretation of a social problem, development of innovative ideas based on the internal pattern of knowledge and experience, and integrating this knowledge in prototypes to evaluate the practical solutions, and finally, applying the transferred solutions, and evaluating the impacts (Unceta *et al.*, 2017). To flourish absorptive capacity, there should be collaborative learning networks wherein actors can share information, knowledge, and resources to face a common challenge and participate in learning activities to cultivate their skills and capabilities. Thus, the availability of permanent sharing mechanisms and the diversity of continuous training activities are two important items in the process (Unceta *et al.*, 2020).

*Supporting infrastructures.* Although the association and absorptive capacities are essential aspects of SI, it cannot fully exploit its potential for meeting social needs without available supporting infrastructures. Hence, the process of creating, applying, and diffusing Social innovations is heavily reliant on such intermediary infrastructures since they can facilitate further developments (Domanski *et al.*, 2020). Yet, despite a long

tradition of creating infrastructures supporting technological innovations, these items are mainly neglected in theoretical debates and political agendas regarding Social innovations (Baker and Mehmood, 2015; Domanski *et al.*, 2020). However, several scholars highlighted some items as key mechanisms that increase the capacities of actors to address social needs and developing Social innovations (Krlev *et al.*, 2014; Unceta *et al.*, 2016, 2017; Vasin *et al.*, 2017). These items include the level of information and communications technology (ICT) development and usage in the community, the actors' ability to take part in the digital world, and the quality of government's delivery of online services.

*Practices and processes.* Some authors emphasised the importance of socially innovative actions, practices, processes, and strategies in the development of satisfactory solutions to address a range of social problems from poverty, exclusion to segregation and deprivation or exploiting opportunities for improving the community members' well-being which also are in line with the sustainable development goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations (Baker and Mehmood, 2015; Moulaert *et al.*, 2013; Nicholls *et al.*, 2015). These practices and processes may include grassroots initiatives and social movements that encourage the intensive involvement of community members and deepen citizenship (Moulaert *et al.*, 2007; Vasin *et al.*, 2017). They can also be considered early-stage social entrepreneurial or start-up activities (Krlev *et al.*, 2014; Unceta *et al.*, 2020). However, as Grimm *et al.* (2013) stressed, SI practices are fragmented; thus, there is a gap for developed facilitating networks and innovation intermediaries to nurture and orchestrate all initiatives and movements and scale up Social innovations. These are a new type of local actors that enhance cross-sectoral collaborations and co-creation of a local agenda (Domanski *et al.*, 2020) and may include any innovation accelerators, incubators, and venture-builders (Bund *et al.*, 2015; Nicholls and Murdock, 2012; Vasin *et al.*, 2017).

*Institutional support.* One of the most important objectives of SI is to provide community empowerment through close coordination and developing new relations and interactions among all community members and social sectors (Baker and Mehmood, 2015). For such a process to become sustainable, though, there should be institutional support that provides public sources and funding to support grassroots initiatives, and formulating and implementing sound policies, sharing good practices, and building broad coalitions that align actors and community members (Jessop *et al.*, 2013; Moulaert and Mehmood, 2020). Simply put, the successful empowerment of communities requires new

social relations and governance dynamics at higher spatial scales, coalitions among community members, and the availability of multiple sources of funding dedicated to meet social needs (Martinelli *et al.*, 2010; Moulaert and Mehmood, 2020).

#### **4.2.4. Consequences of social innovation**

For Social innovations to grow and gain strength, a revision of the common approaches to innovative developments seems necessary (Nicholls and Murdock, 2012; Vasin *et al.*, 2017). This means that SI can only be considered successful and effective if it leads to development (Moulaert and Mehmood, 2020). Since SI is a collaborative process that takes place among community members and in a social context, these developments need to go far beyond the economic logic of development (Jessop *et al.*, 2013) and should be related to the sociocultural, institutional, and spatial needs of individuals (Krlev *et al.*, 2014; Martinelli *et al.*, 2010; Sørensen and Torfing, 2015). The realisation of changes in social relations and social transformation is possible only through structural modifications (Correia *et al.*, 2016), systemic changes (Grimm *et al.*, 2013), and spatial (place) developments (Moulaert, 2010; Moulaert *et al.*, 2013).

Overall, SI and its associated strategies have an important role in our debate as they have been considered as crucial intervention measures in different aspects of human and place developments. Several scholars highlighted the potential of SI to enhance citizens' participation (Rodriguez, 2009), social change and societal transformation (Nicholls *et al.*, 2015), economic growth (Vasin *et al.*, 2017), social inclusion and cohesion (Correia *et al.*, 2016; Unceta *et al.*, 2020), territorial development (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2017; Parra, 2013), sustainability (Krlev *et al.*, 2018), community empowerment (Jessop *et al.*, 2013) and well-being (Krlev *et al.*, 2014; Nicholls and Murdock, 2012). These aspects of developments have also indicated in PB literature (*cf.*, Florek *et al.*, 2019; Grenni *et al.*, 2020; Hereźniak and Florek, 2018; Hudak, 2019; Jernsand and Kraff, 2015; Ripoll Gonzalez and Gale, 2020). However, what makes SI important is its ability to integrate different actors (and stakeholders), approaches, processes, resources, and systems towards an inclusive, unified strategy.

In this vein, our argument is that any integrated initiative or inclusive plan based on SI strategies should be led to a) '*sociocultural developments*' in the place that include transformation of social relations towards new cross-sectoral synergies and reframing predominant sociocultural values, beliefs, and norms (Bund *et al.*, 2015; Nicholls *et al.* 2015); b) '*institutional developments*' in the place that include possibility of creating

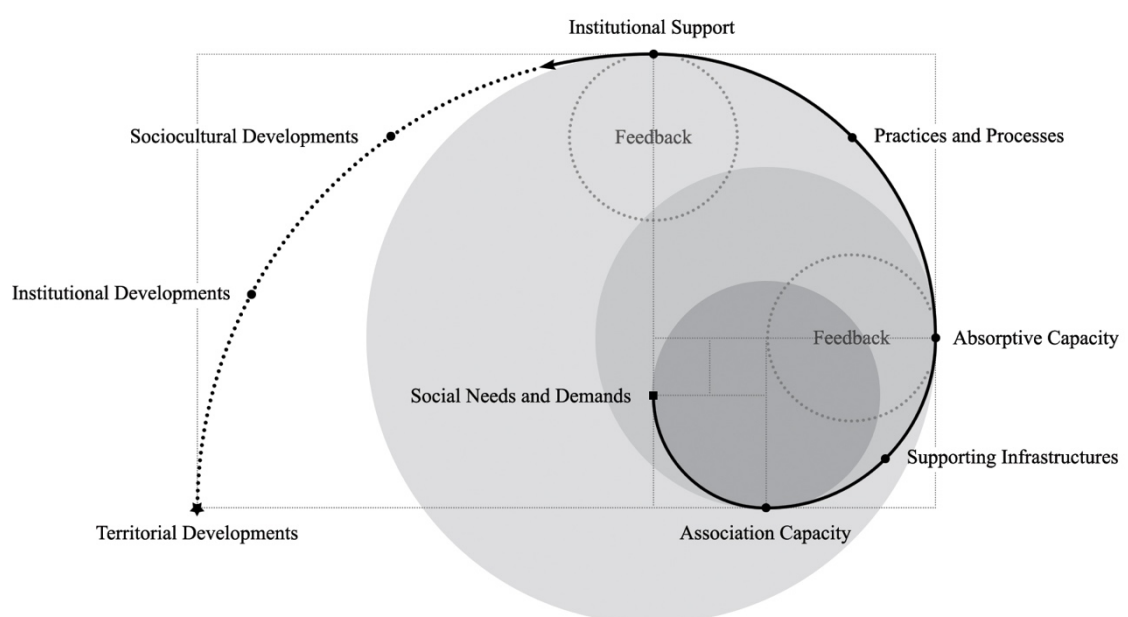
innovative practices and multi-purpose activities, improvements in local economic, development of multi-level governance system that involves disadvantaged groups in decisions and supports community-based innovative practices, and development of new multi-scalar social organisations that support social inclusion and community empowerment (Baker and Mehmood, 2015; Krlev *et al.*, 2014; Unceta *et al.*, 2020); and c) ‘*territorial developments*’ in the place that include improvement in the community members’ sense of place, establishment of innovative regeneration schemes that reflect on the overall image of the place and increase its external recognition, and development of new infrastructures that make the place more accessible for all community members (Moulaert and Mehmood, 2020; Vasin *et al.*, 2017).

Contemplating this background, this study proposed the conceptual framework through an adaptation of the six aspects (dimensions) of SI as key constructs underlying the development of an IPB, as well as three constructs (sociocultural, institutional, and territorial developments) as possible consequences of implementing such a framework (Figure 4.1). Succinctly, the theoretical framework suggests IPB as a second-order construct (manifested by six key constructs) that is positively related to sociocultural, institutional, and territorial developments in the place. Accordingly, three research hypotheses are proposed:

**H1. IPB is positively related to the sociocultural developments in the place.**

**H2. IPB is positively related to the institutional developments in the place.**

**H3. IPB is positively related to the territorial developments in the place.**



**Figure 4.1 Conceptual framework of IPB**

### 4.3. METHODOLOGY

#### 4.3.1. Item generation and expert assessment

Through an extensive literature review, nine dimensions and 28 items were identified, then applied as underlying and resulting dimensions of IPB (Table 4.1). The proposed IPB framework is manifested by six initial dimensions and causes three anticipated outcomes. The six initial dimensions and their related items are considered underlying constructs of IPB while the three remaining dimensions and related items are recognised as consequent constructs and possible consequences of IPB.

**Table 4.1 Underlying and resulting constructs (dimensions and items) of integrated place branding**

Initial dimensions/items ( <i>underlying constructs</i> )		Anticipated outcomes ( <i>consequent constructs</i> )	
Dimensions	Items	Dimensions	Items
Social Needs and Demands (SND)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Legitimacy of social needs</li> <li>▪ Urgency of social demands</li> <li>▪ Request for change</li> </ul>	Sociocultural Developments (SCD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Societal transformation</li> <li>▪ Sociocultural reframing</li> </ul>
Association Capacity (ASC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diversity of actors</li> <li>▪ Risk-taking propensity</li> <li>▪ Capacity for socialisation</li> </ul>	Institutional Developments (IND)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New businesses</li> <li>▪ Economic development</li> <li>▪ Multi-level governance</li> <li>▪ Socio-political integration</li> <li>▪ Multi-scalar networks</li> </ul>
Absorptive Capacity (ABC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Absorptive capacity</li> <li>▪ Knowledge exchange</li> <li>▪ Learning activities</li> </ul>	Territorial Developments (TED)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sense of place</li> <li>▪ External recognition</li> <li>▪ Environmental accessibility</li> </ul>
Supporting Infrastructures (SUI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ICT Development</li> <li>▪ E-Readiness</li> <li>▪ E-Governance</li> </ul>		
Practices and Processes (PAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Collective actions</li> <li>▪ Start-up activities</li> <li>▪ Innovation intermediaries</li> </ul>		
Institutional Support (INS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Governance dynamics</li> <li>▪ Coalition capacity</li> <li>▪ Sources of funding</li> </ul>		

The number of identified items varied from two to five, with three items for the following dimensions: social needs and demands (SND); association capacity (ASC); supporting infrastructures (SUI); absorptive capacity (ABC); practices and processes (PAP); institutional support (INS), two items for sociocultural developments (SCD); five items for institutional developments (IND); and three items for territorial developments (TED). To evaluate content validity, a panel of experts reviewed all identified constructs (dimensions and items) between May and March 2021. The constructs were sent to 18 scholars representing various disciplines such as economics, place branding, sociology, tourism, and urban studies.

The panel has received a clear definition regarding the IPB framework as well as each proposed constructs. Furthermore, the panel experts asked to evaluate the sufficiency of the proposed dimensions and items and their relevance to PB, using a five-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree). Granting Liu et al. (2020), constructs

with a mean value equal or higher than three were retained. All items were scored above the determined mean value. Moreover, the experts were asked to provide suggestions to further refine IPB framework.

The proposed framework is considered a process that incorporates six underlying constructs to provide the basis for IPB as a socially innovative process that could result in some developments for the place (consequent constructs). These latent constructs and their related items have been applied and examined in several theoretical, empirical, and policy frameworks such as the alternative model of local innovation (ALMOLIN), the regional social innovation index (RESINDEX), and the theoretical, empirical and policy foundations for social innovation in Europe (TEPSIE). However, neither of these constructs has been incorporated into an integrated framework for place branding, nor have their impacts and interrelationships been investigated.

#### 4.3.2. Data collection

For the data collection process, we used a questionnaire comprised of five sections including the dimensions and items derived from the literature review (already mentioned in the section 4.2) but were also informed by the opinions of experts. The questionnaire was first devised in English and then translated into Farsi and Portuguese, back-translated, and then retranslated again to ensure clarity, consistency, and comparability of data among three versions of the questionnaire (Harkness *et al.*, 2010). In the final questionnaire, the participants were asked about their level of agreement/disagreement about the items that have been identified in Table 4.1. All items (indicators) except for the demographic data were scored on a five-point Likert-type scale.

The survey was conducted from April to June 2021 with residents of multiple cities in Canada (Edmonton and Toronto), Iran (Esfahan and Tehran), and Portugal (Faro and Lagos). The minimum sample size was established ( $n=267$ ) for an unknown size of the target population, using the most conservative estimate for a single proportion (0.5), a confidence level of 95%, and a margin of error of 6% (Table 4.2). From 267 distributed questionnaires, 256 valid surveys were collected with a 95.8% response rate.

**Table 4.2 The minimum sample size required to perform the survey**

Population size	-	
Confidence level	95%	The amount of uncertainty you can tolerate
Population proportion	50%	An estimate of the proportion of people falling into the target group of the survey
Margin of error	6%	The amount of error can be tolerated
Sample size	267	Minimum recommended size for the survey

However, since our data analysis being based on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the adequacy of the sample size needed to be verified using A-priori Sample Size Calculator for Structural Equation Models (Soper, 2021). Considering a medium anticipated effect size (0.3), desired statistical power level (0.8), probability level (0.05), number of latent variables (9) and number of observed variables (28), the estimation indicated a minimum sample size of 184 was required to proceed with SEM in the study (Table 4.3). A sample size of 256 was therefore considered adequate for the analysis, following other studies conducted in the field of PB (*cf.*, Aziz *et al.*, 2016; Gómez *et al.*, 2018).

**Table 4.3 The minimum sample size required to perform SEM**

Anticipated effect size	0.3
Desired statistical power level	0.8
Number of latent variables	10
Number of observed variables	28
Probability level	0.05
Recommended minimum sample size	232

### 4.3.3. Data analysis

This study adopts an integrated approach to place branding by measuring it as a second-order construct. Prior to estimation, the model has been tested for potential Common Method Bias (CMB). Such analysis is relevant to this study since all constructs used the same scale (1 to 5), contributing to CMB. Harman's (1976) single-factor test was performed using SPSS. Accordingly, we applied an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with all items loaded into one common factor to test for potential CMB. The common factor solution has a total variance of 31.27%, meaning that CMB is not prejudicing our results.

Partial Least Squares SEM (PLS-SEM) approach was selected for analysis due to its application to complex models and its ability to manage non-normal data and relatively small samples (Hair *et al.*, 2021). Indeed, the data for all our items do not follow a normal distribution (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk's tests:  $p$ -value = 0.000). SmartPLS 3.0 was used to determine whether IPB can be outlined as a second-order construct and evaluate the relations between this construct and three consequent constructs. Then, the measurement model (IPB as a first- and second-order construct) and structural model were assessed. Further, the hypotheses H1 to H3 were tested to confirm the possible relations between IPB and the resulting dimensions.

#### **4.3.4. Measuring IPB construct**

To measure IPB as a second-order construct, the Mixed Two-Step Approach to hierarchical constructs in PLS-SEM (Cataldo *et al.*, 2017) was employed. Granting recent simulation studies, this method presented better performance than the traditional approaches for measuring second-order constructs (the Repeated Indicator Approach and the Two-Step Approach) regarding the quality of the model and path significance (Cataldo *et al.*, 2021, Cheah *et al.*, 2019; Crocetta *et al.*, 2021). The method is also considered the best in terms of reducing estimates' bias and Mean Squared Error (MSE) (Crocetta *et al.*, 2021).

The first step in this approach uses the Repeated Indicators Approach to obtain scores for the second-order construct, IPB, as well as for the first-order constructs: SND, ASC, SUI, ABC, PAP, and INS. This is done considering IPB linked to the set of items (18) used to measure the first-order constructs. In the second step, the scores for the first-order constructs are used as indicators of IPB as a second-order construct.

In the two steps, the constructs were considered reflective, which means that the indicators are a manifestation of the construct (Hair *et al.*, 2011). So, for the second-order construct, IPB, we adopted the type I, Reflective-Reflective Measurement Model, also known as the Second-Order Construct Type I, as proposed by Becker *et al.* (2012). Three reasons assisted this decision. First, it is one of the most frequently hierarchical models used in empirical research (Crocetta *et al.*, 2021). Secondly, the use of the Mixed Two-Step Approach to PLS is explained using this type of model (Cataldo *et al.*, 2021; Crocetta *et al.*, 2021). Third, the confirmatory tetrad analysis (CTA), suggested by Gudergan *et al.* (2008) and implemented in SmartPLS 3.0, also supports this measurement type (in all tetrads tests, all *t* values (bootstrapping) are non-significant).

### **4.4. RESULTS**

#### **4.4.1. Profile of participants**

The participants were mainly male (51.6%) and completed a university degree (88.6%). The average age of the respondents was 35.4 years (standard deviation=9.532), and the median was 36.0 years old. The minimum age was 19, the maximum was 72, and the predominant age cohort was between 30 and 40 years old (40.2%). The survey participants were predominantly Iranian (66%), followed by Portuguese (25.8%), and Canadian (8.8%) residents. Most respondents (88.6%) were living for more than 10 years in their city of residence.



#### 4.4.2. Assessing the measurement model

Table 4.4 shows the results for the measurement model for the nine first-order constructs. The results show that all indicators had an adequate level of individual reliability since all factor loadings were higher than 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2011) except for the item ‘*sources of funding*’ (0.660). However, removing this indicator would not improve the measurement model; thus, it was retained in the analysis.

**Table 4.4 Descriptive statistics of the measurement model (First stage – first-order construct)**

Dimensions and items	Mean (SD)	Loading	CR.	AVE	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
<i>Social needs and demands (SND)</i>			0.843	0.641		
SND-1. Legitimacy of social needs	4.266 (0.829)	0.779			17.538	0.000
SND-2. Urgency of social demands	4.316 (0.716)	0.800			21.949	0.000
SND-3. Request for change	4.199 (0.747)	0.823			26.038	0.000
<i>Association capacity (ASC)</i>			0.834	0.627		
ASC -1. Diversity of actors	4.379 (0.730)	0.790			26.365	0.000
ASC -2. Risk-taking propensity	4.230 (0.743)	0.781			22.710	0.000
ASC -3. Capacity for socialisation	4.145 (0.800)	0.804			26.730	0.000
<i>Supporting infrastructures (SUI)</i>			0.850	0.655		
SUI -1. ICT Development	4.277 (0.804)	0.776			18.634	0.000
SUI -2. E-Readiness	4.137 (0.781)	0.816			21.950	0.000
SUI -3. E-Governance	4.285 (0.796)	0.834			30.143	0.000
<i>Absorptive capacity (ABC)</i>			0.834	0.627		
ABC-1. Absorptive capacity	4.254 (0.772)	0.799			28.767	0.000
ABC-2. Knowledge exchange	4.152 (0.803)	0.800			17.734	0.000
ABC-3. Learning activities	4.258 (0.788)	0.776			24.999	0.000
<i>Practices and processes (PAP)</i>			0.857	0.667		
PAP-1. Collective actions	4.270 (0.796)	0.814			24.200	0.000
PAP-2. Start-up activities	4.199 (0.840)	0.849			35.638	0.000
PAP-3. Innovation intermediaries	4.215 (0.855)	0.787			24.656	0.000
<i>Institutional support (INS)</i>			0.826	0.615		
INS-1. Governance dynamics	4.258 (0.768)	0.850			43.401	0.000
INS-2. Coalition capacity	4.211 (0.854)	0.828			28.596	0.000
INS-3. Sources of funding	4.148 (0.825)	0.660			9.714	0.000
<i>Sociocultural development (SCD)</i>			0.848	0.737		
SCD-1. Societal transformation	4.254 (0.730)	0.934			44.418	0.000
SCD-2. Sociocultural reframing	4.301 (0.690)	0.776			15.016	0.000
<i>Institutional development (IND)</i>			0.870	0.572		
IND-1. New businesses	4.293 (0.763)	0.778			26.381	0.000
IND-2. Economic development	4.250 (0.661)	0.728			20.137	0.000
IND-3. Multi-level governance	4.109 (0.783)	0.714			19.654	0.000
IND-4. Socio-political integration	4.301 (0.673)	0.784			24.836	0.000
IND-5. Multi-scalar networks	4.359 (0.682)	0.775			21.259	0.000
<i>Territorial development (TED)</i>			0.814	0.594		
TED-1. Sense of place	4.129 (0.658)	0.736			16.137	0.000
TED-2. External recognition	4.340 (0.623)	0.814			24.201	0.000
TED-3. Environmental accessibility	4.359 (0.726)	0.760			18.435	0.000

The construct reliability (CR) was also assessed, and all indexes (ranging from 0.814 to 0.870) exceeded the recommended threshold (0.7). Next, each latent variable’s Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was observed to evaluate convergent validity. As a result, all AVEs exceed the threshold of 0.5 as determined by Hair *et al.*, (2011). Moreover, a non-parametric bootstrapping process was applied showing a proficient level significance for all indicators with their corresponding latent constructs ( $t > 1.96$  for 5% significance or  $t > 2.585$  for 1% significance).

The results suggest that each observed indicators are related and measuring the correspondent latent variable as demonstrated in Table 4.4. Then, to evaluate the discriminant validity, the Fornell and Larcker (1981) and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio - HTMT (Henseler *et al.*, 2015) criteria were verified. The Fornell-Larcker criterion requires that the square root of each AVE should exceed the correlations between each construct and the other constructs, while the HTMT criterion suggests that the ratio of correlations should not exceed the threshold of 0.9 (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). The results show that all constructs fulfil both criteria (Table 4.5). Thus, the findings revealed that all criteria have been met and that all measures are reliable and valid.

**Table 4.5 Correlations among latent variables**

Constructs	ABC	ASC	IND	INS	PAP	SCD	SND	SUI	TED
ABC	0.792*								
ASC	0.484 0.678**	0.792*							
IND	0.563 0.740**	0.467 0.618**	0.756*						
INS	0.560 0.782**	0.416 0.558**	0.499 0.639**	0.784*					
PAP	0.639 0.877**	0.440 0.605**	0.502 0.641**	0.603 0.808**	0.817*				
SCD	0.337 0.476**	0.233 0.325**	0.422 0.558**	0.330 0.461**	0.323 0.420**	0.859*			
SND	0.360 0.503**	0.505 0.706**	0.375 0.484**	0.279 0.378**	0.254 0.345**	0.342 0.451**	0.801*		
SUI	0.614 0.839**	0.537 0.746**	0.378 0.477**	0.511 0.698**	0.456 0.606**	0.227 0.313**	0.357 0.493**	0.809*	
TED	0.425 0.614**	0.242 0.358**	0.509 0.677**	0.392 0.592**	0.465 0.658**	0.323 0.502**	0.254 0.374**	0.315 0.447**	0.771*

\*Diagonal values corresponding to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, \*\*HTMT values.

Subsequently, in the second stage of model assessment, the scores of the first-order latent variables obtained from the first stage were used as indicators of IPB as a second-order construct (Figure 4.2). In the case of CRs and AVEs, the findings showed the same results for the constructs SDC (0.848, 0.737), IND (0.870, 0.572), and TED (0.814, 0.594), compared to the results of the first stage. The results also indicated that constructs ABC (0.838), PAP (0.779), SUI (0.772), INS (0.767), and ASC (0.739) have the highest impact on the construct IPB, whereas a higher factor loading would be desirable for the dimension SND (0.578). However, according to Hair et al. (2017), only indicators with loading values lower than 0.4 should be eliminated; thus, this indicator was also retained in the analysis.

Figure 4.2 Illustrates the factor loadings of all indicators (all  $p$ -value=0.000). The factor loadings for the first-order constructs are quite close to those we obtained in the first stage (table 4.4). The evaluation of convergent validity revealed that all indicators are significantly linked to their corresponding constructs ( $t > 1.96$  for 5% Sig. or  $t > 2.585$  for 1% Sig.). Compared to the first stage, similar favourable results were obtained regarding discriminant validity, given the Fornell and Larcker's criterion and the HTMT values, to concluding all constructs in the analysis are valid. Moreover, regarding the second-order construct IPB, as results indicated, the AVE (0.560) was higher than the recommended threshold (0.5), and the CR (0.883) exceeded the desirable threshold value (0.70).

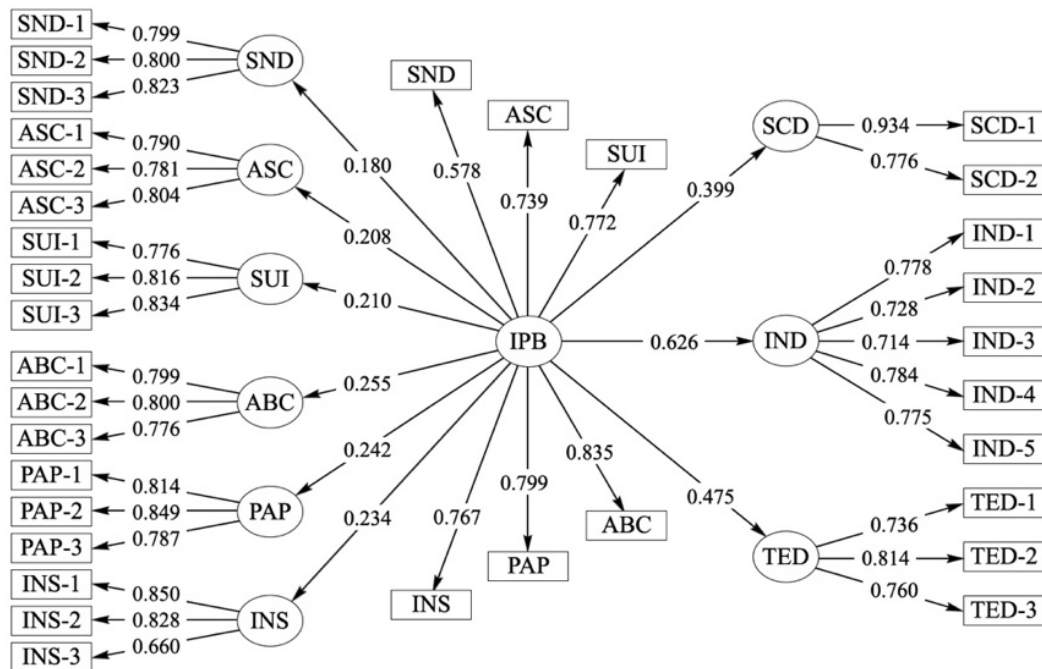


Figure 4.2 Estimates for the final model (stage 2)

#### 4.4.3. Assessing structural model and testing the research hypotheses

The structural model was analysed before testing the research hypotheses. The model was evaluated considering its explanatory and predictive power. First, the explanatory capacity of the model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) for the dependent latent constructs (SCD, IND, and TED). For the constructs SCD and TED the coefficient was 0.163 and 0.230, respectively. However, for the construct IND it was 0.395 which indicates a moderate proportion of variance explained by the IPB construct. Next,  $f^2$  values were calculated as a completion to  $R^2$  measurement, and all exceed the minimum cut-off value (0.02). The results revealed different effect sizes of IPB on the

constructs IND (0.654), TED (0.298), and SCD (0.195). Lastly, through a blindfolding procedure, Stone-Geisser's  $Q^2$  values were computed. All  $Q^2$  values of the consequent constructs were positive, as recommended by Hair et al. (2017).

To test the hypotheses, the path coefficients ( $\beta$ ) in the second-order model were calculated and used along with  $t$ -statistics and  $p$ -values. The results showed that IPB is positively and significantly related to 'institutional developments' in the place ( $\beta = 0.63$ ,  $t = 13.54$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ); hence, the research hypothesis H2 is supported. Similar conclusions can be drawn regarding the relations between IPB and 'sociocultural developments' ( $\beta = 0.40$ ,  $t = 6.84$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), and 'territorial developments' ( $\beta = 0.47$ ,  $t = 11.16$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ); thus, the hypotheses H1 and H3 are also supported.

#### **4.5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to identify important factors for developing an IPB framework and anticipated outcomes of establishing such framework as different aspects of development in the place. Particularly, this study intended to investigate the dimensions constituting IPB and scrutinising its impact on three consequent constructs, namely sociocultural, institutional, and territorial developments in the place. In this sense, three hypotheses were proposed, tested, and found to be statistically significant, meaning IPB is positively related to all consequent constructs.

Initially, this study identified some components fundamental for developing IPB as an effective strategy for promoting social inclusion and community well-being. The results indicated the significance of identified six constructs in the development of IPB framework. The results of the analysis have also revealed that the formation of these constructs and IPB itself rely on several items including the existence of urgent social needs and demands, diversity of actors, their openness for novelty and risk-taking tendency, and actors' capacity for socialisation.

Moreover, to meet social needs, actors should be adept at generating innovative ideas, developing novel solutions, and evaluating their impact. But, even with an elevated level of actor's absorption capacity, addressing the community's social needs is not possible without proper supporting infrastructures. Likewise, developing satisfactory solutions requires availability of integrated grassroots initiatives and social movements that encourage community members' engagement, enhancing cross-sectoral collaborations, and scaling up innovations.

Besides, such a strategy needs institutional supports that help and align actors and community members in building broad coalitions, providing them with sound policies and sources of funding that support innovative initiatives. Moreover, the analysis shows some promising results regarding the consequent constructs and proposed hypotheses of the study. The first hypothesis (H1) supported that IPB is positively related to the sociocultural developments in the place. This means an IBP framework based on SI strategies can transform social relations towards new cross-sectoral synergies. First, these new relations can provide community members with competition and collaboration (Muñiz Martínez, 2016), new social networks (Sevin, 2013, 2014), and multi-scalar associations (Horlings, 2012). Second, such a strategy might bring community members together to change predominant sociocultural values and norms, helping them reframe their sense of belonging, shared values, and collective identity (Horlings, 2012; Kavaratzis, 2012; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014).

The second hypothesis (H2) confirmed that IPB is significantly related to the institutional developments in the place. In this sense, IPB is considered an apt strategy for developing innovative practices, and multi-purpose activities and events (Daspit and Zavattaro, 2014), instituting new multi-scalar social organisations that support social inclusion and community empowerment (Giovanardi, 2015; Paganoni, 2012), promoting socio-political integration by establishing a multi-level governance system (Syssner, 2010) that involves disadvantaged groups in decisions (Merrilees *et al.*, 2014) and supports community-based innovative practices (Domínguez García *et al.*, 2013), and eventually, fostering economic restructuring (Ashworth, 2010; Oliveira, 2015), boosting the local economy.

Lastly, the third hypothesis (H3) verified that IPB is positively related to the territorial developments in the place. Such developments include the improvement in community members' sense of place (Hereźniak and Florek, 2018; Muñiz Martínez, 2016), the establishment of innovative regeneration schemes (Maheshwari *et al.*, 2011; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014) that reflect on the overall image of the place (Florek *et al.*, 2019; Vuorinen and Vos, 2013) and increase its external recognition, and development of new infrastructures that make the place more accessible for all community members as well as other place stakeholders (Freire, 2016; Merrilees *et al.*, 2014).

The hypotheses support the evidence that IPB positively affects the three typologies of developments, but its most substantial impact is on 'institutional developments'. Such a result indicates that the most important consequence of IPB is institutional

developments that it can bring to the place from residents' point of view. Such developments have been regarded as the exploratory learning process that develops intrinsic value for the community at large, making the best use of institutional resources and ensuring the sustainability of the enhanced institutional capacity. Through these processes, institutions can be strengthened both as internal entities and as external impact mechanisms (McGill, 1995).

Internally, institutions involve empowered, well-networked actors who keep developing and applying good learning and adaptive practices. Such entities cover a broad range of activities and initiatives that can transform the living standards of local communities. Externally, they require a multi-level governance system in which institutions can facilitate bottom-up initiatives with top-down support (Baker and Mehmood, 2015). This aspect of institutional development is particularly significant when considering SI as a catalyst for changes to institutions and social transformations, especially its impacts on public policy and practice (Mehmood, 2016) and socio-political integration of communities.

The result also underlines the institutional aspects of SI and its evolutionary characteristics in which socially innovative strategies are embedded within the institutional dynamics of the communities. These strategies support economic, cultural, political, and social changes, promoting the dialogue among institutional, organisational, and individual actors (Martinelli *et al.*, 2010) to develop equitable and sustainable human and place development programmes. Thus, brand managers and policymakers should be concerned with increasing changes in institutional structures, the interrelations between institutions, politics, culture, and the environment they take place, the driving forces that mobilise community members, and the processes wherein new knowledge and innovative ideas and solutions can be developed.

Further, the results have shown that IPB has positive but more moderate impacts on sociocultural and territorial developments. Such a result also furnishes scholars as well as brand managers and policymakers with several ideas to develop innovative and integrated strategies for place branding. First, sociocultural developments depend on community members capacity for societal transformation and their attitude towards sociocultural reframing. However, such a transformation and change require the participation of multiple, diverse actors who have the capacity for socialisation (Unceta *et al.*, 2016), the tendency for risk-taking, and the ability to create socially innovative solutions (Krlev *et al.*, 2014).

This indicates the need for establishing intermediary infrastructures that elevate the level of actors' absorptive and association capacities, which are integral for creating satisfactory solutions and addressing the community's needs and demands. Second, sociocultural reframing relies on the availability of integrated grassroots initiatives and social movements while encouraging actors and community members' engagement, enhancing cross-sectoral collaborations, and scaling up social innovations.

Likewise, several improvements can be made in the context of territorial developments. Based on the proposed framework, these aspects include community members' sense of place, external recognition of the place, and environmental accessibility. Traditionally, the first two concepts have been discussed in a wide range of academic studies and practical programmes. However, the development of socially innovative movements and collective activities reinforced by dynamic governance, increased coalition capacity, and secured financial supports, can benefit both internal and external stakeholders, enhancing their sense of place and place attachment, and increasing place brand's image and external recognition (Healey, 2009).

In terms of the environmental accessibility of the place, the IPB framework focuses on structural and systemic innovations aimed at increasing accessibility in the place for all stakeholders, especially to disadvantaged individuals and people with restricted physical abilities. Such innovations can be developed through innovative regeneration schemes that serve the aims and means of the new policy agenda (Rodriguez, 2009), being crucial in preventing the fragmentation of development plans, reinforcing solidarity and inclusion potential in the place. Furthermore, these innovative schemes can be linked to grassroots initiatives developed by local actors to cope with the consequences of economic and urban restructuring, improving the conditions for place development, social integration, and community empowerment.

#### **4.5.1. Theoretical implications**

The theoretical contributions of this study are twofold. Initially, to address the first research question, the results of the study indicate the significance of several factors for the development of an all-inclusive IPB strategy. These factors include community stakeholders' social needs and demands and positive attitudes and supports from all social, organisational, and institutional actors towards the branding process. Moreover, it is argued that developing such a strategy depends upon community members' association and absorptive capacities, ICT-based communication strategies, community-based

initiatives, social movements, supporting infrastructures, and institutional supports. Although many of these factors have been examined in previous studies, however, no prior study has analysed these factors in such an integrated manner.

Next, to answer the second research question, the possible consequences of IPB on various aspects of the development were examined. The study's findings revealed the positive impact of IPB on sociocultural, institutional, and territorial developments. However, this study's contribution is the development of IPB as an all-inclusive strategy that can lead to social inclusion and overall community well-being by establishing various development aspects in the place. Such developments might provide communities with societal transformation and sociocultural reframing, new multi-scalar networks, more institutional dynamics, multi-level governance, new businesses, economic developments, and an enhanced sense of place, environmental accessibility, and increased external recognition.

#### **4.5.2. Practical implications**

This research has several practical implications. First, it examines the impact of IPB on several aspects of developments in the place, but in an integrated and holistic way. This indicates the significance of the sociocultural, institutional, and territorial developments beyond the economic bottom line that can lead to changes in community values, beliefs, norms, socio-political relations, and overall image. Such a result brings the practitioners' attention to the development of an innovative PB strategy that while seeking to establish the different aspects of developments in the place, integrates all stakeholders (and actors) in the process.

Second, the proposed framework supports the development of innovative practices and multi-purpose activities that might improve the local economy while fostering a more creative atmosphere and competencies. This finding points practitioners towards utilising SI strategies in the development of their branding plans. These innovative strategies can build an understanding of the different aspects of place development, while engaging different actors from all relevant sectors (*e.g.*, public, private, civic).

Third, the IPB framework proposed in this study highlights several opportunities for brand managers and policymakers to develop more inclusive, integrated strategies, including developing a multi-level governance system that involves disadvantaged groups in decisions and new multi-scalar social organisations that support social inclusion and community empowerment.



### 4.5.3. Limitations and further research

This study has limitations that can create avenues for further research. First, the study was limited by the participation of a small group of residents using online platforms due to the need for physical distancing and isolation forced by the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Thus, although PLS is appropriate in the current context of a complex model with a relatively small sample, future research should entail a larger sample size, including public and private actors. Second, this study reflects the viewpoints of residents in different countries with different place realities and cultures who have been combined to reach a convenient sample size. This can potentially affect the results. So, further research should test the potential effect of culture on the stability of the model's results. This could be done using multigroup analysis in PLS-SEM but would require a significant number of participants (*i.e.*, around 200) of each nationality. Moreover, to assess the transferability of results and generalisability of the proposed framework, subsequent studies should anticipate replicating the findings in other geographical contexts like smaller cities, towns, and rural areas. Third, since most of the proposed framework's components and variables are based on social relationships that change over time, extending the longitudinal perspective over several years would be sensible to improve the confrontation of this study's findings with reality. Overall, our study divulges the need for more inter-disciplinary research in PB and SI.

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**Chapter 5.**

# **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

## **5.1. GENERAL DISCUSSION**

This thesis attempted to define three fundamental components of PB in an inclusive and integrated manner. Thus, the whole research was grounded in concepts like participation, inclusivity, and human-centredness, all playing pivotal roles in supporting the overall idea of the thesis.

A key element of this research was to create an IPB framework based on these concepts, elevating it above conventional PB approaches that are solely communication-based and market-oriented. According to the findings of this research, it can be argued that the followings are the most significant aspects to develop an IPB strategy:

### **5.1.1. Leading role of internal stakeholders**

Traditionally, PB has been targeted at external stakeholders only through communication tools and promotional approaches. However, it is often the internal stakeholders who actualise the brand's experience (Vasudevan, 2008). As a result, in recent literature, internal stakeholders have received increased attention, and their critical role has been highlighted in multiple studies (*e.g.*, François Lecompte *et al.*, 2017; Helmi *et al.*, 2019; Lucarelli, 2018a). Moreover, although several studies have referred to a wide range of internal stakeholders, there is neither any comprehensive categorisation nor theoretical framework that includes all internal stakeholders of PB. Despite the significance of diverse stakeholders in PB being apparent conceptually and practically (Muñiz Martínez, 2016), and the growing evidence within the interdisciplinary PB literature (Braun *et al.*, 2013; Daspit and Zavattaro, 2014), empirical studies on the role of internal stakeholders in PB literature is relatively scarce (Saraniemi and Komppula, 2019).

However, while a variety of views regarding the relevance of internal stakeholders (Glińska and Florek, 2013b; Sartori *et al.*, 2012; Wagner and Peters, 2009) has been acknowledged and confirmed, the results of our study indicated the importance of internal stakeholders as the most integral part of the PB theory and practice (Braun *et al.*, 2013; Compte-Pujol *et al.*, 2018; Hanna and Rowley, 2013b; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014). The literature has identified some distinct gaps regarding a holistic view of internal stakeholders, their objectives, and their role in the PB process. Therefore, it is argued that there is a need to adopt a more integrated approach wherein all internal stakeholders engage in the process of PB co-creation.

Besides, internal stakeholders tend to hold more diverse place associations and perceptions than their external counterparts. This network of associations enables internal

stakeholders to develop the brand's strategy, structure, and communications, but the multiplicity of these associations complicates the development of an integrated brand. However, assembling all stakeholders into a theoretical framework is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, given their multiplicity and diversity of their interests and needs. Taking these factors into consideration, internal stakeholders were categorised based on two relevant variables: first, their sources of influence over the PB (power, legitimacy, and urgency), and second, their roles in the branding process.

Finally, our study underscored the need to place greater emphasis on the process itself. It is argued that PB is a complex, cost-intensive, and time-consuming process, thus, developing an integrated branding framework that could be prototyped and assessed before the final implementation phase, is necessary. The results emphasised the necessity of a transdisciplinary approach to PB as a strategic, iterative, and dynamic process that involves active engagement and support of all internal stakeholders.

### **5.1.2. Human-centredness as an alternative approach**

Place branding is the process in which meanings and values are co-created in relational networks and through a set of social interactions among all stakeholders. Nevertheless, the sustainability of a place brand depends on active participation of stakeholders throughout the process. But to secure the long-term participation, it is necessary to promote stakeholder engagement while encouraging consensus over values, meanings, experiences, and other distinct place-brand attributes.

Recently, there has been a growing interest in stakeholder participation in PB. This remarkable shift towards the participatory approach to PB can be associated with several endogenous and exogenous factors like broader engagement of place stakeholders (Kavaratzis, 2012), internal branding strategies (Braun *et al.*, 2013), stakeholders' lived experience (Löfgren, 2014), and the exchange of ideas, information, and perspectives among them (Hereźniak and Florek, 2018). Within the current paradigm, much of the literature devoted to internal stakeholders who play crucial roles in the co-creation, development, and management of place-brands (Zenker and Erfgen, 2014).

Participatory place branding enticed the attention of scholars in the field. Several authors have discussed inclusive methodologies for PPB and proposed different models that address aspects of the process (Florek *et al.*, 2019; Ntounis and Kavaratzis, 2017), while others (Jernsand and Kraff, 2015) approached the concept from a different point of view, advocating for innovative methods to integrate design as an empathetic process that



can foster community participation. Following the second group, this study has also stressed that adding a design-driven, human-centred approach to the existing PPB frameworks might benefit the process by fostering new social relations, developing new meanings and values, facilitating mutual exchanges of perspectives, and enriching stakeholders' imaginations. Human-centredness transcends the limitations of the technocentric systems by adopting concepts such as creativity, dialogue, equality, social cohesion, and sustainability while reflecting on the philosophies of democratic participation, emancipation, and valorisation of diversity (Gill, 1996).

The debate here is focused on stakeholder relations, arguing that a design-driven approach has the potential to generate solutions and possibilities that only can emerge through empathy, knowledge exchange, iterative experimentations, and learning by failing.

The general philosophy of human-centredness is based on sociocultural developments, inclusion, and innovation. Besides, human-centredness questions 'the one best way' and 'one-size-fits-all' approaches, enabling stakeholders to negotiate their roles and objective. Thus, it appears well-suited to address social challenges since it is grounded in the adoption of several generative mindsets, underpinned by empathy and creative confidence (Schweitzer *et al.*, 2016), abductive reasoning (Beverland *et al.*, 2015), and tolerance of ambiguity and failure (Kolko, 2015). Incorporating human-centred approach into the branding process paves the way for an inclusive strategy. In this context, PB is seen as a context-sensitive and innovative process that embraces diversity and ambiguity and considers human knowledge, experience, and perceptual skills as critical factors.

In addition, the most distinguishing contribution of human-centredness to PB is the up-scaling effect that arises from stakeholders' mobilisation, engagement, and empowerment in value co-creation processes and making changes in existing conditions. These changes can involve a wide range of innovations from an idea or intervention to a social movement or a combination of these possibilities in the form of a structural change in social relations. These innovations not only meet social needs and develop desirable outcomes but also enhance society's capacity to act.

By this definition, the HCPB can be viewed as a strategic but inclusive process that engages and empowers actors and stakeholders interested in solving social problems and generates new social capital through the diffusion of innovative social relations. In this view, PB activities should focus on clarifying purposes, motivating stakeholders, and

encouraging dialogue among them before proceeding to identify the means of implementation.

Finally, it is discussed that by applying a human-centred approach, novel ideas emerge from a variety of stakeholders directly involved in social challenges that need to be addressed. These ideas then should be evaluated, improved, and turned into more efficient solutions—in the form of innovative services, systems, and environments—supporting more sustainable lifestyles (Bannon and Ehn, 2013). This way, the human-centred paradigm acts as an intermediary for the transition towards sustainable branding methods that bring about fundamental changes in various levels from small-scale everyday life solutions to the large-scale transformations where the changes happen to the whole cities, regions, nations.

### **5.1.3. Innovation, inclusion, and integration**

This research was used these keywords as a guide to develop an integrated framework for PB that is aimed at addressing various aspects of development in the place, meeting community members' latent needs, and bringing about structural and institutional changes. Thus, innovation is considered as a necessary component for such a framework as it can provide communities with wealth and well-being (Go and Govers, 2010), economic growth and success (Taecharunroj *et al.*, 2019), and endogenous development (Donner *et al.*, 2017).

Integrating innovation capability into the PB process provides opportunities to establish a culture of innovation, to learn from stakeholder engagement, and to activate innovative practices (Daspit and Zavattaro, 2014). Innovation can help to increase the visibility of the place and raise people's awareness regarding the qualities of their place (Horlings, 2012).

However, inclusion and integrity cannot be achieved through conventional innovation systems due to the incapacity of existing structures and policies to solve the most pressing economic and social problems (Correia *et al.*, 2016). To tackle the major social challenges currently facing the global community, there needs to be alternative innovation strategies that enable social transformation, generate new ways of social organisation, allowing communities to change existing structures and relations and develop new social systems. As such, SI strategies have emerged to make deliberate social changes (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2017; Portales, 2019).

Social innovation has the potential to empower stakeholders for creating novel solutions to social challenges (Moulaert *et al.*, 2013; Nicholls *et al.*, 2015). It can generate long-term social change (Baker and Mehmood, 2015) that affect social interactions and may lead to the formation of new social relations, social practices, social institutions, and social capital (Parra, 2013). Social innovation aims to create a systemic change that involves social interactions, business models, laws and regulations, infrastructures and entirely new ways of thinking and doing things (Unceta *et al.*, 2020). Social innovation has also been stated as a simultaneous action to create public good by identifying social problems and using innovative ideas to bring positive social change and improve social well-being (Nicholls *et al.*, 2015).

Moreover, SI has also been proven to have enormous impacts on social structures, which from a strategic point of view have much in common with PPB. These impacts include promoting greater stakeholders' participation and engagement in the process, changing social structures and relations, and increasing society's socio-political capacity to act (Portales, 2019). But social transformation and changes in social relations could only be possible through structural modifications (Correia *et al.*, 2016), systemic changes (Grimm *et al.*, 2013), and spatial (place) developments (Moulaert, 2010). Besides, SI is a collaborative process that takes place among community members and in a social setting, thus, it should be led to alternative developments (Moulaert and Mehmood, 2020) far beyond the economic logic (Jessop *et al.*, 2013) and more relevant to individuals' socio-cultural, institutional, and spatial expectations (Krlev *et al.*, 2014; Martinelli *et al.*, 2010; Sørensen and Torfing, 2015). In this vein, we argued that any integrated initiative or inclusive plan based on SI strategies should lead to:

- a) '*Sociocultural developments*' in the place that include transformation of social relations towards new cross-sectoral synergies and reframing predominant sociocultural values, beliefs, and norms (Bund *et al.*, 2015; Nicholls *et al.* 2015).
- b) '*Institutional developments*' in the place that include possibility of creating innovative practices and multi-purpose activities, improvements in local economic, development of multi-level governance system that involves disadvantaged groups in decisions and supports community-based innovative practices, and development of new multi-scalar social organisations that support social inclusion and community empowerment (Baker and Mehmood, 2015; Krlev *et al.*, 2014; Unceta *et al.*, 2020).
- c) '*Territorial developments*' in the place that include improvement in the community members' sense of place, establishment of innovative regeneration schemes that

reflect on the overall image of the place and increase its external recognition, and development of new infrastructures that make the place more accessible for all community members (Moulaert and Mehmood, 2020; Vasin *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, through this study, several theoretical and practical implications have emerged that warrant the further discussion.

## **5.2. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY**

The main objective of this thesis was to conceptualise the IPB framework. To this end, three separate but intertwined studies conducted to first identify and classify the place brand's internal stakeholders and to investigate their role in the development of PB. Second, to scrutinise the possibility of developing an alternative approach to PB towards a more human-centred process base on the design-driven mindsets. Lastly, to examine the possibility of developing an integrated framework for PB based on SI strategies.

The **first study** has addressed some gaps in the literature of PB but from internal stakeholders' perspective. Therefore, through a systematic search, 55 qualified research studies on PB were identified, reviewed, and analysed. This study's findings showed no existing consensus over the type/role of internal stakeholders in PB research. Its findings, however, indicated the significance of stakeholders' social interactions, collective experiences, and affective engagements in co-creation of an inclusive place brand. The first study has provided an alternative perspective that underlines the development of integrated PB frameworks by providing stakeholders with motivational and emotional incentives, capturing their creativity and imagination, and encouraging them to participate in the process. Such frameworks entail a transdisciplinary approach to PB as a dynamic process that depends on all internal stakeholders' active engagement. The study further scrutinised the three most related research topics on internal stakeholders, including co-creation, internal branding, and participatory PB.

The **second study** has been developed based on the findings of the first study. In this study, PB has been considered as process of co-creating meanings and values in relational networks and through social interactions among all stakeholders who encounter, use, and live the brands. Therefore, it is argued such a process should be formed through shared knowledge and experience, purpose and vision, and roles and responsibility of the place-brand stakeholders. However, such a process also needs alternative approaches that, while engaging and empowering stakeholders, support them in reaching a consensus over the values, meanings, experiences, and other distinct place-brand attributes. Moreover, the

study outlined promising avenues for applying a design-driven human-centred approach in PB by drawing on concepts like internal and participatory branding. The study's main discussion is formed around the idea that such an approach can serve as an intermediary for the transition towards integrated place brands.

The **third study** was also following the previous one, aiming to identify crucial factors for developing an IPB framework based on SI strategies and to examine the possible consequences of such a framework. Thus, a conceptual model was developed including several constructs extracted through an intensive review on SI literature. A survey was conducted from April to June 2021 with residents of multiple cities in Canada, Iran, and Portugal (n=256). The PLS-SEM method was used to assess the model and proposed hypotheses and to determine whether IPB could be outlined as a second-order construct. The results indicated the importance of underlying constructs for developing an IPB framework. Moreover, all hypotheses were found statistically significant, meaning IPB is positively related to various aspects of developments in the place.

### **5.3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

In the **first study**, attempts have been made to identify internal stakeholders associated with PB and to define their roles in the process. Thus, a systematic literature review was adopted to discover factors/items affecting internal stakeholders' involvement in PB. The first study's findings imply some critical items that might have considerable impact on the development of an inclusive PB. These items include 'internal branding' which as a strategy can provide the chance of a fit between the identity and the image of the place brand, increasing stakeholders' sense of place and place attachment, and encouraging them to live the brand; 'co-creation' that involves the process of providing and promoting dialogue among internal stakeholders to enhance alignment and consensus over the brand values, vision and meaning, as well as the creation of the whole place-brand products, and place-brand experiences; and 'participation' of internal stakeholders in the process, as much as possible that not only integrates them into the branding process and provides them the basis to perform substantial roles like brand ambassadorship and citizenship, but also can show them the best way in which the place brand should be built.

These three items are considered as foundations of developing a participatory PB strategy. Moreover, the results of this study revealed that it would be more effective if inclusive PB frameworks could be prototyped and get assessed before implementation. The study then highlighted that achieving such a framework requires an alternative,

transdisciplinary approach to PB to make it an iterative and dynamic process, aiming at increased social relations and inclusion. It is argued that such a process might bring about new social interactions and affective engagements of internal stakeholders that are necessary for making real changes in the place and its social environment. However, engagement or desire for change is not enough for stakeholders to be considered relevant and more importantly, to be the brands' advocates and ambassadors. They need motivational and emotional incentives to be involved in PB and must believe in the brand's core values, live the brand, to contribute to branding initiatives.

In addition, the literature analysis indicated some gaps in the literature that can be used as a direction for future research, especially in terms of approaches, frameworks, and empirical foundations promoting the role of internal stakeholders in PB. For instance, the results indicated that further studies needed to address internal stakeholders' capacity for absorbing, applying, and disseminating new forms of knowledge and their capacity for socialisation and taking part in social movements and organisations. Future studies also encouraged to investigate PB as a transformational tool, providing internal stakeholders with the opportunity to involve and change the place's physical and social structures.

For this purpose, it is argued that more studies with a participatory and citizen-centric (human-centred) approach are required, aiming at identifying the necessary opportunities and motivations to integrate more internal stakeholders into the decision-making process. Therefore, forthcoming studies encouraged to be more focused on concepts like creativity and innovation and evaluating their impacts on various aspects of development in the place, the improvement of infrastructure and institutional settings, the promotion of the place brand's image, the development of human capital and cultural change.

Finally, the study's findings have stressed a more inclusive and integrated approach towards the PB process yet to be scrutinised, which undoubtedly can broaden the scope and illustrate a bigger picture of such a topic.

Following these findings, in the **second study**, we have tried to examine the possibility of articulating an alternative approach for PB based on key concepts like internal branding and participatory branding. However, to extend the scope of the research and making sure that every necessary aspect of inclusiveness and integrity is considered, the participation paradigm has been explored within design disciplines since it has a long history of employing such an approach in both theory and practice. To this end, the concept of 'participatory design' has been reviewed and common themes of PD and PPB processes have been identified in detail.

Apart from several identical aspects identified between two paradigms, the findings revealed that one of the most important objectives of PD is to harmonise all stakeholders' experiences, insights, and knowledge towards a shared vision and to develop outcomes that benefit everyone. It is an evolutionary approach that brings about a dramatic shift in the prioritisation of people-centred decisions over technology, organisation, or market-oriented preferences.

From this view, therefore, any participation-based strategy should expand its focus and approach to establish a strong link with civil society, embracing more broad questions of human-centred social change. Consequently, human-centredness was introduced as an approach that, in addition to increasing meaningful participation and developing alternative ideas and solutions for place development, can introduce new values to PB. This means that successful adoption of the human-centred approach can facilitate and accelerate efforts towards strategic innovations, bringing novel values to stakeholders in all public, private, and civic sectors, and making systemic and structural changes. In this regard, the study highlighted three significant mindsets that play essential roles in the development of any human-centred frameworks:

First, human-centredness calls upon 'empathy' to acknowledge and address insight into stakeholders' needs, aspirations, and desires. Empathy is considered as a value that enhance stakeholders' ability to aspire, cultivate, imagine, and share their objectives as well as their lived experiences. In many disciplines (*e.g.*, management, product design, and service innovation) the concept of empathy has been adopted as a means for enabling innovation. However, while empathy has been contemplated in several fields of research, here we argue that it has been neglected in PB research, and that it can function as a frame of reference to bring together different opinions through new networks and social relations, and by promoting dialogue among stakeholders.

Moreover, human-centredness relies on 'abduction reasoning' and 'learning through experimentation' for generating multiple alternative solutions in decision contexts and particularly when uncertainty and ambiguity are at the highest level. The former mindset intervenes between logical and emotional decisions, mediating a variety of tensions between possibilities and constraints. To imagine potential solutions, it makes creative leaps and stretches beyond the obvious and feasible ideas. Based more on assertion than evidence, abduction reasoning enriches the quality of the discussions by introducing novel ideas and mediating different voices and views to a unique narrative.

This mindset enables a human-centred branding framework to reveal unmet needs and highlight various perceptions of people about the brand. In addition, it can help align stakeholders' attitudes towards a strategic vision for the place brand.

The latter mindset enables stakeholders to get involved in the actualisation of ideas and identifying new ways to develop effective strategies. It is through the application of learning by failing and iterative prototyping that stakeholders can challenge the current situation and offer more effective solutions that are assessed against the realities of the place and its available resources. Rather than cautiously reducing mistakes and making appropriate choices, a learning by failing mindset embraces the concept of risk and opens the door to exploration, portraying other possibilities for improvement and novelty.

Taking all these mindsets into account under the umbrella term 'human-centredness', this approach can pave the way for innovation in a place where a wide range of solutions from products and services to processes and procedures, policies and strategies can be proposed. Like so, human-centredness can be considered as an alternative approach for PB that transcends the limitation of the dominant top-down, market-oriented approaches by adopting concepts such as creativity, dialogue, equality, imagination, and innovation.

This approach thereby offers a novel PB framework based on social inclusion and sociocultural development. This discussion set the foundation for a more innovative, inclusive, and integrated approach to both theory and practice of PB. Accordingly, it is argued that a HCPB can only be realised through the integration of what is truly meaningful to people and socially desirable with what is strategically and technically feasible and organisationally sustainable.

The study also highlighted a considerable scope for research on PB and SI, especially in terms of vital objectives such as community development, social cohesion, systemic/structural change, and social transformation.

Ultimately, in the **third study**, factors necessary to develop an IPB framework were identified, and its possible consequences were examined. The study examined underlying constructs constituting the IPB as well as how they influence its consequent constructs (*i.e.*, sociocultural, institutional, and territorial developments). A literature review of SI was conducted to identify the major themes, dimensions, and items that were proposed and considered key elements of previous conceptual models or theoretical frameworks.

This led to the identification of six main dimensions and 18 related items that were further used as underlying constructs directly influencing the development of the IPB framework. Moreover, an analysis of the literature revealed that SI is often considered to



be an effective and feasible strategy when the mobilisation of all resources to achieve various aspects of development is the main objective. Thus, three development themes (sociocultural, institutional, and territorial) were identified and considered as consequent constructs and potential outcomes of IPB.

To accomplish the objectives of this study, a conceptual model and three hypotheses was proposed in which IPB is considered as a second-order construct, positively related to all resulting constructs. The model and hypotheses were then tested using PLS with a Mixed Two-Step Approach.

Based on the analysis, IPB was positively associated with the sociocultural developments of the place, suggesting that it may bring about the transformation of social relations towards new cross-sectoral synergies, and provide community members with competition and collaboration, as well as multi-scalar associations. Additionally, results showed that it can increase community members' involvement in the transformation process and assist them in making changes to dominant sociocultural structures and norms, improving their sense of belonging, shared values, and collective identity.

Next, the analysis revealed that IPB is positively related to institutional development in the place, making it an ideal strategy for developing innovative practices, developing multipurpose events and activities, and establishing new social organisations that promote social inclusion and community empowerment. In addition, the results indicate that such a strategy can promote socio-political integration through multi-level governance and by involving disadvantaged groups in decision-making, supporting grassroots initiatives, and eventually, fostering economic restructuring and boosting local economies.

Lastly, as shown by the analysis, IPB is positively related to territorial developments in the place, concluding that it is likely to contribute to a higher sense of place among the community members. It is indicated that IPB can also facilitate the establishment of innovative regeneration schemes that reflect on the overall image of the place and enhance its external recognition, as well as the creation of new infrastructures that make the place more accessible for all community members of the community and other stakeholder groups.

Moreover, IPB is analysed as an integrated, innovation-driven strategy that promotes social inclusion and leads to community well-being. Research findings suggested that several factors contribute to the development of an IPB strategy, including social needs and demands, communities' association capacity, access to supporting infrastructure, the

absorptive capacity of the actors, existence of innovative practices and processes, and availability and effectiveness of institutional supports.

Based on these findings, it is evident that to meet social needs, actors must be able to generate innovative ideas, develop novel solutions, and evaluate the outcomes of applying those solutions. Besides, while being open to changes, they must also be prepared to accept the risks associated with implementing novel ideas. But it is obvious that even with an elevated level of actors' absorptive capacity, the community's social needs cannot be completely met unless there is a proper supporting infrastructure.

Consequently, the availability of intermediary infrastructures is paramount to further developments of the process. Likewise, the development of satisfactory solutions requires an extensive range of grassroots initiatives and social movements that engage community members and encourage cross-sector collaboration while scaling up innovations. Additionally, such a process requires institutional support to aid and align actors and community members in building broad coalitions and to provide them with sound policies and funding resources that are effective in meeting social needs.

#### **5.4. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

To conclude, there are some limitations to this study as well as directions for the future research. Regarding the first study, results of the literature analysis revealed that PB literature is still open for development, and there are gaps in terms of approaches, frameworks, and empirical foundations regarding internal stakeholders. Regardless of the methodologic limitations of examining specific groups of internal stakeholders that make it difficult to generalise the results to other places or stakeholders, further studies are needed to address the level of internal stakeholders' knowledge of PB, brand citizenship behaviour, and the role of other influential concepts like culture, meanings, values, and personality of the place-brands from internal stakeholders' perspective.

Another limitation is related to the concept of time as a substantial factor since tangible characteristics of a place change over time and its intangible characteristics and associations that are related to the stakeholders may change considerably. Therefore, longitudinal studies are required through which changes in a place can be observed and measured.

Besides, since change is a significant factor for developing and sustaining a place-brand, further studies should investigate PB as a transformational tool for internal stakeholders, helping them to change the place's physical/social structure. Consequently,

it is necessary to conduct studies with a human-centred approach, aiming at identifying the necessary motivations to integrate all internal stakeholders into the decision-making process. Thus, forthcoming studies should more focus on concepts like creativity and innovation, evaluating their impacts on various aspects of development in the place.

Second study provides a clear description of human-centredness as an alternative approach for PB. Although the study introduces the concept of HCPB as a novel approach to PB, further research is needed to ensure whether this approach is indeed effective, and the use of case studies will be an imperative tool for investigating this line of enquiry. This opens new avenues for future research, where the application of human-centred mindsets might provide additional insights into the theory and practice of PB.

Third study has also several limitations that can create avenues for further research. First, the study was limited by the participation of a small group of residents using online platforms due to the need for physical distancing and isolation forced by the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Thus, although PLS is appropriate in the current context, future research should entail a larger sample size, including public and private actors. Second, this study reflects the viewpoints of residents in different countries with different place realities and cultures who have been combined to reach a convenient sample size. This can potentially affect the results. So, further research should test the potential effect of culture on the stability of the model's results. This could be done using multigroup analysis in PLS-SEM but would require a significant number of participants of each nationality. Third, since most of the proposed framework's components and variables are based on social relationships that change over time, extending the longitudinal perspective over several years would be sensible to improve the confrontation of this study's findings with reality. Overall, our study divulges the need for inter-disciplinary research on PB, PD, and SI.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## APPENDIX 2. QUESTIONNAIRE

Invitation

### Survey on the Model of Integrated Place Branding

**Dear** .....,  
Greetings.

You are kindly invited to complete an online questionnaire about an integrated place branding framework based on social innovation strategies. Such a place branding strategy aims to foster social inclusion and wellbeing through community empowerment, improving social relations and creating new meanings and values. The development of such a strategy undoubtedly requires distinct items and it can also lead to various results. Therefore, I hereby would like to invite you to indulge us with your invaluable opinion that will improve the credibility of our conceptual framework.

I also would like to express my gratitude for your time and considerations.

If you wish to participate in the survey, please click on the link below.

[link](#)

**Note:**

No personal information will be collected, and survey responses will be collated anonymously employing an identifying number known only to the participant and investigation team. All responses received in the study will be strictly confidential, and your identity will not be divulged. Direct quotes to free-text answers may be used as part of the study report, but these will not be traceable back to you. The data derived from this survey might be used for an article in academic journals and presented at conferences.

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The Research Centre for Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being (CinTurs), Faculty of Economics, University of Algarve.

Best regards,  
Research team.

Dear participant,

Imagine you are living in a city/town that already has a brand. However, the current city brand needs to evolve and be transformed into an inclusive brand that involves all citizens and their needs. The purpose of this survey is to find out how you perceive such an integrated place brand. Such a branding strategy aims to promote social inclusion and wellbeing by empowering communities, improving social relations, and creating new values. The development of such a strategy undoubtedly requires distinct items, but it can also have several outcomes. In the following, you are being asked to express your opinion regarding the items assumed to be crucial for developing an integrated place branding and the possible results such a branding strategy might bring about.

**1<sup>st</sup> part:**

*To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following items?*

1. An integrated city brand should be developed based on the social needs/problems of citizens.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
2. Social movements aimed at solving social problems are important for integrated city brand.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
3. Social initiatives aimed at making social changes are essential in building an integrated city brand.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
4. An integrated city brand should reflect the diversity of actors involved in social movements.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
5. The ability of citizens to socialise is crucial to develop an integrated city brand.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
6. The ability of citizens to accept innovative ideas is crucial for integrated city brand.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree

**2<sup>nd</sup> part:**

*In your opinion, how important are the following items for building an integrated city brand?*

7. Availability of digital infrastructures that are essential for building new social relations and networks.  
 Not important    Slightly important    Neutral    Important    Very important
8. Citizens' ability to use digital technologies and take part in the digital world.  
 Not important    Slightly important    Neutral    Important    Very important
9. The quality of e-services delivered by the local authorities to the citizens.  
 Not important    Slightly important    Neutral    Important    Very important
10. Citizens' ability to gain and share new knowledge, experience, and skills.  
 Not important    Slightly important    Neutral    Important    Very important
11. Availability of proper mechanisms for sharing ideas, information, and knowledge.  
 Not important    Slightly important    Neutral    Important    Very important
12. Availability and diversity of continuous educational activities and training programmes.  
 Not important    Slightly important    Neutral    Important    Very important

**3<sup>rd</sup> part:**

*Which of the following items can increase the likelihood of achieving an integrated city brand?*

13. Possibility of citizen participation in community-based initiatives and social movements.  
 Definitely not    Probably not    Possibly    Probably    Definitely
14. Availability of start-ups focused on social transformation and community wellbeing.  
 Definitely not    Probably not    Possibly    Probably    Definitely
15. Availability of business incubators, start-up accelerators, and venture-builders.  
 Definitely not    Probably not    Possibly    Probably    Definitely
16. Availability of local policies that support and promote the development of social organisations.  
 Definitely not    Probably not    Possibly    Probably    Definitely
17. Availability of a multi-level collaboration among citizens, public authorities, and local businesses.  
 Definitely not    Probably not    Possibly    Probably    Definitely
18. Availability of financial resources (public funds) dedicated to improving the citizens' quality of life.  
 Definitely not    Probably not    Possibly    Probably    Definitely

**4<sup>th</sup> part:**

*To what extent do you agree/disagree that an integrated city branding should result in the following items?*

19. Development of new social relations among citizens to improve their quality of life.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
20. Promoting cultural views and changing predominant social values, beliefs, and norms.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
21. Enhancement in citizens' sense of belonging, shared values, and collective identity.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
22. Improvement in the average income earned per person in the city/town (local income per capita).  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
23. Enabling equal opportunities for all citizens to access critical resources.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
24. Development of new activities, events, and initiatives that increase citizens' social interactions.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
25. Development of multilevel governance that involve citizens in decision-making processes.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
26. Development of new policies, regulations, and procedures that support innovative practices.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
27. Development of new networks and social organisations that empower unprivileged citizens.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
28. Enhancement in citizens' ties with their city and promoting their sense of place.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
29. Development of new urban regeneration initiatives that improve the overall image of the city.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree
30. Improvement in city infrastructures that ensure a more accessible place for all citizens.  
 Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree

**5<sup>th</sup> part:**

*Personal information*

Gender	Age	Level of education	City of residence	Length of residence
<input type="checkbox"/> Female	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Primary education	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Male		<input type="checkbox"/> Secondary education		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Master's		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral		