Between branding and being: how are inclusive city branding and inclusive city practices related?

Run Zhao and Jurian Edelenbos
Department of Public Administration and Sociology,
Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, and

Martin de Jong
Rotterdam School of Management and Erasmus School of Law,
Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands and
Institute for Global Public Policy, Fudan University, Shanghai, China

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between being an inclusive city and branding oneself as such, as more cities adopt the inclusive city concept as part of their brand identity.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper builds theory by introducing a typology that categorizes cities based on their level of inclusion and degree of branding, supplemented by an analysis of the branding practices and identities. Integrating the literature on inclusive city and city branding, with a specific focus on the inherent conflict between their sharing and competing attributes, this research postulates that a city may choose to engage in being inclusive and branding itself as such in various ways depending on its dominant motivations of altruism or entrepreneurialism.

Findings – Four distinct types of inclusive city branding are identified: inclusion ambassadors (high inclusion and high branding); innate champions (high inclusion and low branding); façade marketers (low inclusion and high branding); and silent segregators (low inclusion and low branding). Furthermore, it underscores that inclusive city branding is shaped by the interplay of entrepreneurialism and altruism, not just a city's inclusion. Different branding practices, such as media-generated images, narratives and events, are emphasized when entrepreneurialism is the primary motivation, whereas iconic architecture buildings, flagship projects and long-term policies are more associated with altruism.

Originality/value – This study develops a typology to unravel the paradoxical aspects of inclusive city branding. Examining the intersection of city branding motivations and practices enriches existing literature. Moreover, its findings offer valuable insights for cities grappling with the

implementation of contentious inclusive branding strategies, thereby bridging theory with practical applications.

Introduction

The concept of an inclusive city has become a prevalent discourse in both academia and policymaking. Cities are increasingly engaging in inclusive city initiatives not only to address urban issues such as exclusion and inequality but also to advance social cohesion and economic prosperity for all (Anttiroiko and de Jong, 2020; Espino, 2015). Simultaneously, some cities acknowledge the value of inclusion in making themselves attractive and fostering identification; thus, an increasing number of cities are incorporating inclusion into their branding strategies, positioning themselves as inclusive cities (Belabas and George, 2023; Cleave and Arku, 2020; Nederhand *et al.*, 2023).

However, there can be contradictions and tensions between inclusive city and city branding. Inclusive cities advocate that everyone can equally share and contribute to the city's prosperity (Anttiroiko and de Jong, 2020). It embodies a set of practices and policies ensuring equal access to opportunities and resources for all residents, particularly those who are marginalized within the urban context (Alessandria, 2016; Liu *et al.*, 2020). Yet city branding often focuses on competing for talent, investment, tourists and other resources that can enhance their domestic and international competitiveness (cf. Jokela, 2020; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008). There appear to be conflicts of target audience and purpose between being an inclusive city and branding oneself as such. The competitive and selective attributes of city branding are at odds with the vision of an inclusive city and may even generate inequality and exclusion, such as excessive tourism and gentrification (Bonakdar and Audirac, 2020; Gibson, 2005). If this is the case, why would cities brand themselves as inclusive cities? What are their motivations?

Research indicates that branding oneself as an inclusive city enhances a city's competitive standing, attracting assets crucial for urban growth (Alsayel *et al.*, 2022; Collett, 2014). For example, the Open for Business City Rating reflects the advantages of being an open and inclusive city in terms of business attractiveness (Keller *et al.*, 2022). However, cities that brand themselves as inclusive cities may not necessarily be the ones that are. The city of Richmond, Virginia, for example, recently announced its inclusion brand, "Richmond Real," but the city ranks 262 out of 274 in a US inclusive city ranking (Urban Institute, 2016). Netizens of Richmond complained that the government spending money on logos was a waste of money and should focus on the city's actual problems (Layne, 2022). In contrast, Zurich was ranked as the most inclusive city worldwide (D&L Partners, 2019), but it does not brand itself as an inclusive city.

In addition to competitive positioning and economic advancement, the branding of inclusive cities may also be for urban renewal and improving residents' quality of life (Cleave and Arku, 2020). As Belabas *et al.* (2020) argue, branding as an inclusive city is an important policy agenda for inclusive urban development and governance. For example, the "welcoming city" programs in three US cities, Atlanta, Charlotte and Nashville, promote brand inclusion by providing services to all residents regardless of immigration status. This not only enhances the cities' image but also integrates inclusive values into government policies (Mcdaniel, 2018).

The above analysis illustrates that while the branding of inclusive cities may seem contradictory, varying motivations can lead to diverse practices and subsequent impacts. Therefore, this paper aims to answer the following questions:

> *Q1.* How are inclusive cities and city branding related? How can we understand this (mis)match through the establishment of a typology?

Q2. How and why do cities brand themselves as inclusive cities? What are the underlying motivations and how do they manifest themselves in branding practices?

To answer these questions, this study proposes a typology integrating the dynamics between city inclusion and the degree of inclusive city brand-building efforts. This is subsequently complemented by a combined analysis of branding practices and identities.

Literature review
City branding and its motivation
The concept of city branding refers to the various strategies and practices used by political organizations and local governments to develop, market and communicate a city's unique and compelling images and shared values (Braun, 2012; Kavaratzis, 2004). The process of city branding typically commences with the identification of a preferred brand identity, followed by the strategic implementation of various branding practices to effectively imprint the associated brand image in people's minds (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008; Lu and de Jong, 2019). Researchers have reached a consensus that city branding practice is not only the design of media-generated images but also includes the adoption of narratives and storytelling, eye-catching events, iconic architecture, flagship projects and long-term policies (Bonakdar and Audirac, 2020; Eshuis *et al.*, 2013; Ma *et al.*, 2021).

The motivations for city branding have been a key area of debate in recent years. In the past decades, a large body of research has argued that city branding is driven by entrepreneurialism (Andersson and James, 2018; Gulsrud *et al.*, 2013). According to Harvey (1989, p. 8), urban entrepreneurialism relies "on a public-private partnership focusing on investment and economic development with the speculative construction of place rather than amelioration of conditions within a particular territory as its immediate (though by no means exclusive) political and economic goal." The evolution of city branding parallels the transformation of the entrepreneurial city (Jokela, 2020). As Anholt (2006) believes, cities work on their brands when the image no longer helps to support their economic, political, or development goals.

Driven by entrepreneurialism, city branding serves as a strategic instrument to stimulate economic development, attract investment and enhance competitive advantage. In this context, branding practices such as logo images and slogan narratives that are often used by companies and products are increasingly used in city branding (Kavaratzis, 2004; Ma *et al.*, 2021). Despite being a seemingly effective strategy for urban competition, city branding driven by entrepreneurialism has been criticized for being superficial or contrived (Andersson and James, 2018; Jokela, 2020). Zenker suggests that "If you do place branding without something good to communicate, it is a waste of time—you should rather spend the time and money to improve the place itself. Once you change something, or once there is a real delivery, then you need place branding to get this into the heads of your (potential and existing) place consumers" (Kaefer, 2021, p. 264).

The consensus suggesting that entrepreneurialism primarily motivates city branding has emerged, yet recent research introduces additional perspectives emphasizing the presence of altruistic motivations behind it (Andersson and James, 2018; McCann, 2013). Altruism in city branding involves motives beyond profit, aiming to benefit society and enhance the well-being of residents (Andersson and James, 2018). As Zenker (2018) argues, city branding involves policies to improve local areas and their public management. Besides, researchers have interpreted this motivation from the perspective of policy boosterism and policy mobilities (Filomeno, 2017; McCann, 2013; Vallaster *et al.*, 2018). As McCann (2013)

suggests, city branding facilitates sharing best practices and policies, aiding in cross-city learning and informed decision-making to address common urban challenges.

That is to say, driven by altruism, city branding aims to foster positive social impact and community well-being beyond mere economic interests. This altruism typically manifests in two ways: aligning policies and urban development with the brand (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008; Lucarelli, 2018; Zenker, 2018) and the policy tourism-generated branding (Andersson and James, 2018; McCann, 2013). As Eshuis and Klijn (2017, p. 93) suggest, "city branding has become influential not only at the symbolic level, but has become a genuine governance instrument that plays a role at the level of urban planning, policy making and concrete urban development." Therefore, altruism-driven city branding is poised to embody greater authenticity, signifying tangible substance to convey and communicate.

Drawing from the preceding discussion, city branding motivations predominantly revolve around two main domains: entrepreneurialism and altruism. The fundamental difference between these two is the extent to which branding makes a tangible contribution to improving citizen well-being, contrasting genuine social benefit with superficial marketing efforts.

Inclusive cities and city branding

What role does the inclusive city play in city branding? As an emerging city concept, the inclusive city reflects a city's respect and commitment to diverse communities and endows the city with attractiveness and competitiveness. An inclusive city means that all people can fully participate in and benefit from the city's development and resources without discrimination or exclusion (Espino, 2015; Liang et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023). The concepts associated with inclusive cities include accessibility, social participation and rights, equitable social space, diversity, education and awareness, safety and security (Elias, 2020). In other words, an inclusive city not only embraces diversity in content but also represents an urban governance process. In content, inclusive city involves the inclusion of all residents regardless of demographic factors such as gender, race, age, religion, location, caste, ethnicity, occupation or disability status (Anttiroiko and de Jong, 2020; Liu et al., 2020). In the governance process, inclusive cities are embodied in extensive public participation and democratic decision-making to ensure that the voices of various groups are fully heard and reflected in urban planning and policymaking (Alessandria, 2016; Donaghy, 2017).

Connecting inclusive city and city branding, therefore, takes two main forms: one is to make the city's inclusive content part of the city's brand identity, highlighting the city's commitment to diversity and social justice (Alsayel et al., 2022; Belabas and George, 2023); the other is to emphasize extensive public participation and transparent decision-making mechanisms and to build city brand recognition and influence through joint participation in urban governance (Karavatzis et al., 2017; Merrilees et al., 2014). Among them, the second type of inclusive city branding, according to Karavatzis et al. (2017, p. 172), is "a process that seeks to actively include stakeholders and to resist native claims to identity, representation, and participation." A large number of place branding scholars have also affirmed its value and conducted extensive and critical discussions (cf. Jernsand and Kraff, 2017; Joo and Seo, 2018; Karavatzis et al., 2017).

This paper is dedicated to the first form, the branding of inclusive city related content. Integrating emerging city concepts that present shared values into branding strategies has become a trend in contemporary city branding (de Jong et al., 2015; Hatuka et al., 2018; Nederhand et al., 2023). As Hatuka et al. (2018) demonstrate, cities have attempted to frame civic governance through emerging city concepts, which are seen to enhance their position in this competitive environment by implementing visions related to openness, innovation

and prosperity in the public image. In recent years, inclusion-related brands have become increasingly popular with the development of inclusive cities and incorporate equality, equity, diversity, integration, openness and welcome as key brand values (Alsayel *et al.*, 2022; Belabas and George, 2023). For example, the annual "European Capital of Inclusion and Diversity" selection, which recognizes the work by cities, towns or regions in Europe to promote inclusion and discrimination-free societies, has branded cities such as Cologne (Germany), Koprivnica (Croatia) and Terrassa (Spain) as inclusive cities (EU-Commission, 2024).

In addition, Alsayel *et al.* (2022) note that various aspects of inclusive cities are increasingly being used in city branding. They applied Anttiroiko and de Jong's (2020) "matrix of the forms of exclusion and the type of capital" as an analytical framework of aspects that are branded by cities, including age; disability; religion and ideology; race and ethnicity; gender and sexuality; income and wealth; and location. Researchers have studied the branding of different aspects of inclusive cities. For example, Collett (2014) notes that cities on both sides of the Atlantic have branded inclusion in terms of immigration and integration and consider diversity as a relevant core value. Belabas *et al.* (2020) indicate that super-diverse cities, such as Rotterdam and Amsterdam, translate immigration-related diversity and inclusion into their city brands. Besides, some cities brand inclusion in terms of gender and sexual orientation (Ram *et al.*, 2019), the elderly (Alsayel *et al.*, 2022), disability (Mokhtar and Kasirye, 2023), aboriginal people (Forsyth, 2016) and other aspects of the inclusive city.

However, branding oneself as an inclusive city does not mean it is inclusive. Cities may become overly fixated on projecting a superficial image of inclusion, potentially losing sight of the genuine progress toward true inclusiveness (Belabas *et al.*, 2020; Zhao *et al.*, 2023). Driven by urban entrepreneurialism, cities often tend to prioritize image marketing over substantive development, and branding inclusive cities is not necessarily immune to this. Besides, a multi-dimensional inclusive city may not always be reflected in city branding. Research suggests that cities selectively emphasize positive aspects of inclusion in self-congratulatory ways while downplaying or ignoring others (Alsayel *et al.*, 2022; Belabas *et al.*, 2020; Yazici *et al.*, 2023). Cities endeavoring to reposition or enhance their standing in the post-industrial epoch have incorporated "development-oriented inclusion" as a constituent element of their strategic endeavors (Filomeno, 2017).

Understanding the dynamics of cities branding themselves as inclusive cities requires a more in-depth study of the motivations for branding and, in turn, linking branding practices and identities. Therefore, this study is based on an analysis of city branding and its motivations, assuming that inclusive city branding has two main underlying motivations: entrepreneurialism and altruism (see Figure 1). Driven by entrepreneurialism, inclusive cities have been mainly used as selling points (Collett, 2014), and branding efforts are high, but actual urban inclusion may not be guaranteed. When driven by altruism, cities tend to be more inclusive (McCann, 2013). We developed a typology of inclusive city branding based on these assumptions. In Figure 1, the two axes of inclusion and branding are complemented with motivations for branding: the higher the degree of city branding, the more it is driven by entrepreneurialism, and the higher the degree of city inclusion, the more likely it is driven by altruism. This typology gives us the opportunity to study the relationship between inclusive cities and city branding, making a distinction between four potential types.

Methodology
This research uses content analysis to convert qualitative data, such as textual statements found on websites, into quantitative variables and metrics (Jonsen *et al.*, 2021). This
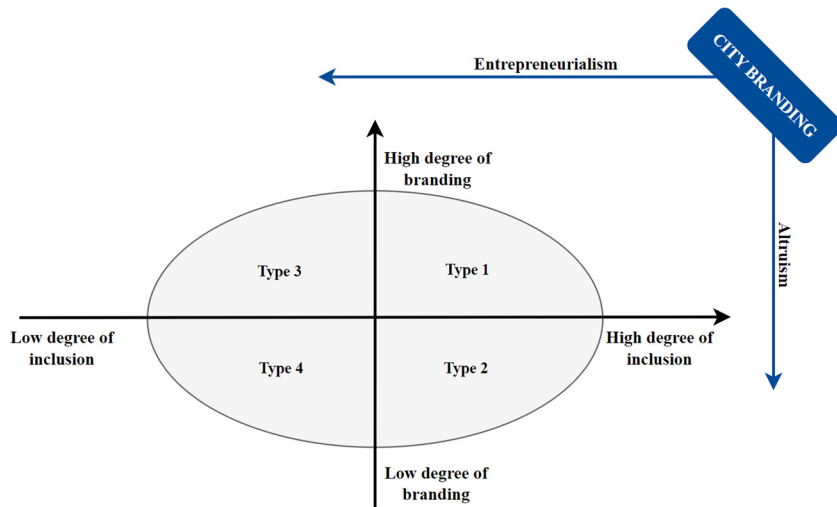
Source: Authors' own creation

methodology facilitates the conduct of comparative analyses and has demonstrated its reliability in examining websites from a branding standpoint (Florek *et al.*, 2006; Jonsen *et al.*, 2021; Paganoni, 2012; Sáez *et al.*, 2013; Singh and Point, 2006; Vinyals-Mirabent *et al.*, 2019). With the development of communication technology, municipal websites are increasingly seen as an integral branding tool and are included in many local government modernization agendas (Florek *et al.*, 2006; Paganoni, 2012). As Vinyals-Mirabent *et al.* (2019) note, the municipal website (official destination website) serves not only as an information hub and a channel for addressing complaints but also uniquely showcases the social fabric of the city, thereby effectively enhancing the promotion of the city brand.

Inclusion is a core element that many organizations present on their websites (Belabas and George, 2023; Jonsen *et al.*, 2021; Paganoni, 2012). Jonsen *et al.* (2021) examined 75 company websites and discovered that organizations use diversity and inclusion branding to attract talent, position themselves as preferred employers, and highlight specific dimensions of diversity relevant to their identity. By examining 12 British municipal websites, Paganoni (2012) discovered that the visual and verbal narratives of the city brand can effectively convey a socially cohesive discourse, representing the diverse communities within a city. Inclusive discourse clues on municipal websites are usually the reflection of authoritative discourses and attitudes on urban inclusion, influencing users' perceptions of inclusivity. Consequently, municipal websites are important entry points for understanding inclusive city branding strategies. Next, we'll delve into the specifics of this methodology.

Research design, sample and measures
The objectives of this study are to understand the contradictions and tensions of inclusive city branding by establishing a typology and to further understand how and why cities brand themselves as inclusive cities. This research therefore needs to identify the degree of inclusion of a city, as well as the intensity and specific practices and identities of branding.

Firstly, the sample cities and their degree of inclusion were determined according to the inclusive city rankings. As Anttiroiko and de Jong (2020) suggest, inclusive city rankings

can form a snapshot of the inclusion of cities worldwide. However, research indicates that a city's inclusion performance may vary from ranking to ranking because of methodological differences, such as differences in the specific variables considered in each ranking and how those variables are weighted and normalized (Zhao *et al.*, 2023). While individual assessments may be susceptible to various forms of bias, methodological disparities among rankings also evidence a degree of complementarity. This implies that the identification of cities exhibiting consistent performance across multiple rankings can enhance accuracy in evaluation.

Our study therefore attempts to identify sample cities and their degree of inclusion through multiple inclusive city rankings. Specifically, we first derived inclusive city rankings that measure cities worldwide and were published within the past five years (2018–2022): the Prosperity and Inclusive City Seal and Awards (PICSA), Urban Environment and Social Inclusion Index (UESI) and Cities in Motion Index (CIMI). Second, we retained cities from high-income countries or regions with populations greater than 200,000 in the final league table for each ranking to enhance comparability. Finally, we selected the top 25% and bottom 25% of co-occurring cities as representatives of more and less inclusive cities. As a result, there were 12 more inclusive cities and 9 less inclusive cities identified, and the overall inclusion percentile score has been calculated based on their position in the rankings (Table 1).

Subsequently, the sample cities' branding efforts and specific practices and identities were analyzed based on the application of content analysis on municipal websites (Jonsen *et al.*, 2021; Vinyals-Mirabent *et al.*, 2019). In corporate branding research, branding efforts are measured through trademark registration and marketing expenses (Agostini *et al.*, 2015; Odoom *et al.*, 2017). However, based on the city branding literature, trademarks and

Cities	% of positions in PICSA	% of positions in UESI	% of positions in CIMI	Average % of positions	Overall inclusive score
Taipei	5	–	1	3	97
Copenhagen	3	6	2	4	96
Zurich	1	–	7	4	96
Helsinki	4	–	5	5	95
Ottawa	7	–	4	5	95
Munich	11	–	4	7	93
Oslo	6	–	11	9	91
Eindhoven	17	–	5	11	89
Melbourne	30	3	7	13	87
Vancouver	–	13	16	14	86
Amsterdam	15	16	26	19	81
Boston	14	9	43	22	78
Tel Aviv	50	53	18	41	59
Chicago	57	25	56	46	54
Los Angeles	58	56	39	51	49
Zagreb	61	–	57	59	41
Montevideo	67	–	52	60	40
Kuwait City	68	–	53	61	39
Rome	65	–	56	61	39
Turin	65	–	60	62	38
Hong Kong	62	–	86	74	26

Source: Authors' own creation

Table 1.
Sample cities and their inclusion calculation scores

marketing expenditure alone do not measure the degree of city branding. Therefore, we jointly measure the intensity of brand-building efforts from brand practices and brand identities, because both the intensity of practices adopted and the intensity of emphasis on inclusion identity jointly reflect the intensity of brand-building. The indicators of branding practices can be found in the upper part of Table 2.

For the branding identities, we applied the exclusion grounds of Anttiroiko and de Jong (2020), which define multi-dimensional identities of an inclusive city, as the basis for analysis. In addition, we added the category "Everyone" as a brand identity that may be applied (Table 2). This is because of two considerations. First, in the definition, an inclusive city is a city that is inclusive of everyone. In addition, based on our observation of many inclusive city branding practices, cities not only choose certain inclusive city content for branding but also express themselves in favor of a general statement that it is inclusive to everyone. It is worth noting that low educational qualifications, lack of full-time employment and lone parenthood may also be reasons for exclusion (Tsakloglou and Papadopoulos, 2002), but because they are chronic cumulative disadvantages, we did not include them in our study.

Data collection and analysis
Data were collected by searching for statements related to inclusive city branding on municipal websites from the past five years. Although there are certain limitations in

Main category	Sub-category	Definition and example items
Practices	Media-generated image	Use media and visual elements to present and create images, such as logo, symbol, mascot and promotional video
	Narrative and storytelling	Present or create images through narrative, such as turning historical events into stories, mayor's speeches, real-life storytelling, etc.
	Eye-catching event	Present or create images by organizing iconic events and culture activities, such as the Olympic Games, World Expo, etc.
	Iconic architecture	Communicate or create an image through iconic buildings, such as museums, and landmarks
	Flagship project	Urban renewal and development projects, space and community planning that differentiates it from stand-alone facilities, such as public spaces, streets and waterfront promenades
	Long-term policy	Specific regional visions, strategies, master plans, etc. that adapted to the city's sustainable development goals
Identities	Everyone	Everyone, Each one, All, All citizen
	Age	Elderly people, Children
	Disability	Physical or mental disability
	Religion and ideology	Person of religious belief and/or ideology
	Race and ethnicity	People of color and/or minorities
	Gender and sexuality	Women, sexual and gender minorities
	Income and wealth	The poor, low-income workers, etc.
	Location	Indigenous peoples and residents in underprivileged urban areas

Table 2.
Inclusive city branding practices and identities

Source: Authors' own creation

analyzing only the statements presented on the municipal websites, this method can ensure data accessibility across all cities in the sample, unlike surveys with potentially low response rates (Singh and Point, 2006). This approach was deemed appropriate because it does not involve in-depth quantification and the branding evidence comes from a broad range of inclusion branding statements, not only limited to marketing programs that municipalities may choose to place or not place on their websites. It is worth noting that not all statements about inclusive cities on the website can be regarded as branding. Only statements that present both inclusive city content and city branding practices can be regarded as inclusion branding statements, and what matters the most is whether the city positions itself as an inclusive city in these statements (see the analysis in the results section for specific illustrations).

To unify the search logic and ensure that the statements only come from the municipal website, we used Google Advanced Search and set "site:" as the URL of the official municipal website. The keywords include "inclusion," "inclusive city" and other keywords related to branding practices (Table 2). The local official language was used to ensure comparability. Applying the above procedures, we collected all the statements related to inclusive city branding and systematically stored them in PDF format, which is 65 pages in total. We compared the statements with the categories in the codebook (Table 2), and recorded 1 if relevant and 0 otherwise. For the case where the statement points to multiple practices, we recorded 1 point for each item. Cities were arranged from left to right according to the intensity of branding efforts, among which Boston has the highest intensity of branding, while Kuwait City has the lowest (Figure 2). The classification of brand-building efforts in this study is relative, with the aim of comparing the branding degree among sample cities. To achieve this, cities in the top 50% for intensity were considered to have high branding efforts, while those in the bottom 50% were considered lower.

		Cities	Boston	Taipei	Turin	Amsterdam	Montevideo	Chicago	Rome	Vancouver	Munich	Melbourne	Copenhagen	Oslo	Ottawa	Los Angeles	Hong Kong	Zurich	Tel Aviv	Zagreb	Eindhoven	Helsinki	Kuwait City
Branding practices		Media-generated image	6	4	5	2	4	3	1	3	3	2	0	0	1	2	3	0	1	0	3	0	0
		Narrative and storytelling	14	12	12	12	7	11	11	5	7	2	3	2	2	4	10	0	2	0	1	2	0
		Eye-catching event	15	25	16	6	13	7	11	7	10	3	5	2	4	5	4	4	2	3	1	0	0
		Iconic architecture	3	10	7	2	9	9	7	5	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
		Flagship project	15	10	9	15	10	14	17	11	12	11	7	9	5	1	1	3	4	4	4	2	0
		Long-term policy	8	3	4	12	5	2	1	7	1	10	6	1	3	1	1	2	1	0	1	1	0
Branding identities		Everyone	7	9	2	13	12	8	9	10	7	8	5	7	5	1	1	0	3	1	4	0	0
		Age	8	7	4	6	6	3	7	3	4	2	7	2	1	2	1	1	1	3	0	3	0
		Disability	5	2	33	6	10	7	6	4	11	8	3	0	3	1	1	7	1	5	2	0	0
		Religion & ideology	0	10	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Race & ethnicity	28	11	2	13	2	12	1	9	5	0	0	5	1	8	3	2	1	0	0	2	0
		Gender & sexuality	17	9	7	6	10	3	5	6	7	6	5	4	2	2	1	2	5	0	0	0	0
		Income & wealth	5	3	0	2	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Location	4	3	3	2	1	3	8	4	0	3	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
		Total (high to low)	135	118	104	98	89	84	84	74	69	57	41	34	30	29	28	23	21	17	17	10	0

Figure 2.
The intensity of
inclusive city
branding efforts

Source: Authors' own creation

Results and discussion

This section presents the results of the data analysis. First, the typology of inclusive city branding; second, an analysis of branding practices and identity statements; third, the analysis incorporating typology and corresponding branding practices and identities.

Typology of inclusive city branding

Combining the inclusion performance of 21 cities (Table 1) and the degree of inclusion branding efforts (Figure 2), we discovered four types of inclusive city branding (Figure 3).

Inclusion ambassadors: high inclusion × high branding. Inclusion ambassadors act as exemplary models for other cities, proactively promoting and fostering inclusivity. Cities of this type attach great importance to inclusivity and strategically leverage this advantage to enhance their competitive standing and drive economic growth. Amsterdam, for example, is known for its openness and inclusion. The city not only embraces diversity and celebrates multiculturalism through events and festivals but also implements policies that promote inclusion and address social inequalities (Hodes *et al.*, 2007). In Melbourne, inclusivity is integral to the city's brand (Alsayel *et al.*, 2022). Through multicultural festivals, community outreach and accessible facilities, Melbourne fosters a sense of belonging, attracting talent and innovation (Bellato and Cheer, 2021). Brand sustainability is an issue for this type. The giant letters "I Amsterdam," which originally symbolized the city's inclusion, were removed in 2018 because residents believed they caused overcrowding and symbolized mercantilism (Gerritsma, 2019).

Innate champions: high inclusion × low branding. Cities of this type may not feel the need for brand inclusion or may be in the early stages of developing a brand. These cities often have strong social support systems and policies that promote equal access to resources and services, which contribute to outstanding inclusion performance. The reasons for the
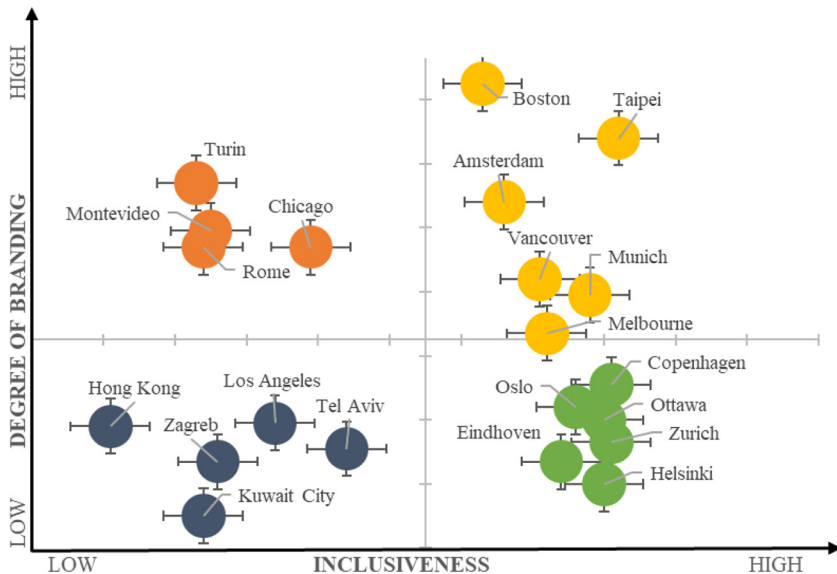
Figure 3.
The typology of inclusive city branding

Source: Authors' own creation

lower degree of branding can be explained in two ways. First, because of a stable economic situation and strong domestic industries, these cities do not heavily rely on external resources to boost growth. For example, Zurich is a hub in the worldwide financial system (Kruse *et al.*, 2000); Copenhagen, Helsinki, Ottawa and Oslo are the capitals of each country and centers for business and culture. Second, before branding themselves, they already had livable reputations and images in people's minds and became popular travel destinations. For this type of city, while branding may be seen as unnecessary when a city completely ignores branding, it may increase the risk that it will not reap the proper rewards from costly programs and initiatives (Oliveira, 2015).

Façade marketers: low inclusion × high branding. This type demonstrates the competitive spirit of inclusive city branding. Deep-rooted systemic issues, such as historical inequalities or political barriers, hinder these cities' ability to achieve high actual performance on inclusion. Nevertheless, they prefer to prioritize their reputation and brand themselves as inclusive cities. For example, the traditional image of Chicago is "as a gritty metropolis carved into ethnically defined enclaves" (Bennett, 2012). In recent years, the city has been committed to rejuvenating and attracting more middle-class professionals by branding its diverse population and historical culture. However, it faces challenges in achieving real inclusion because of issues such as racial segregation, income inequality and limited resources for marginalized communities (Herstein *et al.*, 2014). Notably, when a city's internal character and external image diverge, it not only leads to the failure of city branding but also makes locals and tourists feel out of place. For example, the economic crisis Turin is going through is at odds with its brand as a vibrant cultural city. During the crisis, Turin's city brand selectively displayed positive and creative aspects and avoided addressing economic problems, leading not only to the gradual dismantling of the city's aspirations to become the "Creative Capital of Europe" but also sparking a massive protest movement by economically precarious "creative workers" (Vanolo, 2015).

Silent segregators: low inclusion × low branding. These cities usually struggle with inclusion across various social economic factors, including housing affordability, income disparity, social segregation and limited access to resources. Some of them may face economic challenges, leading to inadequate investments in inclusive city development. Others may have deep-rooted social divisions or lack inclusive governance structures. The city of Hong Kong, for example, faces challenges in achieving inclusivity, particularly regarding housing affordability (Forrest and Xian, 2018). In some cases, cities may prioritize economic growth or certain population segments over the welfare and integration of marginalized communities, perpetuating exclusionary practices. In Kuwait City, Bidun – people without papers or nationality – are explicitly excluded from the planning of housing and other infrastructure (Al-Ragam, 2017). Admittedly, these cities do not necessarily need to brand inauthentic inclusion, and stakeholders may still be attracted by the core functional benefits they focus on, but ignoring the exclusion problem will not solve it and will only exacerbate it.

The typology analysis suggests that the relationship between actual urban inclusion and inclusive city branding is multifaceted, even paradoxical. "Winners" in the inclusive city rankings do not necessarily brand themselves as such, nor does low performance on inclusion prevent cities from promoting themselves as "inclusive." A city's inclusion branding strategy depends on conditions such as development and competition needs, resources, market and target groups. In the next section, we will analyze the inclusive city branding statements, which will enable us to understand more in detail the motivations for branding strategies.

Inclusive city branding practices

Brand statements from 21 cities reveal the dominant motivations for different inclusive city branding practices. When cities use media-generated images and narratives and eye-catching events to promote brand inclusion, there is a more obvious intention to promote urban economic growth. Statements pointing to economic and urban growth purposes accounted for more than 50% of all three types of practice statements, with 87% of media-generated image statements having this motivation, followed by eye-catching events at 83%, and finally narratives and storytelling accounting for 57%. The characteristics of these practices are: first, they self-affirm the inclusion of the city; second, the target groups are mainly tourists, investors and employees, who ultimately bring economic benefits. Branding statements for Boston are a good example of this:

> Mayor today announced the All Inclusive Boston campaign [. . .] The campaign is anchored by a video showcasing Boston's diversity. The goal is to increase awareness and drive trips [. . .] (Boston).

When cities brand inclusion through iconic architecture buildings, flagship projects and long-term policies, it reflects the intention of promoting internal integration and alleviating exclusion. Statements pointing to altruism motivation accounted for more than 50% of all three types of practice statements, with 98% of long-term policy statements having this motivation, followed by flagship projects at 88% and finally iconic architecture buildings, accounting for 75%. The characteristics of these practices are: first, they highlight the importance and commitment of inclusion to the city and its residents; second, the brand statements are based on specific urban planning projects and/or policies. Statements on the municipal websites of Copenhagen reflect representative views in this regard:

> Copenhagen is a city for everyone [. . .] Copenhagen introduced an LGBTI+ policy emphasizing that in Copenhagen everyone must be treated equally [. . .] (Copenhagen).

It is worth noting that although boundaries exist between different branding practices and their motivations, they may be intertwined and synthesized to create an inclusive image of the city. Some cities brand the same issue through different practices at the same time and indicate the same motivation. For example, Amsterdam's immigrant inclusion branding occurs not only through relevant policies but also makes use of storytelling:

> While searching for a job, Ibrahim stumbled upon this legal project [. . .] An initiative of Amsterdam looks at diversity and inclusion with the aim of sustainable mediation of the labor market [. . .] (Amsterdam).

Inclusive city branding identities

Different cities have branded their "inclusive identities" in different ways, reflecting not only branding motivations but also local adaptations. Before undertaking a deeper analysis, it is necessary to explain that there is an overlap between identities, such as LGBTQ teenagers and the elderly, low-income women, etc.

Inclusive to everyone seems to have become the daily parlance of inclusive city branding. It represents the city's equality and inclusion for everyone, but this expression is regarded as general and requires vigilance against individual elitism (Fitjar *et al.*, 2013):

> Oslo is a city of equal value for all its residents [. . .] Difference and diversity are enriching cities and becoming their strengths (Oslo).

The branding on age inclusion is to promote age equality and access to basic infrastructure and services. Copenhagen, Rome and Taipei are the higher branding cities in age inclusion, among which Copenhagen addresses the inclusion of children while Rome highlights the inclusion of the elderly:

> Create a safe and inclusive city for children and youth. We must spread the lessons of the most successful inclusion initiatives to all schools. (Copenhagen)

Branding disability inclusion is often done to improve the equality and inclusion of this group and increase social and workforce participation. Besides, branding this dimension is also related to cities' goals to apply and host relevant mega-events, such as the Paralympic Games:

> Our goal is to make Melbourne one of the world's most accessible and inclusive cities. We developed our first Disability Action Plan in 1999 [. . .] we have been working to reduce and eliminate barriers in our physical, informational and social environments. (Melbourne)

Cities have little or no interest in branding religion and ideology inclusion. The branding of this aspect is primarily intended to promote social equality and harmony, but also to promote tourism and the economy:

> Taipei won the "Most Potential Muslim-Friendly Tourism Destination City Award" [. . .] We look forward to making Muslims working in Taipei feel at home by breaking the fast and allowing more citizens to understand Muslim culture. (Taipei)

Race and ethnicity inclusion branding is mainly used by super-diverse cities, such as Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Vancouver and Amsterdam. Although the composition of ethnic diversity varies, these cities all face the problems and challenges of diversity. In accordance, the reasons for branding this aspect include alleviating issues of racial exclusion and segregation or promoting diversity in the workforce:

> Chicago has a proud history of diversity and inclusion, and my administration will do everything in our power to ensure that immigrants remain safe, secure and supported. (Chicago)

The branding of gender and sexuality inclusion is often out of the motivation to increase the representation of women and LGBTQ+ in the workforce or to celebrate and promote gender and sexual orientation equality. Most cities have branded this aspect, such as Boston, Montevideo, Taipei, Turin, Munich and Amsterdam:

> We work with employers to make Boston the best city for working women. [. . .] today announced A "Very Proud City", an LGBTQ+ Pride series with events to take place throughout downtown [. . .] (Boston).

There are few branding statements about income and wealth inclusion. Although the sample cities are located in high-income countries or regions, this does not mean that prosperity is shared by all. Branding this aspect is based on cities' goals to alleviate poverty and reduce the gap between rich and poor:

> This year's motto is "Couragiert gegen Armut (Courageous against poverty)". The pledge works not only because in Munich, one in six people is at risk of poverty, but also because of the underlying motivation of the voluntary pledge: solidarity with the marginalized of society and reducing the burden of their lives and suffering. (Munich)

Branding location inclusion is mainly to improve social harmony and equality. Although much less attention is paid to location inclusion, it has been emphasized in cities where there are indigenous people or Roma, such as in Boston, Chicago, Vancouver, Melbourne, Taipei, Rome and Turin:

Vancouver declared a City of Reconciliation [. . .] issued a declaration acknowledging Vancouver is located on the unceded territories of the Musqueam Indian Band, Squamish Nation [. . .] We were the first government in Canada to do so. (Vancouver)

In summary, the gender and sexuality inclusion branding identity shows the most obvious examples of entrepreneurialism as a key motivation; the branding identities referring to inclusion of everyone, disability, religion and ideology, race and ethnicity are more neutral, while brand identities stressing inclusion of age, income and wealth and location hinge more strongly on altruism as the crucial motivation.

Integrative analysis: connecting types, brand practices and brand identities
In the above analysis, we developed a typology based on a city's degree of inclusion and brand-building efforts and hypothesized the dominant motivations behind each type. Subsequently, we obtained the motivations for various inclusive city branding practices and brand identities through content analysis. This section aims to integrate the developed typology with brand practices and identities, respectively, to further examine their interrelations through motivations, as shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of brand practices among the four types of inclusive city branding, wherein various brand practices are categorized based on the motivations of entrepreneurialism and altruism. Figure 5 illustrates the composition of brand identities for each type, where
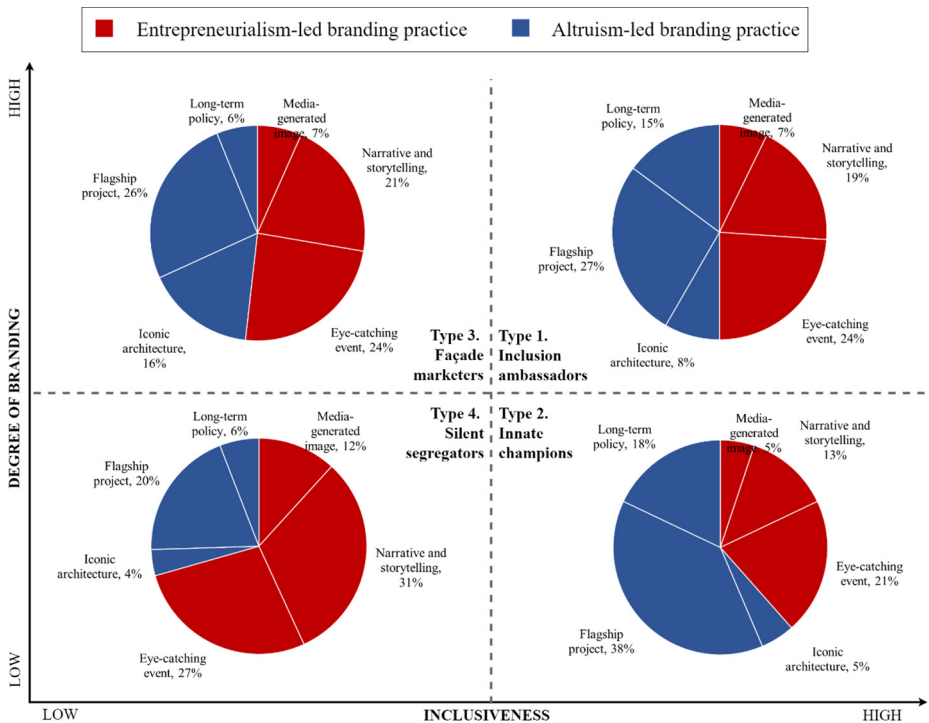
Figure 4.
Four types of inclusive city branding and corresponding practice composition

Source: Authors' own creation
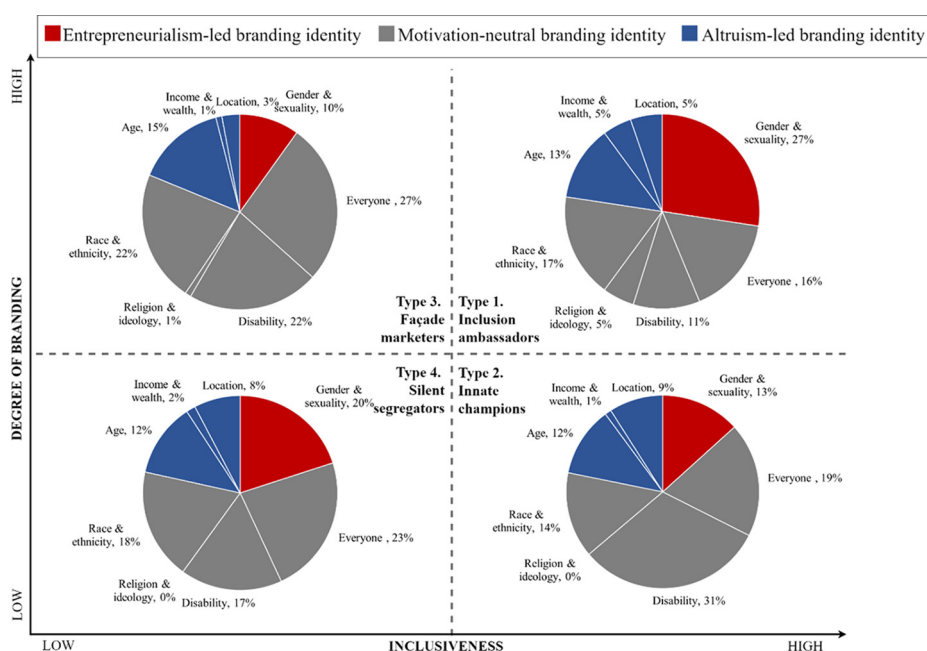
Figure 5.
Four types of inclusive city branding and corresponding brand identity composition

Source: Authors' own creation

different brand identities are classified according to the motivations of entrepreneurialism, neutralism and altruism.

The results illustrate a high level of motivational correspondence between the inclusive city branding typology and branding practices. For instance, inclusion ambassadors, characterized by their high degrees of inclusion and branding efforts, exhibit a blend of altruism and entrepreneurialism motivations. Correspondingly, practices driven by entrepreneurialism (media-generated image; narrative and storytelling; and eye-catching events) and practices driven by altruism (iconic architecture, flagship project, long-term policy) each account for 50% of this type (Figure 4). The innate champions are highly inclusive but barely brand their inclusion, suggesting a predominant altruism motivation. Correspondingly, long-term policies, flagship projects and iconic buildings that embody more altruism are more often used as branding practices (more than 60% of practices). The façade marketers are typical cities driven by entrepreneurialism with a high degree of branding, despite doing poorly on actual inclusion. Cities of this type are more likely to use media-generated images, eye-catching events and storytelling practices that reflect urban entrepreneurialism (more than 50%). The silent segregators choose to silence their less inclusive reality, and they adopt mainly entrepreneurialism-led branding practices (more than 70%).

However, there is no obvious motivational correspondence between the inclusive city brand identities and the typology. For example, entrepreneurialism-led brand identities such as gender and sexuality are not salient among façade marketers (Figure 5). Brand identities led by altruism exhibit relatively similar proportions across all types, ranging between 19% and 23% (Figure 5). Furthermore, the introduction of neutrality into brand identity

motivations adds complexity. This can be attributed to the locality of inclusive city identities. Inclusion challenges vary regionally, impacting brand identity adoption significantly. For instance, the branding of race and ethnicity inclusion is most prevalent in North America because these issues are brought to the forefront (Tatli *et al.*, 2012), while they are neglected in Switzerland and certain European countries (Singh and Point, 2006). Consequently, a typology solely assessing inclusion degrees and brand-building efforts without considering local diversity characteristics struggles to correlate with brand identity motivations. Admittedly, some inclusive city identities may reflect a pronounced entrepreneurial spirit, such as gender and sexuality inclusion being a positive aspect of economic growth (Alsayel *et al.*, 2022), but most exhibit a nuanced blend of motivations.

Conclusion

Inclusive city branding has become a common strategy for a growing number of cities worldwide. The existing literature, almost without exception, affirms the importance of developing inclusive cities (Anttiroiko and de Jong, 2020; Espino, 2015; Liang *et al.*, 2022) and the value creation of city branding (Braun, 2012; Eshuis *et al.*, 2013). Simply combining the two intuitively seems sensible advice, but there are contradictions and tensions in between. Researchers have criticized that cities promise more than they deliver and cherry-pick inclusive city identities for their brands (Alsayel *et al.*, 2022; Yazici *et al.*, 2023). This study developed a typology to help us further understand the oxymoron of inclusive city branding.

By analyzing the relationships between motivations and inclusive city branding types, practices and identities, this study suggests that examining inclusive city branding solely through the lens of urban entrepreneurialism motivations is narrow and that incorporating considerations of altruism is necessary (Andersson and James, 2018). The motivations of entrepreneurialism and altruism are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Moreover, honest, inclusive city branding becomes important where branding meets the perceived reality of inclusion. Synergies in developing inclusive cities and city branding can be achieved when the inclusion branding matches the degree of inclusion of the city (Bonakdar and Audirac, 2020). Our typology makes clear that a city's achievements in inclusion do not reflect its branding campaigns, and the façade marketer is an illustrative type in this respect.

This insight also has practical implications. Cities should evaluate the conflicting demands and benefits of investing in inclusion-promoting policies and branding themselves as inclusive to arrive at a mix that is perceived as appropriate by their stakeholders (citizens, societal organizations, etc.). While some aspects of inclusive city identities may be more popular for their economic growth orientation, cities need to incorporate these identities based on local realities at the risk of their brand becoming groundless. Cities should simply preach what they practice, and vice versa. Urban competitive positions and assets change constantly, so there is a need for regular assessment of the gap between what local governments want to achieve and the actual status quo. If a city is currently classified as a certain type with specific practices and identities, it cannot stand idly by and expect itself to maintain that position and hold on to its current strategy for an indefinite period of time.

This research is not without limitations. The paper's examination of branding strategies relies on data (statements) extracted from the municipal website, providing a broad perspective on inclusive city branding. However, while this offers valuable insights, the effectiveness of the practices and policies outlined in these statements remains unverified. Future research should thus concentrate on scrutinizing the implementation process and the tangible impact of inclusive city branding. Similarly, considering that various media sources influence destination perception differently, exploring brands projected through alternative

forms of discourse beyond municipal websites will further enrich our understanding of this dynamic relationship. In addition, the motivations for inclusive city branding present a more complex picture in practice, including not only competition-oriented entrepreneurship and sharing-oriented altruism, but also more specific motives such as politics and elections, markets and target groups. However, these more specific motives have not yet been included in the same discussion level of this study; hence, we suggest that future research can specialize in these motives.

References

Agostini, L., Filippini, R. and Nosella, A. (2015), "Brand-building efforts and their association with SME sales performance", *Journal of Small Business Management*, Vol. 53 No. sup1, pp. 161-173.

Alessandria, F. (2016), "Inclusive city, strategies, experiences and guidelines", Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences 223. 2nd International Symposium 'NEW METROPOLITAN PERSPECTIVES' – Strategic planning, spatial planning, economic programs and decision support tools, through the implementation of Horizon/Europe2020, ISTH2020, *Reggio Calabria (Italy)*, 18-20 May 2016, pp. 6-10.

Al-Ragam, A. (2017), "Negotiating the politics of exclusion: Georges Candilis, housing and the Kuwaiti welfare state", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 41 No. 2, pp. 235-250.

Alsayel, A., de Jong, M. and Fransen, J. (2022), "Can creative cities be inclusive too? How do Dubai, Amsterdam and Toronto navigate the tensions between creativity and inclusiveness in their adoption of city brands and policy initiatives?", *Cities*, Vol. 128, p. 103786.

Andersson, I. and James, L. (2018), "Altruism or entrepreneurialism? The co-evolution of green place branding and policy tourism in Växjö, Sweden", *Urban Studies*, Vol. 55 No. 15, pp. 3437-3453.

Anholt, S. (2006), "Why brand? Some practical considerations for nation branding", *Place Branding*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 97-107.

Anttiroiko, A.V. and de Jong, M. (2020), *The Inclusive City: The Theory and Practice of Creating Shared Urban Prosperity*, Springer.

Belabas, W. and George, B. (2023), "Do inclusive city branding and political othering affect migrants' identification? Experimental evidence", *Cities*, Vol. 133, p. 104119.

Belabas, W., Eshuis, J. and Scholten, P. (2020), "Re-imagining the city: branding migration-related diversity", *European Planning Studies*, Vol. 28 No. 7, pp. 1315-1332.

Bellato, L. and Cheer, J.M. (2021), "Inclusive and regenerative urban tourism: capacity development perspectives", *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, Vol. 7 No. 4, pp. 943-961.

Bennett, L. (2012), "The third city: Chicago and American urbanism", *The Third City*, University of Chicago Press, available at: www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.7208/9780226042954/html (accessed 28 July 2023).

Bonakdar, A. and Audirac, I. (2020), "City branding and the link to urban planning: theories, practices, and challenges", *Journal of Planning Literature*, Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 147-160.

Braun, E. (2012), "Putting city branding into practice", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 19 No. 4, pp. 257-267.

Cleave, E. and Arku, G. (2020), "Immigrant attraction through place branding? Evidence of city-level effectiveness from Canada's London", *Cities*, Vol. 97, p. 102502.

Collett, E. (2014), *The City Brand: Champion of Immigrant Integration or Empty Marketing Tool*, Migration Policy Institute, Washington, DC, Epub ahead of print 2014.

D&L Partners (2019), "Creating an inclusive prosperity cities index", available at: www.picsaindex. com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Creating-an-Inclusive-Prosperity-Cities-Index-final-PICSA-report_Nov2019.pdf

de Jong, M., Joss, S., Schraven, D., Zhan, C. and Weijnen, M. (2015), "Sustainable–smart–resilient–low carbon–eco–knowledge cities; making sense of a multitude of concepts promoting sustainable urbanization", *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Vol. 109, pp. 25-38.

Donaghy, M.M. (2017), "Community resistance and the inclusive city: devising strategies in São Paulo", *Journal of Urban Affairs*, Vol. 39 No. 7, pp. 986-1000.

Elias, P. (2020), "Inclusive city, perspectives, challenges, and pathways", in Leal Filho, W., Marisa Azul, A., Brandli, L., *et al.* (Eds), *Sustainable Cities and Communities*, Springer International Publishing, Cham, pp. 290-300, available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95717-3_32 (accessed 27 June 2022).

Eshuis, J. and Klijn, E.H. (2017), *City Branding as a Governance Strategy. The Handbook of New Urban Studies*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 92-105.

Eshuis, J., Braun, E. and Klijn, E.-H. (2013), "Place marketing as governance strategy: an assessment of obstacles in place marketing and their effects on attracting target groups", *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 73 No. 3, pp. 507-516.

Espino, N.A. (2015), *Building the Inclusive City: Theory and Practice for Confronting Urban Segregation*, Routledge, London.

EU-Commission (2024), "European capitals of inclusion and diversity Award – European commission", available at: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combatting-discrimination/tackling-discrimination/diversity-and-inclusion-initiatives/european-capitals-inclusion-and-diversity-award_en (accessed 13 March 2024).

Filomeno, F.A. (2017), "The migration–development nexus in local immigration policy: Baltimore city and the Hispanic diaspora", *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol. 53 No. 1, pp. 102-137.

Fitjar, R.D., Rommetvedt, H. and Berg, C. (2013), "European capitals of culture: elitism or inclusion? The case of Stavanger2008", *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 63-83.

Florek, M., Insch, A. and Gnoth, J. (2006), "City council websites as a means of place brand identity communication", *Place Branding*, Vol. 2 No. 4, pp. 276-296.

Forrest, R. and Xian, S. (2018), "Accommodating discontent: youth, conflict and the housing question in Hong Kong", *Housing Studies*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 1-17.

Forsyth, J. (2016), "The illusion of inclusion: agenda 21 and the commodification of aboriginal culture in the Vancouver 2010 Olympic games", *Public*, Vol. 27 No. 53, pp. 22-34.

Gerritsma, R. (2019), "Overcrowded Amsterdam: striving for a balance between trade, tolerance and tourism", *Overtourism: excesses, Discontents and Measures in Travel and Tourism*, CABI Books, pp. 125-147.

Gibson, T.A. (2005), "Selling city living: urban branding campaigns, class power and the civic good", *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 259-280.

Gulsrud, N.M., Gooding, S. and Konijnendijk van den Bosch, C.C. (2013), "Green space branding in Denmark in an era of neoliberal governance", *Urban Forestry and Urban Greening*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 330-337.

Harvey, D. (1989), *The Condition of Postmodernity an Enquiry Into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Wiley-Blackwell.

Hatuka, T., Rosen-Zvi, I., Birnhack, M., *et al.* (2018), "The political premises of contemporary urban concepts: the global city, the sustainable city, the resilient city, the creative city, and the smart city", *Planning Theory and Practice*, Vol. 19 No. 2, pp. 160-179.

Herstein, R., Berger, R. and Jaffe, E. (2014), "Five typical city branding mistakes: why cities tend to fail in implementation of rebranding strategies", *Journal of Brand Strategy*, Vol. 2 No. 4, pp. 392-402.

Hodes, S., Jqv, R.K. and Gerritsma, R. (2007), "Amsterdam as a gay tourism destination in the twenty-first century", *Tourism, Creativity and Development*, Routledge, pp. 200-210.

Jernsand, E.M. and Kraff, H. (2017), "Democracy in participatory place branding: a critical approach", *Inclusive Place Branding*, Routledge.

Jokela, S. (2020), "Transformative city branding and the evolution of the entrepreneurial city: the case of 'brand new Helsinki'", *Urban Studies*, Vol. 57 No. 10, pp. 2031-2046.

Jonsen, K., Point, S., Kelan, E.K., *et al.* (2021), "Diversity and inclusion branding: a five-country comparison of corporate websites", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 616-649.

Joo, Y.M. and Seo, B. (2018), "Transformative city branding for policy change: the case of Seoul's participatory branding", *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, Vol. 36 No. 2, pp. 239-257.

Kaefer, F. (2021), "Dr. Sebastian Zenker on place marketing and city branding in Europe", in Kaefer, F. (Ed.), *An Insider's Guide to Place Branding: Shaping the Identity and Reputation of Cities, Regions and Countries, Management for Professionals*, Springer International Publishing, Cham, pp. 263-266, available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67144-0_48 (accessed 4 March 2024).

Karavatzis, M., Giovanardi, M. and Lichrou, M. (2017), *Inclusive Place Branding: Critical Perspectives on Theory and Practice*, Routledge.

Kavaratzis, M. (2004), "From city marketing to city branding: towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands", *Place Branding*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 58-73.

Kavaratzis, M. and Ashworth, G. (2008), "Place marketing: how did we get here and where are we going?", *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 150-165.

Keller, D., Osman, Z., Stewart, J., *et al.* (2022), *Open For Business City Ratings 2022*.

Kruse, C., Behrendt, H. and Thierstein, A. (2000), *Capital Market Processes and Regional Innovation Systems: Hypotheses About The Zurich Case*, European Regional Science Association (ERSA), Louvain-la-Neuve, Epub ahead of print 2000.

Layne, T. (2022), "Richmond spent $450k on branding campaign. Some say it's a waste of money, others thrilled", available at: www.wtvr.com/news/local-news/richmond-spent-450k-on-branding-campaign-some-say-its-a-waste-of-money-others-thrilled (accessed 23 August 2023).

Liang, D., De Jong, M., Schraven, D., *et al.* (2022), "Mapping key features and dimensions of the inclusive city: a systematic bibliometric analysis and literature study", *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*, Vol. 29 No. 1, pp. 60-79.

Liu, Z., de Jong, M., Li, F., *et al.* (2020), "Towards developing a new model for inclusive cities in China– the case of Xiong'an new area", *Sustainability*, Vol. 12 No. 15, p. 6195.

Lu, H. and de Jong, M. (2019), "Evolution in city branding practices in China's Pearl River Delta since the year 2000", *Cities*, Vol. 89, pp. 154-166.

Lucarelli, A. (2018), "Place branding as urban policy: the (im) political place branding", *Cities*, Vol. 80, pp. 12-21.

McCann, E. (2013), "Policy boosterism, policy mobilities, and the extrospective city", *Urban Geography*, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp. 5-29.

Mcdaniel, P.N. (2018), "Shared humanity, city branding, and municipal immigrant integration initiatives in the southeastern United States", *Southeastern Geographer*, Vol. 58 No. 3, pp. 250-281.

Ma, W., de Jong, M., Hoppe, T., *et al.* (2021), "From city promotion via city marketing to city branding: examining urban strategies in 23 Chinese cities", *Cities*, Vol. 116, p. 103269.

Merrilees, B., Miller, D., Shao, W., *et al.* (2014), "Linking city branding to social inclusiveness: a socioeconomic perspective", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 10 No. 4, pp. 267-278.

Mokhtar, A. and Kasirye, F. (2023), "A gestalt and semiotic analysis of brand communication on disability inclusion: the case of Malaysia and the US", *Intellectual Discourse*, Vol. 31 No. 1, p. 1.

Nederhand, J., Avelino, F., Awad, I., *et al.* (2023), "Reclaiming the city from an urban vitalism perspective: critically reflecting smart, inclusive, resilient and sustainable just city labels", *Cities*, Vol. 137, p. 104257.

Odoom, R., Mensah, P. and Asamoah, G. (2017), "Branding efforts and SME performance – an empirical investigation of variations across firm sizes and business sectors", *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 59-76.

Oliveira, E. (2015), "Place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 18-33.

Paganoni, M.C. (2012), "City branding and social inclusion in the Glocal city", *Mobilities*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 13-31.

Ram, Y., Kama, A., Mizrachi, I., *et al.* (2019), "The benefits of an LGBT-inclusive tourist destination", *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, Vol. 14, p. 100374.

Sáez, L., Periáñez, I. and Mediano, L. (2013), "Building brand value in major Spanish cities: an analysis through municipal websites", *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 120-143.

Singh, V. and Point, S. (2006), "(Re)presentations of gender and ethnicity in diversity statements on European company websites", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 68 No. 4, pp. 363-379.

Tatli, A., Vassilopoulou, J., Ariss, A.A., *et al.* (2012), "The role of regulatory and temporal context in the construction of diversity discourses: the case of the UK, France and Germany", *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 18 No. 4, pp. 293-308.

Tsakloglou, P. and Papadopoulos, F. (2002), "Aggregate level and determining factors of social exclusion in twelve European countries", *Journal of European Social Policy*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 211-225.

Urban Institute (2016), "Measuring inclusion in America's cities", available at: https://urbn.is/inclusion (accessed 4 October 2022).

Vallaster, C., von Wallpach, S. and Zenker, S. (2018), "The interplay between urban policies and grassroots city brand co-creation and co-destruction during the refugee crisis: insights from the city brand Munich (Germany)", *Cities*, Vol. 80, pp. 53-60.

Vanolo, A. (2015), "The image of the creative city, eight years later: Turin, urban branding and the economic crisis taboo", *Cities*, Vol. 46, pp. 1-7.

Vinyals-Mirabent, S., Kavaratzis, M. and Fernández-Cavia, J. (2019), "The role of functional associations in building destination brand personality: when official websites do the talking", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 75, pp. 148-155.

Yazici, E., Murji, K., Keith, M., *et al.* (2023), "London is avocado on toast': the urban imaginaries of the #LondonIsOpen campaign", *Urban Studies*, Vol. 60 No. 12, pp. 2418-2435.

Zenker, S. (2018), "Editorial: city marketing and branding as urban policy", *Cities*, Vol. 80, pp. 1-3.

Zhao, R., de Jong, M. and Edelenbos, J. (2023), "Will the true inclusive city rise? Mapping the strengths and weaknesses of the city ranking systems", *Cities*, Vol. 143, p. 104617.

Corresponding author

Run Zhao can be contacted at: zhao@essb.eur.nl