**Aalto University
School of Business**

Cluster Brand as a Competitive Advantage
Case: Airport Cluster Finland

AALTO UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF BUSINESS   ABSTRACT

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Objective of the Study: The objective of this study is to explore the phenomenon of cluster branding. This study investigates cluster brand as a competitive advantage that impacts the success or decline of the cluster. The research questions examine three aspects: (1) cluster branding as a process, (2) the concrete tools that can be used in cluster branding and (3) the perceived benefits of cluster brand. The study aims to produce a generic model for cluster branding, which can be used as a tool to guide the cluster branding process. In this study, cluster is defined as a geographic concentration of interconnected actors in a particular field that compete but also cooperate and have formed a network to serve a common purpose.

Methodology and theoretical framework: The research approach in study was qualitative. The research method was a single case study, conducted by using Airport Cluster Finland as the case cluster. The data was collected through ten interviews with the stakeholders of the case cluster. The theoretical framework was built on cluster development theories in order to understand why and how cluster are formed. In addition, different approaches on branding were integrated into the theoretical framework in order to spot the elements suitable for cluster context.

Findings: The findings showed that a strong cluster brand creates value for the cluster stakeholders. The cluster brand is significant especially for small and medium-sized companies. A strong cluster brand increases the credibility of the companies that belong to the cluster. Based on the findings, the cluster branding process can be divided into four phases; (1) justifying existence & attracting members, (2) identification, (3) building credibility & creating awareness and (4) maintaining brand image. Concrete tools for cluster branding and the main challenges in the process were also identified.

Key words: cluster branding, cluster development, cluster, branding, branding tools, cluster branding process

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACF – Airport Cluster Finland

B2B – Business to Business

B2C – Business to Consumer

MNC – Multinational company

SME – Small and medium-sized company

1. INTRODUCTION

Business clusters built around certain industry, technology or expertise, have become a common form of cooperation between organizations. In fact, according to Porter (2000) clusters have become a striking feature of any national or regional, and even metropolitan economy, especially in more advanced nations. Clusters represent a new way of looking at economies and provide new ways of cooperation between companies, institutions and organizations.

In Finland many companies are small and medium sized companies, and can clearly benefit from cooperation with other actors. In fact, 93,6 % of all Finnish companies have less than ten employees (Suomen Yrittäjät, 2014). These companies have to carefully decide on which business activities to focus on, since their resources, in terms of finance, time and perhaps skills and knowledge as well, can be rather limited. Some activities such as going international can be almost impossible for a company with only a few employees, no matter how good their product or service is.

This is where clusters come in. Inside clusters, companies should not see other companies operating in the same field of industry and same geographical area, as competitors, but rather as partners. Finland had a government funded programme "Centre of Expertise" ("OSKE") which operated as a cluster-based model in 2007-2013. In practice, 13 national clusters of expertise and 21 regional centers of expertise were formed during the programme. The aim was to promote cooperation between private companies, universities, research institutes and various sources of finance. The OSKE programme wanted to focus regional resources and activities, and to develop areas of key national importance. (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2014).

In addition to clusters formed by OSKE, there are several other national clusters in Finland, which operate as strategic network alliances. Some examples of Finnish business clusters can be found below in figure 1.

Figure 1. Examples of Finnish Business Clusters.

Clusters have become common and nationally significant in Finland. From the figure we can also see that all these clusters have a name and their own logo. Both are features of a brand, which means that the clusters have thought about branding and considered it important. Clusters are also significant in terms of regional development (Kasabov & Sundaram, 2009). But still, there is very little research on how clusters can be branded as "market organizations" for competitive advantage.

There has been a growing interest in clusters among researchers in the areas of economics, business studies, regional science and economic geography (Ingstrup & Damgaard, 2011). However, most research on clusters is mainly focused on cluster development and cluster life cycle. Despite the theoretical and practical analysis of clusters, there is no generic model that could explain the success of some and the decline of other clusters (Boja, 2011.) I believe that cluster brand is a factor that affects the success of the cluster. A strong brand is seen as a strategic asset within companies, and therefore it should be seen that way in clusters as well. Yet, to my knowledge, cluster brands and cluster branding have not been thoroughly studied.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate clusters from a new angle, that is, from the branding point of view. This thesis studies the phenomenon of cluster branding and looks at cluster brand as a competitive advantage, which contributes to the success or decline of a cluster. As the existing literature looks at clusters mainly from the cluster development and cluster life cycle point of views, while neglecting the branding aspect, this new angle may increase the understanding of why some clusters succeed and some decline. The topic of cluster branding needs more academic attention and this study is one step towards the increased understanding of cluster brand and its impact on the overall success of the cluster.

The aim of the thesis is to identify the specific features of cluster branding and to produce a model for cluster branding process, which describes the critical steps in the process. In addition this study aims to identify some of the concrete tools that can be used by the existing or beginning clusters in their branding work. To study this topic, I have chosen to conduct a case study about a Finnish cluster operating in the airport industry "Airport Cluster Finland", introduced in the next chapter.

1.1 Case Cluster: Airport Cluster Finland

The case cluster of this study is Airport Cluster Finland, a network of Finnish companies operating in the airport industry. The cluster was founded at the end of year 2009 by a city development company, Vantaa Innovation Institute Ltd. During the first four years of the operation, the cluster was funded mostly by the city of Vantaa and the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (Uudenmaan ELY-keskus).

In the beginning of 2014 the cluster has been operating purely by the funds of its member companies. This is an extremely interesting time to investigate the cluster, since the year 2014 has been the first year the member companies have had to put more own resources, both money and time, into the cluster operations.

The background for founding Airport Cluster Finland was clear; Finland has an exceptional amount of airport related expertise. Most of the actors, however, are small or medium sized companies, who do not necessarily have the resources or knowledge to access international markets. The airport market has huge potential though; developing countries are constantly

developing their infrastructure, including airports. Passenger volumes in air traffic are higher, leading to the need to build new airports and to update the existing ones to meet the demand of the industry. Especially the emerging markets are making significant investments in their infrastructure in the near future. Russia, for one, will be hosting the FIFA World Cup 2018 in 11 cities, which all need an airport upgrade. Another example is China, where over 20 airport projects received approval in 2012. (China Securities Journal, 2012).

Airport Cluster Finland was founded in order to gather together Finnish companies operating in the airport industry. The main idea was to together promote the Finnish airport related expertise internationally. The most important activities of Airport Cluster Finland are:

- Creating a brand around the Finnish airport related expertise
- Promoting the Finnish airport expertise internationally
- Market information collection and distribution to the member companies
- Joint marketing efforts such as brochures and joint fair participations
- Organizing events
- Cluster development
- Enhancing innovation and knowledge sharing among the members

The amount of member companies in the cluster has varied between 12 and 30 members. When this study was conducted there were 25 members. The requirement for the membership is that the company is either Finnish or has a branch in Finland. Also, there has always been a membership fee. The amount of the fee has varied according to the amount of outside funding. The membership fee also depends on the turnover of the member company; smaller companies have smaller fees than large companies.

Airport Concepts project

Some of the Airport Cluster Finland member companies participated also in a project called Airport Concepts. The idea was to combine the products and services of the companies in order to create complete service packages that could be sold to airports as units instead of "pieces". Three packages i.e. concepts were formed: Winter Conditions, Airside and Airport development.

I will use the winter conditions package as an example to demonstrate the idea of the concepts: Airport Cluster Finland has many companies operating in the airport business, and more specifically in the area of winter conditions. Some companies were manufacturing snow removal equipment, some company was specialized in de-icing chemicals and some company in measuring friction. All of these are essential parts of winter conditions management at airports.

Airport Concepts project aimed to package these services and products so, that the buyer (an airport) could buy the whole winter conditions management from one place instead of having to buy bits and pieces from multiple suppliers and/or service providers. Airport Concepts created new branding challenges for Airport Cluster Finland and they will be briefly addressed in the recommendations section.

1.2 Research objectives and research questions

The objective of this thesis is to study cluster branding. The study aims to find out what cluster branding actually is, how it is done, and whether it is a competitive advantage for the cluster. More specifically, the goal is to find out, if a strong cluster brand brings a competitive advantage for the member companies. Ideally, as the result of the study, a model for cluster branding process will be created and concrete suggestions for cluster brand building and cluster brand management presented.

The figure below illustrates the research process of this thesis. The process starts by defining the research problem and the more detailed research questions (presented later in this chapter). Next, the relevant literature is identified and studied, and the theoretical framework formed. The third phase in the process is collection and analysis of the data. The box on the bottom illustrates the final research findings, which is a model for cluster branding process and concrete suggestions and tools for cluster branding. In addition, benefits of cluster branding for different stakeholders will be identified.
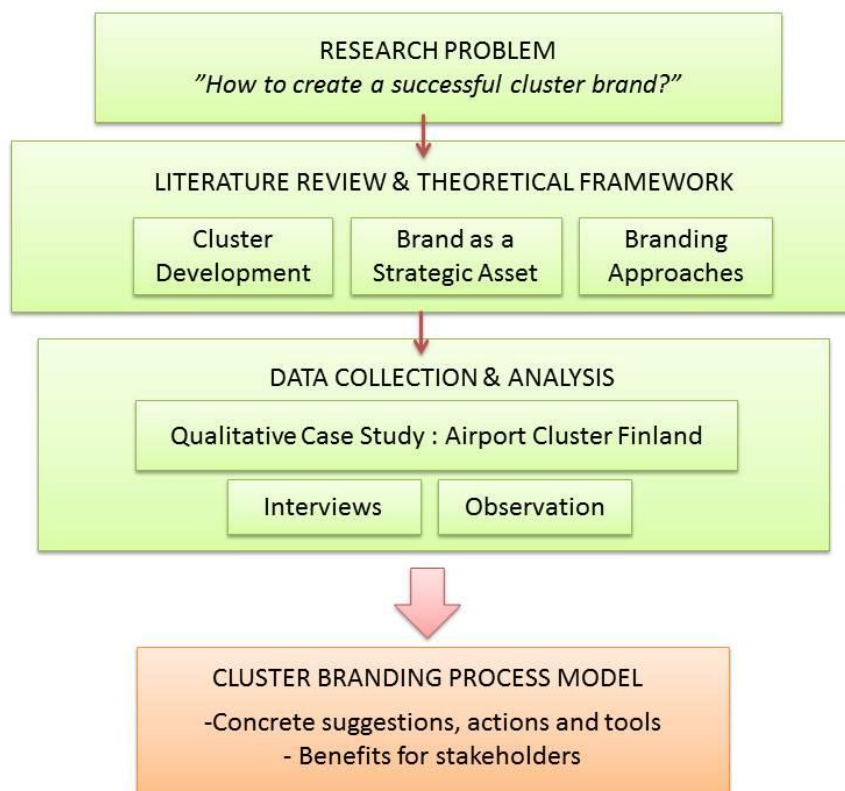
Figure 2. The Research Process.

The study has been conducted from the perspective of the cluster members and the cluster manager, so the possible implications for other cluster stakeholders are excluded. For example, if the cluster branding has increased the attractiveness of the geographical area of the cluster, is not studied in this thesis. The research problem and questions of the thesis arise from real life experiences from working within the case cluster. They are presented in more detail below:

Research problem: How to create a successful cluster brand?

1) **What are the stages of an effective cluster branding process?**

The branding strategies and approaches vary depending on the company and the industry it operates in. Small and medium-sized companies look at branding from a very different angle than large multinational corporations. Also, whether the company operates in the business-to-consumer (B2C) or business-to-business (B2B) markets, affects the branding

decisions significantly. Similarly, the branding process of a cluster, an entity consisting of numerous different companies, can be expected to have unique features due to their exceptional and complex nature.

Cluster branding is a relatively new phenomenon and there is not much literature on the topic yet. This thesis aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on cluster branding by studying the cluster branding process. The goal is to produce a model for the cluster branding process. The model would include concrete actions that are required in the cluster branding process. Ideally the model would help existing or beginning clusters in their branding efforts.

2) What are some of the concrete tools of cluster branding?

In addition to the cluster branding actions, this study aims to identify concrete tools that can be used in cluster branding. Ideally the findings will provide some practical tips for people working within cluster brand management.

3) What are the perceived benefits of cluster brand?

The creation of a strong brand does not usually happen automatically, but needs time and efforts from the brand owner. In a cluster case, all the stakeholders are in a way brand owners and the branding process will require input and resources from all of them. Therefore it is extremely interesting to study, whether the cluster stakeholders consider the cluster brand as a competitive advantage. In other words, this question aims to find out if a cluster brand is considered useful and beneficial by the cluster stakeholders. In addition, this questions aims to recognize, how different cluster stakeholder have benefitted from the cluster brand, if at all. This question will be looked at from the viewpoint of start-ups and small and medium-sized companies, as well as large corporations. Differences can be expected, since the member companies of the case cluster are very varied. The members include companies from start-ups to successful multinational corporations.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research project, its objectives and research questions. In addition, the case cluster is introduced in the first chapter. Chapter 2 entails the literature review, which presents literature relevant for this study including literature about cluster development and branding. It also presents the theoretical framework based on that literature and used in the empirical part of the thesis. Chapter 3 explains the data that was used in the study and how it was collected and analyzed. This chapter also briefly discusses the trustworthiness of the study. The fourth chapter presents the findings of the data analysis. Finally, chapter 5 summarizes the research project, discusses the practical implications and presents recommendations based on the findings. In addition the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research are presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents the literature relevant for the purpose of this thesis. The chapter starts by discussing the concept of a business cluster, its development and benefits. The chapter 2.1 aims to provide the reader a clear understanding of what kinds of clusters there are, how are they formed and why. The chapter introduces different definitions for the concept of cluster, and describes the definition used in this thesis. The cluster life cycle model is presented in order to form a better understanding on how cluster is formed and developed. It is essential to understand the different phases of cluster life cycle in order to determine what kind of branding activities should take place in each of the phases.

Chapter 2.2 discusses branding from different perspectives. Firstly, the overall strategic meaning of brands is discussed in order to understand the true power of a strong brand. Secondly, I will discuss the brand elements, i.e. what a brand, in fact, consists of. Existing literature shows that branding is different depending on the context. In other words, branding of small and medium sized companies differs from branding of large multinational corporations. Also, there are differences in the branding strategies whether we are talking about B2B or B2C markets. Chapter 2.3 discusses these different branding approaches. As a cluster can include a variety of different kind of companies, it is therefore essential to understand the unique elements of different branding approaches to be able to spot those elements that would be appropriate in the cluster context.

2.1 Cluster Development

Different authors define cluster differently and there seems to be no consensus among the researchers about the exact definition. For others cluster mean a strictly defined network with exact characteristics, while others use the word cluster for any network of companies. This chapter discusses the differences in the definitions and determines the definition used in this thesis. In addition, cluster development is discussed while presenting two different cluster life cycle models. Lastly, the benefits of clustering according to existing literature are discussed in order to understand, why clusters are formed.

2.1.1 Definition of cluster

Michael Porter introduced the concept of a business cluster already in 1990, when he defined it as: "a geographic concentration of interconnected businesses, suppliers, and associated institutions in a particular field ". Over time, his definition of cluster has remained almost the same except for a few minor additions. In 2005 he defined cluster as "a geographic concentration of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries and associated institutions in a particular field that compete but also cooperate". According to Porter clusters can occur in many types of industries and can be found in both advanced and developing industries. The geographic scope of a cluster can vary from a region, city to even a country or neighboring countries (Porter, 2005). In practice this means that companies that are located in different cities or even different countries can belong to the same cluster.

Rosenfeld (2005), on the other hand, claims that almost any geographic grouping of similar or complementary companies, can be described as a cluster. Kuah (2002) defines cluster as a geographical agglomeration of competing and related industries. According to Kuah cluster needs to show evidence of improved performance such as growth and profitability arising from the agglomeration of firms in region. In all of the previous definitions, clusters are assumed to be reasonably permanent entities, but Maskell et al. (2004) view clusters as "geographically localized agglomerations of firms with similar or highly complementary capabilities". They use cluster as a generic concept, and argue that clusters can also be temporary. According to them, temporary clusters are formed for example at professional gatherings such as trade fairs where companies from the same field gather together. In other words, temporary clusters are places where intensive exchange of knowledge, network building and generation of new ideas take place.

Kasabov & Sundaram (2011) suggest that clusters should be studied as examples of place brands. They also recommend adopting a stakeholder management approach when analyzing clusters as place brands. They argue that this would allow more pluralist and multidimensional research agenda when it comes to studying clusters. Clusters and place brands indeed share similarities, especially when talking about purely geographical clusters.

Due to the fact that the geographical boundaries do not play a very significant role in the case cluster of this thesis, I will not look at clusters as examples of place brands. However, the concept of place branding and its relevance to this study is still discussed in chapter 2.2.6 and it is also included in the theoretical framework of the thesis.

As we can see, there are almost as many definitions for the word cluster as there are authors. The definitions between different authors may vary significantly, but all definitions agree on the fact that a cluster consists of several actors i.e. companies, institutions or other organizations who operate within some geographical boundaries. Porter's definition also states that the companies need to be connected by a particular field. Menzel & Fornahl (2007) captures the essential elements of a cluster in one figure (see figure 3).
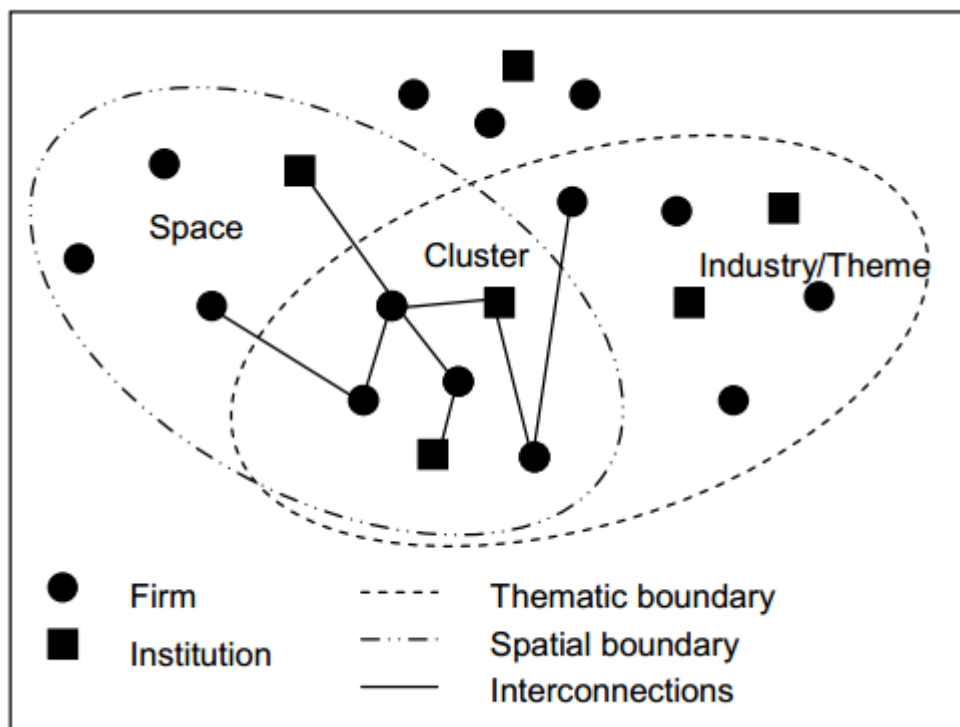
Figure 3. Elements of Cluster (Menzel & Fornhal, 2007).

The case cluster of this study, Airport Cluster Finland, falls very well under Porter's definition and also fits into the illustration of cluster elements presented above. Therefore this study views clusters mainly through Porter's definition, with one addition. This addition is the purpose of the cluster. The cluster I have been studying, has clearly defined why it exists, and what the objectives of its activities are. The members are engaged to the cluster

based on those activities and goals. Therefore, the definition of a cluster used in this thesis is a combination of Porter's definition and my own:

"*Cluster is a geographic concentration of interconnected actors in a particular field that compete but also cooperate, and have formed a network to serve a common purpose*".

The last addition "have formed a network to serve a common purpose" refers to that the cluster has been founded by some actors, who have agreed on certain goals and functions for the cluster. New members join the cluster in order to be involved in those functions and expect to gain some benefits from being part of the cluster. Therefore purely geographical development based cluster such as Silicon Valley or Otaniemi are ruled out from this study. Also, temporary clusters suggested by Maskell et al (2004) are not the type of clusters that would fall under the definition of clusters used in this study.

2.1.2 Cluster life cycle

The research on clusters often uses the idea of cluster life cycle as the preferred approach (Pasquinelli & Teräs, 2013; Martin & Sunley, 2011). Different researchers have come up with different cluster development models, but most of the cluster life cycle models share more or less the same phases: birth, growth, maturity and decline or reinvention. (Ingstrup & Damgaard, 2011). Different authors might use different terms, but the core idea seems to be similar.

Cluster life cycle relates to cluster branding, because clusters at different life-cycle stages have different needs when it comes to branding. The cluster life-cycle model according to Andersson et al. (2013) is presented in figure 4. The figure shows that the cluster life cycle consists of four stages, which are embryonic, established, mature and declining.
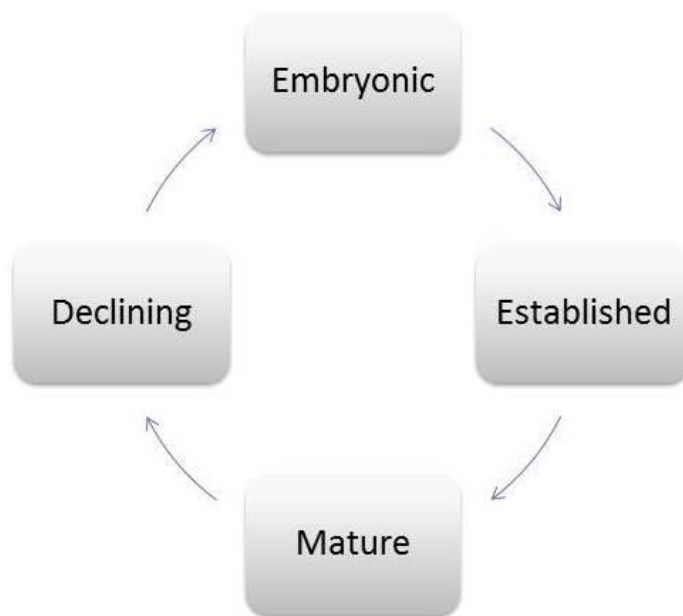
Figure 4. Cluster Life Cycle according to Andersson et al. (2013).

In the first two stages clusters need to focus mainly on gaining visibility and getting recognized and heard among their stakeholders. This is important also in order to attract potential members to the cluster.

At the two latter stages, the main focus is shifted into increasing attractiveness and differentiation. As the cluster matures, the branding and marketing efforts also move from push to pull. This means that in their early stages clusters need to be more proactive in their marketing and branding efforts and "push" their message to the stakeholders. Later, when the cluster reputation is more established, it is enough to use the so-called "pull" strategy and aim to keep the stakeholders attracted to the cluster. (Andersson et al, 2013).

Swann et al. (1998) present a slightly different cluster life cycle model with only three stages; take-off, peak and saturation stages. The first stage, take-off, is when the cluster grows in size and attracts new entries. In the peak phase the growth slows down, and finally more or less stops in the saturation phase. According to Swann et al. (1998), the saturation occurs due to congestion either on the demand or the supply side. Menzel and Fornahl (2007) also divide cluster development into three stages; emergence, growth and declining. During the emergence the cluster has a few active companies. The amount of companies increases in

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the growth phase, and finally decreases in the declining phase. They also mention a fourth possible stage, "sustaining", which is used to emphasize the fact that a cluster can also be able to sustain itself, without facing declining. As clusters can sometimes shift to different and new industries, it is more appropriate to describe a cluster by its development rather than by its age. In Menzel and Fornah's (2007) view on cluster development, the process is not illustrated as a cycle, as in the cluster life cycle model by Andersson et al. Instead, they present cluster development as a linear process as can be seen in figure 5.
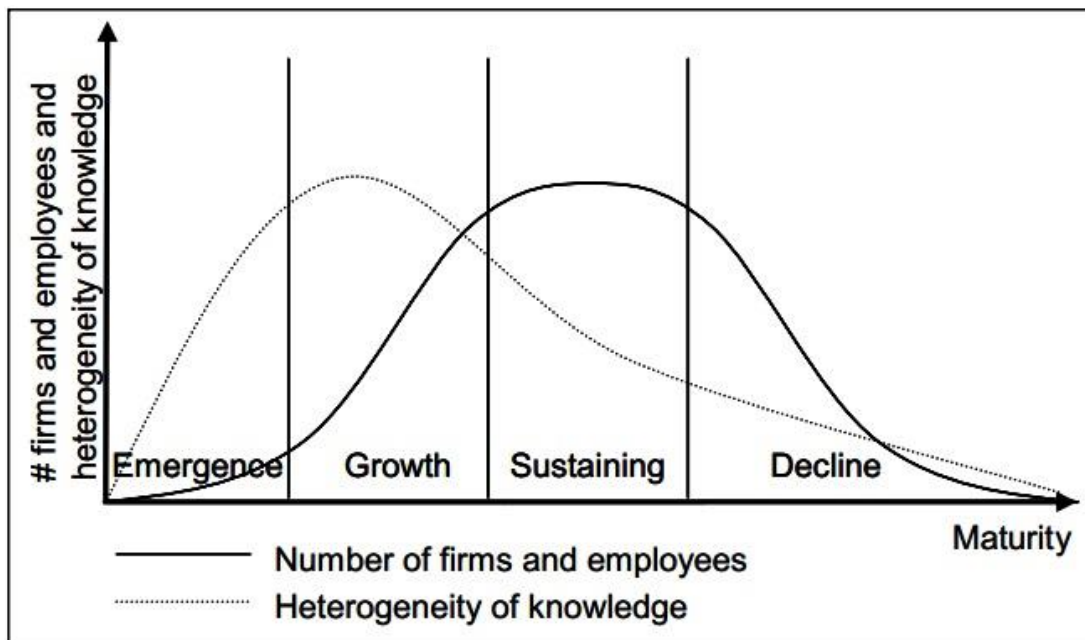
Figure 5. Cluster Life Cycle According to Menzel & Fornahl (2007).

Menzel and Fornahl (2007) state that a declining cluster is defined by a decrease in the amount of companies and employees that may happen due to firm exits, mergers and rationalization. According to them, there are three possibilities for ending the declining stage of a cluster. In the first option, the cluster follows the natural life cycle and simply diminishes. The other two possibilities present options for new growth phase. One of them is to change the direction of cluster development by implementing new and different technologies. Menzel and Fornahl use an accordion cluster as an example; they ended the declining phase by transforming from traditional music instruments towards electronic ones. The other option for ending the declining stage is a structural change. In practice the structural change means moving to a completely different field. According to Menzel and Fornahl (2007) clusters can be distinguished from one another both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. The quantitative dimension refers to the number of active firms and

employees in the cluster. The qualitative dimension refers to the heterogeneity of the cluster members' competencies available in the different stages of cluster development.

Most clusters develop with the support and intervention of an outside party, known as a cluster facilitator. A cluster facilitator can be an individual, private consultant, company, public authority or government agency, local association or a research institution such as a university (Gagné et al., 2010). Existing literature presents mainly individuals as the cluster facilitators rather than public authorities or government agencies (Ingstrup & Damgaard, 2011.) However, it is important to notice, that also public authorities such as a development companies, can operate as cluster facilitators. In fact, most of the Finnish clusters shown in figure 1 are facilitated by a development company. The case cluster of this thesis, Airport Cluster Finland, was initiated and facilitated by Vantaa Innovation Insitute Ltd, which is a city development company, owned by the city of Vantaa with an interest in developing the region.

2.1.3 Benefits of clustering

According to Porter (1998) a successful cluster attracts new firms to enter it and enhances rapid growth of the firms. It has been studied that firms in clusters, in fact, do grow faster than average. But only if they are clustered with other firms operating in the same sub-sector of industry. Firms in clusters are also proven to be more innovative, whether measured in the amount of new patents or new innovations. Belonging to a cluster allows firms to better access information, technology and institutions, and to cooperate with other firms both horizontally and vertically (Kuah, 2002). Also Porter's findings (1998) support the before mentioned cluster benefits, since he states that the clustering increases the productivity of the companies, drives innovation in the field and stimulates new businesses in the field. Generally, clusters affect competition in three broad ways. First of all, clusters increase the current productivity of constituent firms or industries. Secondly, clusters enhance growth and innovation among the cluster members. Thirdly, enhance the formation of new businesses that support and expand the cluster. (Porter, 2000)

Kuah (2002) identifies agglomeration externalities as the key force behind clustering. Agglomeration externalities refer to the any cost reductions enabled by firms being located

close to each other. According to him, most of the cluster benefits are based on the geographical proximity of cluster firms. The benefits that follow include; customer proximity, reduced consumer search costs, information externalities, reputation, knowledge spillovers, specialized labor, infrastructure benefits and information externalities. According to Kuah (2002) clusters grow, because they allow the participants to interact and learn from each other.

As said before, clusters enhance the creation of new businesses. In fact, Porter (2000) argues that many, if not most, businesses are created in clusters as opposed to isolated locations. In a cluster the entry is often more attracting, since there is a lot of information about the opportunities. The existence of the cluster alone, is already a sign of an opportunity. Another reason, why clusters enhance the creation of new businesses, is because people working in clusters spot gaps in products or services more easily. They perceive actual needs for new products and services and can find partners within the cluster to fill the gap with. In clusters the larger companies also help the start-up companies. According to Porter (2000) it is not unusual to see large companies developing close relationships with the smaller ones. The large companies may help the small companies in establishing their business or even acquire them.

Generally clusters affect regional development positively, and increase the attractiveness of the region in the eyes of both companies and employees. Therefore also many policy makers would like to endorse and benefit from the presence of one or more clusters in their administrative domain.

2.2 Brand as a Competitive Advantage

Brands have become extremely important and valuable assets for companies. We are currently living in a world with endless options, whether we talk about choosing a car, airline or shampoo. Some of the strongest brands like Apple, McDonalds and Nike and their logos and slogans, are known all around the world. Companies with strong corporate brands can, in fact, have an enormous market value – over double their book values (Hatch & Schultz, 2001). Branding and brand management have become key strategic and financial issues for companies. What makes brands even more valuable is the fact that, while products and

services are easy to imitate and copy, brands definitely aren't (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). This chapter discusses, how and why a brand should be considered as a strategic asset. The chapter also explains the brand elements and points out, which elements are relevant in the cluster brand context.

2.2.1 Brand as a strategic asset

For many, a brand only means a name and a logo, but in reality it entails and captures much more. While a brand is something intangible, it is understandable that the concept can be difficult to define exactly. Kotler & Pfoertsch (2006) define brand as follows: "A brand is the totality of perceptions – everything you see, hear, read, know, feel, think etc. –about a product, service or business". In addition a brand is a promise formed in customer's mind based on past experiences, associations and future expectations. In other words, the real power of a brand is in the thoughts, feelings, images, beliefs, attitudes, experiences etc. that the consumers have towards the brand (Keller, 2003). Brand is in a way related into anything a company does and should therefore be treated as a strategic issue.

Brand building is aimed at creating long-term non-tangible assets, which makes it rather hard to evaluate and measure the effects and results of branding. However, brand equity is often used to measure or describe the power of business brands (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). There are different approaches on brand equity and different authors and scholars define the term differently. According to Wood (2000) the term brand equity is used to mean brand value (often used by accountants), brand strength and brand image. On the other hand, when marketers use the term brand equity they tend to mean brand strength. According to Hollensen (2003) brand equity simply refers to the value of the brand. Highly valued brands can capture customers' loyalty and therefore create a significant competitive advantage over the company's competitors. Brand value is affected by brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and other assets such as patents and trademarks. Brand strength is, as mentioned, difficult to measure in monetary value, and therefore companies rarely list brand equity on their balance sheets (Kotler et al., 2008).

In order for a brand to be meaningful, it needs to be consistent and clear. The brand and the brand strategy need to be crystal clear to employees, so that they can behave according to

brand and its promise. This is important also from the cluster branding point of view, where the cluster members are, in this sense, almost like "employees", who must be aware of the brand strategy, in order to be able to act accordingly. Brand strategy has to be aligned with the corporate strategy. Brands are not static, but they can evolve and even change depending on the market conditions and stakeholder expectations (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006).

Successful brand management is based on the corporate identity of a company (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). According to Margulies (as cited in Christensen & Askegaard, 1999) corporate identity is the sum of all the ways a company identifies itself to all its stakeholders, including customers, employees, media, investors etc. Corporate image, on the other hand, is how the company is perceived within the eyes of these stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2001). In other words, corporate identity is seen as belonging to the sender side of the communication process, whereas corporate image is mostly related to the receiver side. A strong corporate identity is known to bring valuable benefits to an organization, including increased consumer confidence and loyalty, stimulating investments and attracting high quality personnel among others (Christensen & Askegaard, 1999). When talking about a cluster, the benefits of a strong cluster identity and brand can be expected to be quite different, since the different nature of the cluster, compared to a commercial company. The benefits of a strong cluster brand are discussed in the findings chapter of the thesis.

2.2.2 Brand elements

Brand elements are the concrete devices needed in order to identify and differentiate a company's product or service from the competitors. These visual, and sometimes even physical elements, are essential when building a strong brand (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). Brand elements typically include names, logos, characters, packaging, slogans and jingles. Together they enhance brand awareness and facilitate the formation of favourable brand associations (Farhana, 2012).

Kotler & Pfoertsch (2006) suggest only four key brand elements to be used in B2B branding. Due to the fact that clusters often operate in B2B markets and the fact that cluster rarely have own products or services to sell, only these four elements are considered relevant for the purpose of this study. For example, packaging is considered irrelevant brand element in

cluster branding, because typically clusters do not have own products and therefore packaging does not play any role in their branding process. Characters are an effective way to captivate consumer's attention and make the brand memorable in consumer's mind (Farhana, 2012). However, as mentioned before, clusters often operate in B2B markets and do not communicate to consumers directly and therefore characters are not included in the brand elements of cluster branding. For this same reason, jingles are also excluded from the cluster brand elements. In conclusion, the key elements of a cluster brand are: brand story, name, logo and a tagline (see figure 6), as Kotler & Pfoertsch suggested for B2B environments.
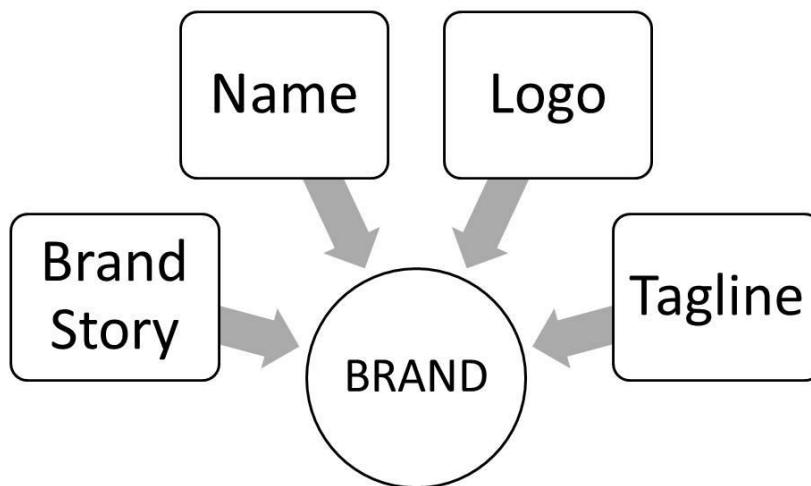
 Figure 6. Brand Elements.

The **name** of a brand is probably the greatest expression of a product. Therefore choosing the name requires careful consideration, where cultural, linguistic and personal aspects need to be taken into account. The name of a product, service or a company, directly affects the perception of the brand and a well-chosen name can therefore be a valuable asset (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). The name should capture the key associations of the company in a very compact way. Brand names, at their best, are extremely effective means of communications. According to Keller (2003) the brand name can be noticed and its meaning activated in memory within only a few seconds.

According to Keller (2003) the visual brand elements such as the **logo**, are essential in building equity, especially in terms of brand awareness. The logo is "the look" of the company, which at its best represents and communicates the company's identity. The logo has two basic, but important functions for brands; identification and differentiation (Farhana, 2012). From one point of view the logo, the visual image of the company, is even more important and powerful than the company name, since human beings tend to be more perceptive to images and symbols than written names (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006).

The brand **tagline** or slogan is a short, recognizable phrase often accompanied by the brand name. Slogans should be easily memorable and should support the brand image (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). In addition, slogans should communicate descriptive or persuasive information about the brand and capture its essence (Keller, 2003). The tagline, together with brand name and logo, create the whole core of the brand (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006).

Andreasen & Kotler (2008) point out, that too generic slogans should be avoided. Also, if the organization such as the case cluster of this thesis, has a sponsor or an outside financier, it is important that the possible slogan aligns with their ideology as well. Even though the most known and successful brand slogans can be found in B2C markets, Kotler & Pfoertsch (2006) recommend B2B companies to utilize slogans as well, due to their obvious benefits. An effective slogan captures the company's personality and helps to differentiate it from the competitors. Therefore the power of slogans should not be underestimated in the B2B markets.

The fourth brand element, **brand story**, creates a certain depth to the brand. In order for a brand to be special, it should have a special story related to it. Often, the story is for example about, how the company started its business. Storytelling has become one of the key elements in the branding context in corporate life (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). In fact, Hollensen (2003) states, that branding is very much like storytelling.

The brand elements reflect the company's personality and corporate culture. They should be designed with a long-term perspective in mind. Kotler & Pfoertsch (2006) list some useful guidelines that can be used when planning the brand elements. According to them, the brand elements should be:

- **Available:** It should be checked that the internet domain of the brand name is available
- **Meaningful:** Brand elements should capture the identity of the brand and communicate it to stakeholders
- **Memorable:** Brand elements should be easy to remember and names should be easy to read and spell
- **Protectable:** Brand elements should be legally protected in all target countries
- **Future-Oriented:** Brand elements should be adaptable and updatable
- **Positive:** Brand elements should bring out positive associations
- **Transferable:** Making sure that the brand elements can be used also in introducing new products

2.3 Branding Approaches

Recent work in branding literature has indicated that branding is a subjective phenomenon depending on the organizational and industrial contexts (Mitchell et al. 2013). This means that branding has notable differences whether we talk about small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) or large multinational corporations (MNCs). Branding also differs, when we talk about business-to-consumer (B2C) or business-to-business (B2B) brand management. In fact, many B2B companies feel that branding efforts are irrelevant for them (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). Since the case cluster of this thesis is a B2B cluster, it is important to bring the aspect of B2B brand management to the discussion.

Typically the strategic branding options can be divided into three major strategic choices. The three directions are individual brands, family brands and corporate brands. Choosing the most suitable strategy depends highly on the nature of business, industry and business environment, among others. Companies do not typically use purely one of these generic strategies, but rather use a hybrid form, where elements from more than one strategy are applied (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). A hybrid branding strategy is expected outcome in the cluster branding context as well, since I believe that cluster branding takes elements from different branding approaches. Due to the varied member pool (several different types of brand owners), a hybrid branding strategy is a probable outcome.

The different branding strategies are discussed in this chapter in order to be able to spot the elements that would be suitable for a cluster branding strategy. Due to the different companies involved it can be expected that cluster branding has elements from each aspect of branding. On one hand, cluster branding resembles corporate branding, because we are branding several companies (instead of one product). On the other hand, cluster branding, at least in the Airport Cluster Finland case, has elements from B2B branding, because it operates in the B2B markets. SME branding is discussed since most of the member companies of the cluster are often SME's. Lastly, since cluster branding is closely related to place branding, the concept of place branding is briefly discussed. Cluster is defined as a geographic concentration of businesses, so from that point of view place branding actually goes hand in hand with cluster branding.

There is not a lot of literature about cluster branding available, but the last section of this chapter, introduces what has been written about it so far. As said, cluster branding has elements from all these areas, and therefore they are all discussed at least to some extent in the following chapters.

2.3.1 Corporate branding

Corporate brands, sometimes known as master brands, represent all offerings of a company. The corporate brand serves as a so-called umbrella brand, which captures all the dimensions of the brand including vision, values, personality and image (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). According to Kotler & Pfoertsch, (2006) corporate brand strategy is the most typical brand strategy in a B2B environment. It enables companies to create something constant and lasting in the ever-changing industrial marketing environment. Especially in those markets where new innovations occur constantly, a product branding strategy becomes outdated very quickly. Instead, a corporate branding strategy allows the company to shorten the payback time of an investment remarkably.

Corporate brand management aims at providing a clear, consistent and unique picture of a company to all the stakeholders. A clear brand image also goes hand in hand with the shareholders' disposition to buy the company's stocks; the clearer the brand image, the more likely the company's stocks are bought (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006).

According to Hatch & Schultz (2001) a strong corporate brand consists of three elements, "the strategic stars", which need to be aligned in order for the brand to be strong and effective. Those three elements are vision, culture and image. Vision means the top management's aspirations for the company. Culture refers to the values, behaviors and attitudes of the organization. Culture is formed inside the company and ultimately reflects truthfully how the employees feel about the organization. The third element, image, on the other hand, refers to how the outside world sees the company. Outside world, of course, includes all stakeholders such as customers, investors, media, general public etc. When the three elements are aligned and support each other, a company has the building blocks for a strong corporate brand. Harris and de Chernatony's (2001) identity-reputation gap model supports Hatch & Schultz's view. According to them, corporate branding is about narrowing the gap between organization's identity and reputation. The identity-reputation gap model represents the multidimensional nature of corporate branding. According to the model, creating a coherent brand identity and a favourable brand reputation requires careful coordination of company's internal resources. They emphasize the important role of company's employees in the branding process. According to them corporate branding requires a holistic approach, where all members of an organization need to behave according to the desired brand identity.

2.3.2 B2B branding

Establishing and building a brand in the B2B environment is different from branding in the consumer and general public context. Most often branding is discussed in the B2C context. Similarly, most of the literature is dedicated to consumer products and markets when it comes to branding (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). Therefore it is not a surprise that many B2B companies actually feel that brand management is none of their concern. However, recently B2B brand management has been given more and more attention by both researchers as well as practitioners all over the world. B2B brand management represents an effective opportunity for establishing a competitive advantage and therefore should not be neglected by B2B companies (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006).

B2B markets differ from B2C markets and therefore different approaches to branding are also needed. Typically the products sold in B2B markets are industrial products like raw

materials, parts, components or equipment. This means that the purchasing process requires expertise from both buyer and the supplier. In addition, it is typical for B2B market, that there is a smaller number a customers and yet larger volumes per customer. There are differences also in the nature of customer relationships. In B2B markets the relationships tend to be closer and longer-lasting. All these factors affect the way industrial products and services have to branded and marketed in the B2B markets (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). According to Kotler & Pfoertsch (2006) the most potential branding strategy for B2B companies is a strong corporate brand with a few product brands.

Despite the differences between B2B and B2C markets, the **brand building tools** are still fundamentally the same in both areas. Brand building tools are the actual means of marketing communication that a company uses to inform customers about its products and services. Examples of these tools are personal selling, direct marketing, public relations, trade shows and exhibitions, advertising and sales promotion (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). These promotional tools are sometimes also referred to as the promotion mix (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006).

2.3.3 SME branding

It has been widely noted, that the management style, operations and functions in small and medium-sized companies are different from those in large organizations. Brand management is no difference. The branding literature indicates that branding is a subjective phenomenon depending on the organization and the industrial context. Therefore there are notable differences in the brand management processes of small and medium-sized companies and large organizations (Berthon et al., 2008). Abimbola & Kocak (as cited in Mitchell et al., 2013) state that even for small firms with limited resources, brands can become important organizational assets allowing them to compete in crowded marketplaces. Despite, Berthon et al. (2008) argue that the branding research tends to focus on the biggest and most successful brands leaving SME's largely overlooked, even though the majority of world's organizations in are, in fact, small or medium-sized.

According to Berthon et al. (2008) the manager and the key-decision maker in an SME is often the owner of the business. They are responsible for many of the company's functions

from recruiting to advertising. SME managers tend to agree on the fact that company reputation is important. However, due to the limited resources, in terms of money, time and knowledge, it is often difficult to translate that viewpoint into specific strategic actions. This is one significant difference between corporate and SME branding.

According to Berthon et al. (2008) there is not sufficiently research on how smaller organizations, with modest resources, can effectively manage their brands. Their study confirmed that there indeed are differences with SME's and MNC's in how they implement key brand management practices. The large organizations are more focused on understanding and monitoring customer needs and measuring the effectiveness of past actions. However, the results also show that there is a link between implementing branding practices and performance. Those SME's that have put efforts on branding are able to achieve a distinct advantage over competitors.

2.3.4 Place branding

The concepts of place marketing and place branding have emerged in academic literature as well as in practice especially during the 1990's and 2000's (Pasquinelli & Teräs, 2012). Place marketing and branding are often related to travelling industry and destination marketing, but the concepts are also essential in the cluster context as clusters are geographic concentrations of interconnected companies. Hindreth (2010) states that even though the theory and practice related to place branding has evolved a lot during the last decade, there is room and need for further research. To understand cluster branding better, the concept of place branding should be studied, since the two concepts resemble each other in many ways. Especially, if a cluster is closely associated with its geographic location, the boundaries of place and cluster branding can be blurry.

According to Pasquinelli & Teräs (2012) there is a lack of consensus on the exact definition of place branding. They use a definition combined from several authors and conclude that place branding can be defined as "a process that aims at establishing a fair reputation and building brand equity within the frame of place management." They also add that place branding is a strategic process and deals with images and identity. In addition, they state that the concept of place branding requires further theoretical development.

Anholt (2010) concludes that place names certainly are a type of brand name, as people tend to respond to them just like they respond to brands. Place brands can acquire and lose equity just like product brands. In addition, place brands are usually accompanied with visual identities, almost like logos. In practice, place branding means taking actions in order to enhance the brand image of the place. Place branding is believed to enable making places famous.

Place branding techniques can be used to improve and change a place's image. They are useful also when dealing with negative perceptions about a place. Hildreth (2010) points out that the image of a place cannot be faked and existing images cannot be erased from people's minds. New images can be created and a negative image can be enhanced by fostering new and better associations to replace the old ones. Hildreth (2010) introduced a "generic model" for rebranding places that applies for places of all sizes and types. The model is based on four steps; (1) Identifying a current story about the place, (2) Deciding on a desired story, (3) Finding ways to tell the story and (4) Making the story better, more true and easier to spread. Hindreth (2010) also suggests some concrete tools for place branding including graphic design, advertising, marketing communications and events.

2.3.5 Cluster branding

As stated previously, the concept of cluster branding is relatively new and there is not much research done on the subject. The biggest contribution on the topic, to my knowledge, is a cluster branding and marketing handbook by Andersson et al. (2013). The handbook is entirely dedicated for the topic of cluster marketing and branding. To my knowledge there are no other similar academic papers that would focus entirely on this topic.

Andersson et al. (2013) define cluster brand management as "the way a cluster manages its reputation and achieves a distinct position based on its identity and what it does most effectively. They argue that cluster branding is very much about communication and behaviour, and not so much about marketing communication. In other words, what you do, matters a great deal.

Kasabov & Sundaram (2011) argue that corporate and umbrella brand management cannot as such be applied to cluster branding, since corporate branding is a relatively stable process compared to cluster branding. Corporate branding within large corporations with complex brand portfolios has cohesive organizational boundaries, whereas the ownership of places or clusters as brandable entities is not so straightforward.

The most unique element of cluster branding compared to corporate branding, is how the cluster brand is actually public good and benefits several different stakeholders and many different purposes. Even though cluster branding is a management issue, there are usually actors from both private and public sector involved (Andersson et al., 2013). This is also, what makes it challenging. Because of the several actors involved, cluster branding requires careful consideration of management of conflict, disagreement and discord among the multiple stakeholder groups' different interests (Kasabov & Sundaram, 2011).

Andersson et al. (2013) have developed a model representing the phases that should be included in a cluster branding process (figure 7). As the figure shows there are six key phases in the cluster brand management process; (1) Mobilization & Planning, (2) Research & Analysis, (3) Process, (4) Strategy, (5) Implementation, (6) Management, Monitoring & Evaluation.
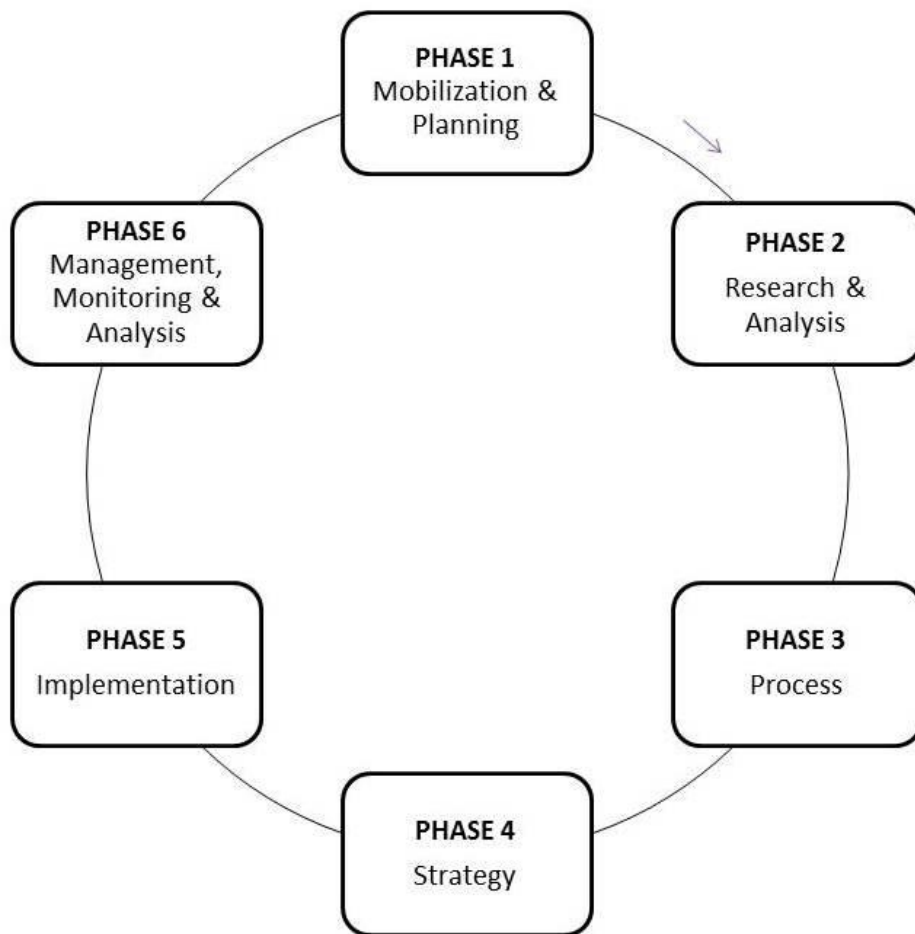
Figure 7. The Cluster Brand Management Process (Andersson et al, 2013).

The first phase, mobilization & planning, aims at creating positive expectations of the cluster branding process and ensuring that cluster stakeholders are ready to invest time and resources into it. At this stage it is also essential to build an infrastructure and management structure for the process. In practice, this means creating a team of representatives for the cluster branding process, led by the cluster manager. Andersson et al. (2013) also recommend hiring an external consultant to assist in the cluster branding process. Especially when building the strategy it is worthwhile to have an outsider's perspective which can help in deciding on what to promote and what not.

The second phase, research and analysis, is mostly about understanding, how people both inside and outside the cluster sees the cluster. It is important to listen to all the stakeholders at this point, since it can later affect their willingness to support and use the final brand strategy themselves. **Phase three**, process, aims at defining the brand vision which answers

the questions of how the cluster wishes to be seen as in the future. More importantly, the steps on how to get there, are defined in this phase.

Phase four includes working out a brand strategy, which should contain at least the following elements: brand platform (core values, brand positioning, brand promise), brand architecture, marketing communication strategy and an action plan. **Phase five**, is when the brand is "brought to life" i.e. the implementation of the strategy created in the previous stage. This includes expressing the brand visually, symbolically, orally and literally. According to Andersson et al. (2013) this is the phase where many strategies fail. They list the most common reasons for failure as: low stakeholder support, lack of leadership, lack of resources and weak marketing budget. It should be noted that this phase has no end, as the implementation of the branding strategy is a continuous process.

Phase six is called the management, monitoring and evaluation. As the previous phase, this is also a continuous phase. During this stage, the success of the previous phases is evaluated. This phase also includes ensuring that the branding work is being used and works well. Improvements and refinements can be made to revitalize the branding process. Andersson et al. (2013) propose two main ways for the actual evaluation; quantitative assessment and cluster brand audit. Quantitative assessment refers to a perception analysis which evaluates how the image of the cluster has developed over time. Cluster brand audit, on the other hand, evaluates how the branding strategy implementation and management has progressed and functioned. It can be implemented by performing qualitative interviews, reviewing of marketing and communications material as well as by benchmarking other clusters.

The terms cluster marketing and cluster branding should not be confused with each other, since they are two clearly distinguished functions. In the cluster context, the term marketing is used to describe the promotion to increase the selling of the products or services of the cluster, or the cluster members. Cluster branding, on the other hand, refers to the improvement of the overall reputation and image of the cluster (Andersson et al. 2013). Cluster branding is relevant for non-profit clusters also, whereas marketing is necessarily not.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This chapter describes the theoretical framework of the research project. The theoretical framework is illustrated below in Figure 8.
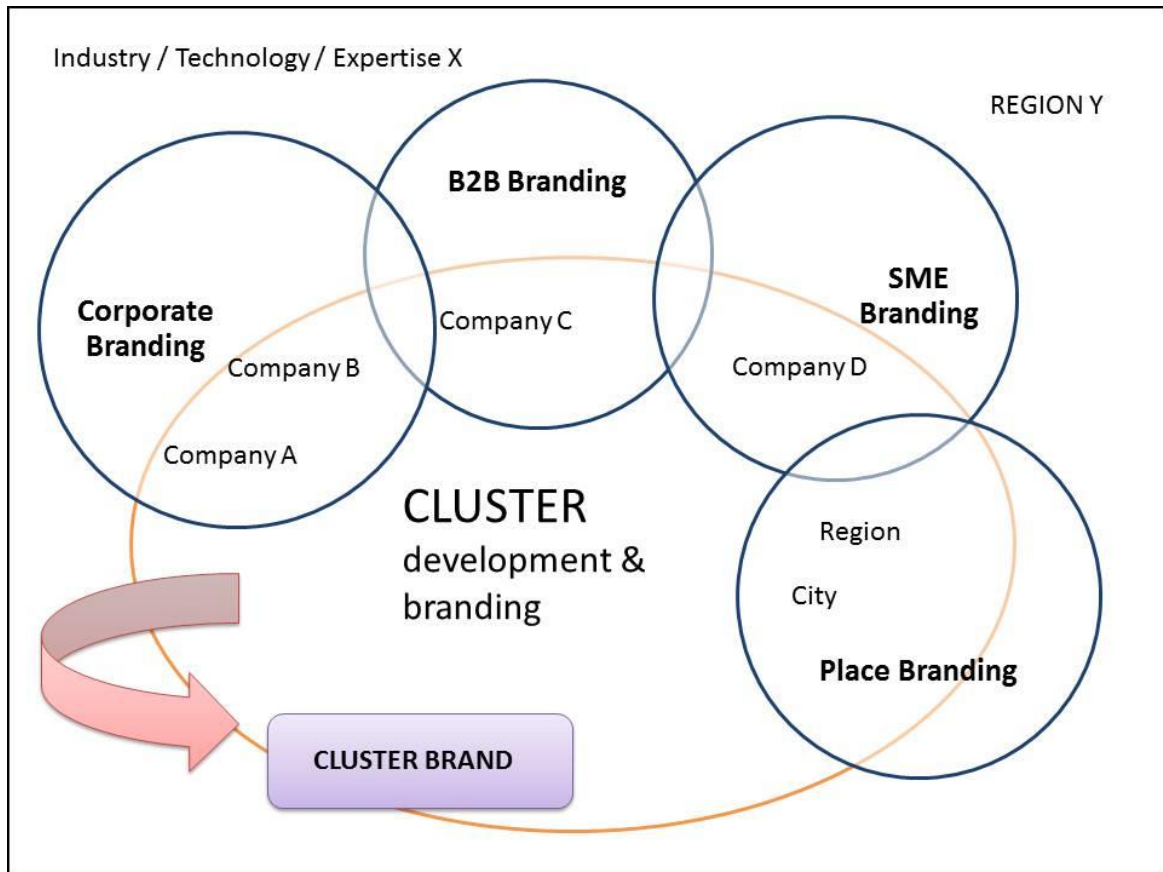
Figure 8. Theoretical Framework.

The figure illustrates a group of different kind of companies (Company A, B, C, D) connected by the same industry, technology or expertise (X). These companies are different in terms of size and product portfolios. Because of that, they also have different approaches and strategies when it comes to branding. The figure shows, which branding strategy is the most relevant for each of the companies. Company A, for example, is an MNC with a diverse product portfolio under one brand, and their branding strategy would therefore be corporate branding. Company D, on the other hand, is a small or a medium-sized company and is therefore in the "circle" of SME branding. In real life, a company could belong to one or more of these categories i.e. implement more than one branding strategy, but in order to simplify the scenario, I have put each company in only one circle.

Even though the companies are different from each other when it comes to size, products and services, they are all connected by the same industry, technology or expertise (X), as the figure shows. In addition, they are located within the same geographical boundaries, for example in the same city or other region (Y). Together they form a cluster illustrated by the biggest circle. The cluster can also include the city or some other actors who operate to promote the area. Therefore place branding is also illustrated as its own circle in the theoretical framework figure.

The idea of the figure is to illustrate the challenge that occurs when we take different kind of companies and other actors with their own brands and different branding approaches, and aim to build one unanimous brand for the whole group. The red arrow going from "cluster development" to "cluster brand" represents the scope of this study. The objective of this study is to find what happens between the cluster development and a finished cluster brand. What kind of strategic issues need to be considered and what are the concrete tools to build a strong cluster brand? This thesis aims to produce a model for cluster branding process, which illustrates the actions that take place while going from cluster development into a finished cluster brand.

3. DATA AND METHODS

This chapter presents the research method used in this study. In addition, the data collection and data analysis processes are described. Lastly the trustworthiness of the study is discussed.

3.1 Data collection

Instead of studying several different clusters, this research is done by conducting a single case study. A case study aims to acquire knowledge from intensive exploration of a single case (Becker, 1970, p. 75). The personal work experience gained from working as the Communications Coordinator of Airport Cluster Finland between August 2011 and December 2013 guided my decision to choose this specific cluster as my case. As a Communication Coordinator my tasks included planning and implementing the external and internal communication activities of ACF. In practice, the duties included website management, social media activities, organizing events and exhibitions and planning marketing material, among others. Due to the own experiences from the case cluster, I can use my own observations and knowledge to support the conclusions drawn from the data analysis.

The research approach in this study is qualitative. Qualitative research emphasizes the importance of people's words, actions and records, instead of relying on mathematical significance (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). In qualitative research the role of theory in relation to the research is usually inductive. This means that qualitative research usually aims to generate theories rather than test the existing ones (Bryman & Bell, 2003). This is the case with my study as well. Hopefully, at the end of the research process, I will come up with a generic model for cluster branding, which would help existing and starting clusters to develop their branding processes.

Qualitative data refers to all non-numeric data. It is data based on meanings expressed by words, instead of numbers. Qualitative data refers to all data that have not been quantified and can be a product of all research strategies (Saunders et al., 2007). In this study the data is derived from ten qualitative interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, which means

that there were a set of pre-determined questions (see appendix 1), but several specifying questions were also asked to understand the respondent thoroughly. The pre-determined interview questions were open ended questions asking questions such as "what", "how", "why". Also, follow-up questions known as "probes" were asked, in case elaboration of the answer was necessary. No definite yes or no questions were asked. The semi-structured form of the interview allowed a relaxed and open atmosphere during the interviews. None of the interviews were conducted during the same day, to allow enough time for processing and analyzing the interview before the next session. Sometimes it was noticed after an interview, that there was something that should be added to the next interview. In other words the interview process also developed throughout the data collection.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, by telephone and some by e-mail in December 2014. The duration of the interviews varied from 20 to 60 minutes. All the interviews were transcribed and saved for a thorough analysis. The language of the interviews was Finnish, and the quotes presented in this thesis are freely translated into English. The table below shows the interviews conducted in more detail and presents some background information about the interviewees.

Interviewee	Company type	Participation in cluster activities (time in years)
Cluster Manager	Cluster	5
Director	City Development company	1
Cluster Manager of another cluster (a member of ACF)	Cluster	5
Cluster member 1	MNC	2
Cluster member 2	MNC	5
Cluster member 3	SME	5
Cluster member 4	SME	4
Cluster member 5	SME	5
Cluster member 6	Start-up	2
Cluster member 7	Start-up	2

Table 1. Interviewee details.

As we can see from the table, the different kind of member companies were well represented in the study, since there was at least one interview with each company category (SME, MNC and start-up). In addition, two interviews with cluster employees from two different clusters were conducted to add one more important perspective. Also, one city development company representative was interviewed.

3.2 Data analysis

There are a number of approaches and ways to analyze qualitative data. The approaches vary from highly structured, where the analysis is highly formalized and proceduralized to less structured, where the analysis relies much more on the researcher's interpretation. Data collection, data analysis and the development of conclusions are interrelated processes, which means that they can take place at the same time to some extent (Saunders et al., 2007). This was the case during this research as well, as the data analysis started already while still collecting the data. In addition to being interrelated, the processes are also interactive (Saunders et al., 2007), which means that occasionally the data has to be rearranged and re-categorized. This also happened during this research, as new meanings and patterns were discovered.

Categorization of the qualitative data allows the researcher to explore and analyze the data more systematically. It helps comprehend and manage the data, identify key themes and patterns and draw and verify conclusions. In practice, categorization means dividing the data into meaningful categories. The categories arise from the research questions and the objectives of the study. In this case the categories arise from the research questions of this study. In this study the interview questions have been divided into three key themes (i.e. categories); (1) cluster branding as a process, (2) concrete tools for cluster branding and (3) benefits to the stakeholders. These categories guided the analysis of the data. Categorization is followed by unitizing the data, which means attaching the bits and pieces of data (units of data) into appropriate categories (Saunders et al., 2007).

Quotes from the interviewees can be used to increase the trustworthiness of the study (Corden & Sainsbury, 2005). Therefore I have included actual quotes in the findings section, in order to increase the credibility of my findings.

3.3. Trustworthiness of the study

Reliability and validity are important concepts when measuring the quality of quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2003). However, there has been discussion among researchers about whether those concepts are relevant in assessing qualitative research. Due to the different nature of these two research approaches, different criteria for evaluation might be useful. Some authors, such as Morse et al. (2002) argue that reliability and validity are important concepts for attaining rigor and trustworthiness also in qualitative research. According to them, without rigor created by reliability and validity, research is worthless and becomes fiction.

Bryman & Bell (2003) introduce an alternative to reliability and validity as the primary criteria for evaluating qualitative research. They suggest that trustworthiness is made up of four criteria; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The trustworthiness of this research is assessed by these criteria by Bryman & Bell (2003).

The first criterion, credibility, refers to carrying out the research in a manner that qualifies as good practice among the research community. In addition credibility entails that the research findings are submitted to those who were studied. This technique is often known as respondent validation or member validation, and it is done to ensure that the researcher has understood respondents correctly. This research is conducted as a student of Aalto University and under the supervision of two professors, which ensures the research is conducted within an appropriate manner. Respondent validation has not been conducted, but the researcher has been involved in the activities of the case cluster and the respondents for several years, which reduces the risk of misunderstandings. The interviews were in-depth which also minimizes the risk of misinterpretations. The respondents will receive a copy of the final thesis.

Since qualitative research tends to investigate a specific group sharing some certain characteristics, the findings are mostly applicable to that specific context. Transferability is concerned with how well the findings can be applied to another "social world" than the one being studied. The findings of this thesis are applicable to those types of clusters that fall under the definition given in chapter 2.1.1: *Cluster is a geographic concentration of*

interconnected actors in a particular field that compete but also cooperate, and have formed a network to serve a common purpose.

Dependability refers to ensuring that complete records are kept during the whole research process. In practice this means recording all stages of the research process from problem formulation to data analysis decisions in an accessible manner. If someone wished to "audit" the research process, all relevant documentation would be available. However, this has not really become a pervasive approach to validation due to the extremely large data sets qualitative research tends to generate. The research process has not been documented in such accuracy as Bryman & Bell (2003) describe to present dependability. However, the progress of the research process has been monitored by the supervisors a few times during the process. The interviews were transcribed and saved for analysis.

Conformability refers to ensuring that the researcher has acted in "good faith" i.e. has not let their personal values or theoretical inclinations affect their research and findings. While it is known that complete objectivity is impossible during business research, the researcher should not let personal issues affect the outcome of the study. In this case, the researcher has experience from working with the case cluster. As the researcher is aware of the risk of letting personal opinions affect the outcome of the study, it has been recognized and avoided. However, observation has been defined as one of the sources of data, which means that researchers own observations have been used in the research process. However, observations differ from opinions and personal values, which means this research presents conformability despite the fact that the researcher has own experience from the field of study.

4. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the key findings of the study. The chapter is divided into three sections; (4.1) cluster branding process, (4.2) concrete tools for cluster branding and (4.3) cluster brand as a competitive advantage. Each of the sections aims to answer one of the research questions, as follows:

1) What is the cluster branding process like?
   ➔ *4.1. Cluster Branding Process*

2) What are some of the concrete tools of cluster branding?
   ➔ *4.2. Concrete Tools for Cluster Branding*

3) What are the perceived benefits of cluster branding?
   ➔ *4.3. Cluster Brand as a Competitive Advantage*

4.1. Cluster Branding Process

The figure 9 shows a model for cluster branding process. It is created based on the analysis of the data both from the interviews and from my own observation while working as the Communications Coordinator in the case cluster between 2011 and 2013. The biggest influence on the cluster branding process model has, however, come from the own observation and the interviews with the cluster managers, who have participated more actively in the cluster branding process, than the member companies.

The cluster branding process model consists of four phases; (1) justifying existence & attracting members, (2) identification – who are we?, (3) building credibility & creating awareness and (4) maintaining brand image. The red arrow below the phases represents the cluster life cycle, and illustrates in which cluster life cycle stage each of the phases take place. This only gives direction and is not definite. I have chosen to use the linear cluster life cycle, instead of the circular one. In my opinion, the linear cluster life cycle better represents the kind of clusters this thesis deals with, since in the linear model, the last phase of the

cluster life cycle continues as long as the cluster exists. In the circular model, however, the life cycle of the cluster starts all over from the beginning after the last phase. I feel like this is not the case in the types of clusters that this study deals with. In these clusters the cluster life cycle does not start over from the beginning after the last phase, but the life of the cluster ends, when the cluster stops existing. Even though I agree that the strategies of the cluster can be renewed and the processes may begin over and over again, in my opinion it does not mean that the whole life cycle starts from the beginning. Therefore I think the linear life cycle model represents the real cluster life in a more realistic and appropriate way.
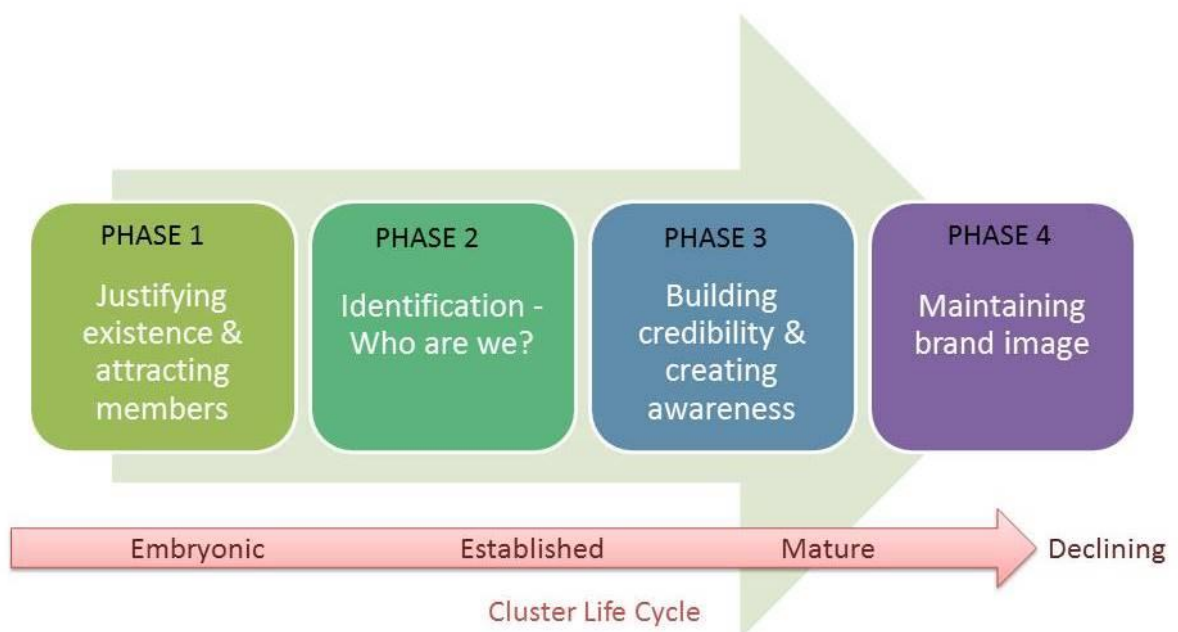
Figure 9. The Cluster Branding Process.

The following chapters will explain each of the four phases of the cluster branding process in more detail.

4.1.1 Phase 1: Justifying Existence and Attracting Cluster Members

Based on my experience and according to the cluster managers interviewed for this study, many clusters in Finland tend to be initiated by a third party such as a city development company or another similar actor. In other Nordic countries, the initiatives often come from

the companies themselves. In the latter kind of case, the basis for the cluster to operate successfully is much stronger, since the companies are already more engaged and committed to the idea of the cluster and its activities. In those cases, where the initiative for the cluster comes from some other actor, these so-called facilitators have a more challenging task in selling the idea of the cluster to the possible member companies and gain their commitment. The initiating actor i.e. facilitator can often be for example a city, who wants to strengthen the city image, attract new companies, increase tax income or simply develop the area. Whatever the motive is, they need to convince the companies on board, which is not always an easy task. This became evident especially in the interviews with the cluster managers, who have been faced with this challenge themselves. Below is an interview quote from one cluster manager, who also sees the member engagement already from the beginning as crucial to the success of the cluster:

> *"Before the cluster is founded, there should be an existing interest among the members. The cluster facilitator needs to find out the expectations of the members in order to make sure there will be committed and engaged members in the cluster." (Cluster representative)*

Therefore the very first step in the cluster brand building process is justifying the cluster's existence and creating awareness within the geographical cluster area in order to attract cluster members. This is usually done on regional or national level, not on an international level, since the members are located in the same geographical area, region, city or country. The cluster starting its activities needs to gain enough members and reach the so-called critical mass, in order to run the activities and make the cluster worthwhile.

In practice, justification of existence means giving concrete reasons, why a company or any other institution should join the cluster. When the member companies of ACF were asked for the reasons for why they joined the cluster in the first place, they all shared some similar reasons, such as networking possibilities, but there were also a lot of differences in the answers as well. The biggest differences could be found between the answers of start-ups and large corporations; start-ups wished to benefit from the cluster reputation and brand to enhance their own business, while large corporations wanted to facilitate innovation and perhaps come up with new business models and ideas.

Based on these answers of ACF member companies, it would be recommendable to list the benefits for different kind of member companies and use the listings as a tool to attract new members. This phase includes a lot of selling from the cluster manager, since he or she indeed has to sell the membership. It would be extremely important to get the member companies to participate in the selling as well. Sometimes it can be useful to use some common selling tools, such as different kind of campaigns to boost the sales of the membership. An example of this kind of campaign could be to give discount from the membership fee to a cluster member company who invites a new company on board. It could also be worthwhile to invite new members to join the cluster for a few months without having to pay the membership fee to "try it out".

In addition to attracting companies to join the cluster, it is useful to invite other types of organizations to join as well. The more varied member pool, the more versatile knowledge sharing can take place. The other type of organizations in the cluster can be for example a city development organization, a research institution or an academic institution like university. Cooperation between companies and research institutions is essential in the creation and implementation of new innovations. The Airport Concepts project mentioned in the introduction, for example, was implemented in cooperation with the Business and Innovation Development (BID) unit of University of Turku, which acts as a link between academic research, business and industry. The implementers of the Airport Concepts project published in cooperation an article "Introducing service solution concepts to airports" in the Journal of Airport Management. This is an excellent example of how getting other actors such as academic institutions into the cluster can increase the creation of new ideas and innovations.

Another benefit from a more varied member pool is that it can also open doors to new sources of funding. Some potential financiers appreciate, or even expect, that the cluster involves and benefits different kind of actors in order to grant the funds. Large and versatile member pool naturally also increases the networking possibilities of the members. For some of the ACF member companies, the cluster has been the only medium to be able to discuss with some of the bigger actors on the field, such as regional political decision makers.

4.1.2 Phase 2: Identification – who are we?

In the interviews the ACF members were asked for the most important elements of cluster brand. All interviewees agreed that a cluster needs to have a name and logo. These cluster **brand elements** should be defined at the latest in the identification phase. The relevant brand elements for a cluster as stated in chapter 2.2.2 do not only include a name and logo, but also a brand story and tagline. At this point in the cluster branding process, the cluster probably has a name already, but the rest of the elements should be defined in cooperation with the involved members. Several of the interviewees stated that a cluster needs to determine its most important tasks and functions, as well as the future goals, very clearly. These are the cluster's **mission** and **vision**, even though not all the interviewees used these specific terms when talking about these issues. The mission should communicate the most important tasks of the cluster. The vision should state the desired future state of the cluster, i.e. what the cluster wishes to be in the future. These are the basis for determining the brand elements.

The meaning of the logo is rather important since is functions as the identification and differentiation of the cluster. The logo is usually visible in several places, such as websites, social media, business cards, brochures and other marketing material etc. In fact, the logo is almost always associated with the cluster name. Typically people tend to remember images better than words, which emphasizes the importance of the logo. It can be difficult to include all stakeholders into the creation of the logo. It might be necessary, or at least useful, to use a professional designer or advertising agency to create the visuals for the cluster. To involve the stakeholders, the cluster manager or other employee coordinating the branding process, could ask the designer to make a few different sample logos. The stakeholders could then vote for the most suitable logo for the cluster. This way the stakeholders could have an opportunity to affect the logo. However, at least in the ACF case, the member companies seemed to trust the cluster employees with issues like this. According to them there is actually a rather thin line between asking member's opinions and spamming them with pointless questions.

Even though, it is not wise to ask the member companies' opinions on every tiny detail, it is still extremely important to involve them into the branding process already from the beginning. Their efforts and ideas should be heard and appreciated when determining mission, vision and brand elements. All stakeholders should develop a sense of ownership

into the cluster brand and should be able to identify with the brand. Based on the interviews conducted for this study, workshops would be the preferred ways to work on the cluster brand together. However, there should not be too many workshops and the time should be effectively spent.

None of the interviewees initially said that a slogan would be essential, but when specifically asked whether some kind of tagline would be useful, the majority agreed that it could be useful. The function of the logo would be informational, rather than promotional, meaning that it would explain briefly what the cluster is all about. Airport Cluster Finland brand was built around the idea of "Airport expertise from Finland". The slogan of ACF was "Your connection to Finnish airport expertise". The quotes below from two ACF member companies indicate, however, that the brand strategy has not been clear to all member companies:

> *"Airport Cluster Finland brand has been quite unclear I guess. Well, I know we are promoting and offering Finnish expertise. But the cluster has not been able to engage the member companies into the branding. I think it is because the member companies are so different." (Start-up)*

> *"The brand has been quite weak and has not been able to convince the right decision-makers." (SME)*

Just as in a corporation, the brand and brand strategy need to be crystal clear to all employees, in a cluster the stakeholders need to understand the brand strategy. In companies, all new employees get an orientation during which they are familiarized properly with the company and its strategy, including the brand strategy. The problem with a cluster is, that there is no time and possibility to give such as thorough orientation to new companies. If the cluster has been running already for several years and branding workshops are already held, the newest members have not been involved in cluster brand building activities and therefore do not necessarily understand it as well as they should.

The main result from this phase should be a cluster identity that all cluster members can identify with and are committed to. The mission and vision and the brand identity should be crystal clear to all stakeholders, so that they can communicate it properly also in their own

communications. Unclear brand can lead to confusions with the external target groups of the cluster, but also within the cluster internally. It is everyone's benefit that the brand is clear and therefore cluster branding is worth putting efforts to.

4.1.3 Phase 3: Creating Awareness and Building Credibility

When the brand elements have been defined and the cluster stakeholders have reached a consensus about the preferred brand identity, it is time to start creating awareness about the cluster. At this point the focus will shift from communicating mostly to potential and existing cluster members, to identifying the key target groups and communicating to them. At this point the communication may also shift from national to international audiences depending on the main target groups of the cluster.

During this phase it is necessary to make a **communication strategy**, which should include at least the key messages, target groups and the relevant communication channels of the cluster. The key messages should be aligned with and represent the cluster brand identity. For example in the ACF case, the cluster wished to be identified as a group of Finnish airport experts and suppliers. This was emphasized in all communication of the cluster. The key messages may change depending on the purpose of the communication, but there should be at least one general key message that is always emphasized in all cluster communication.

The **key messages** may also change depending on the target groups. That is why it is important to identify the target groups and tailor the messages to those groups specifically. Most of the ACF member companies saw their own clients, the decision makers at airports, as the most important target group of Airport Cluster Finland's communication. This was indeed an important target group and many of the cluster's communication activities aimed at reaching these key decision makers. However, several of the member companies felt that this target group was not reached very well. The problem could be in the different expectations when it comes to the communication of the cluster. Many member companies look at numbers and only see actual leads or sales as the result of successful communication and cluster promotion. However, the success of communication activities is often very difficult to measure in monetary value. Branding and communication should not be confused with marketing which aims at increasing sales, whereas branding and communication aim at general improvement of brand awareness and reputation.

When choosing the appropriate **channels** for communicating the key messages of the cluster, it is important to consider which channels would reach the identified target groups. Social media is considered as an important channel for information sharing and creating awareness. Also the ACF members stated in the interviews that the cluster should have some social media accounts. Most interviewees considered Twitter and LinkedIn as the most relevant social media channels for ACF. However, the interviewees agreed that perhaps the primary target group, the decision makers at airports, was probably not reached the best possible way through social media. Social media was mostly considered important in creating awareness and in the promotion of ACF events. The tones of the messages should also be altered depending on the channel. For example the language and tone used in social media, is probably not appropriate for a press release. It is important to remember though, that adjusting the tone and/or the language, does not mean that the message changes. If the cluster has agreed on some key messages, all communication should aim at emphasizing those.

According to some ACF stakeholders interviewed for this study, none of the communication efforts matter unless there is actual substance to support them. For example, if the cluster states that it "enhances the competitiveness of the region by attracting companies and employees", there has to be evidence that it is what the cluster really does. The quote below is from one cluster manager and supports this argument:

> *"Brand and reputation are not credible without substance. Without substance the brand is worth nothing." (Cluster representative)*

Therefore it is extremely important to have a real connection between the cluster's actions and the communication. According to most interviewees, cluster branding and promotion should be honest, transparent and should be based on facts. No false brand promises should be made that the cluster cannot live up to. This is extremely important, when thinking about the possible sources for finance. In order to get outside funding, the cluster has to show that the funds will be well spent and will produce results.

After this phase, the cluster branding strategy should be clear to all stakeholders. The implementation of the branding strategy should be started by both the cluster employees as

well as the cluster members. All stakeholders should be engaged and committed to the cluster brand.

4.1.4 Phase 4: Maintaining Brand Image

This is the last and probably the longest phase of the cluster branding process. This phase continues as long as the cluster life continues, so there is actually no end to this phase until the cluster stops existing. The main goal of this phase is to maintain the cluster brand, keep interest of the audiences and evaluate the success of the cluster branding process and improve, if necessary.

During this phase, the implementation of the branding and communication strategies continues, so it is difficult to determine where the previous phase ends and this one starts. In addition to keep implementing the communication and brand strategies, the cluster manager needs to keep listening to the stakeholders and also keep reminding them to execute cluster branding activities in their own communication activities.

Branding is a continuous process, and the brand evolves over time. Therefore, a regular branding workshop with the stakeholders can be a good idea in order to keep the cluster brand fresh, and also to keep the members involved in the process. Even though almost all of the interviewed ACF members stated that they do not necessarily have time or even interest in branding workshops, it would be extremely important to get the members to participate. One reason for the lack of time or interest could be that the member's do not understand the significance of the cluster brand. As one cluster manager put it in the quote below, the interest and activeness of the member's need to be facilitated, since they do not occur automatically:

> *"Cluster is like a soccer team, the spirit needs to be maintained."*
> *(Cluster representative)*

In a way, this last phase of the branding process has a very significant role in determining the future direction of the whole cluster. If efforts and resources are not directed towards evaluating and improving the cluster brand, it may mark the end of the whole cluster. As the figure 9 shows the life cycle of the cluster starts to decline during or after this phase.

During the evaluation of the brand, the brand promise should be revised and checked whether it still holds true. The cluster, as well as the brand may change, develop and evolve over time, which requires adjustments in the branding strategy as well. Even though the branding strategy would be renewed, it does not start the whole branding process all over again. According to the model presented in this thesis, the brand follow-up and possible improvements all take place in this last phase of the cluster branding process. An alternative view would be to look at the cluster life cycle as a circular process rather than linear, in which case the whole life cycle and branding process could be seen as starting all over again, after the last phase is completed.

4.1.5 Role of the Cluster Manager

All the interviewed cluster members agreed on the fact that the cluster manager has a significant role both in cluster branding and also in the overall success of the cluster. It is not only the manager's knowledge and expertise of the industry, but also the manager's personality, that play a key role in the success of the cluster. Networking and personal contacts are very important in the cluster context. While it is necessary for the cluster manager to have knowledge about the industry the cluster operates in, it is just as important for him/her to be easily approachable and have at least some basic sales skills. Even though the cluster itself would not necessarily sell anything, the cluster manager has to sell for example the cluster membership in order to attract new members. Also, one of the main tasks of the cluster often is to promote something; the industry, the companies, a cause, and that is where the selling skills are also needed. As the quotes below show, the role of cluster manager is, indeed, rather varied - in addition to the skills and knowledge, the manager needs to have a large network in the industry:

> *"The cluster employees need to be known within the industry the cluster operates in, in order to be credible in their positions and to be taken seriously." (Start-up)*

> *"Being a cluster manager is actually quite challenging. You have to manage conflicting interests, different hopes and expectations, tight budget etc. In addition, you have to have deep knowledge and understanding about the industry, and you need to follow what is happening in the markets." (Cluster representative)*

When it comes to brand building, the interviewees generally agreed that the cluster members are responsible for the branding process, but the cluster manager has an important role as a facilitator. In the role of the facilitator, the cluster manager initiates cluster brand building process, invites members to participate and overlooks the whole process. Therefore a certain amount of leadership skills are also necessary for the cluster manager. At the end, he or she is responsible for the cluster brand management.

If the cluster manager doesn't have marketing and branding knowledge, it might be useful to use an outside consultant in the brand building process. In the ACF case, most of the contact people from the member companies were technical experts such as product engineers or R&D people, so they did not necessarily have branding knowledge themselves. Nevertheless, their efforts on the branding process are essential. But there needs to be at least some amount of strong marketing and branding skills and knowledge within the cluster, in order to succeed in the branding process.

Depending on the size of the cluster, it might be necessary to have other hired employees in the cluster as well. If marketing and promotion are considered key activities of the cluster, it might be necessary to hire a professional, such as a marketing coordinator or marketing manager, to be in charge of those activities. However, no matter how skilled marketing and branding people the cluster has, nothing will be accomplished without the sincere interest and active participation of the cluster members, as the quotes below also suggest:

> *"The Cluster manager alone has pretty weak possibilities for cluster branding. All the members need to be involved and plan the core messages and actions together. Only talking and discussing is not enough. Concrete actions are needed." (SME)*

> *"Cluster manager and other cluster employees have to listen to the member companies and form the basis of cluster brand from those ideas. The members need to commit to the brand and include it in their own communication." (Start-up)*

4.2 Concrete Tools for Cluster Branding

This chapter presents some concrete tools for cluster branding process. These tools have been used by Airport Cluster Finland. The members have considered them useful and successful.

4.2.1 Workshops

Workshops are a great way to include cluster members into the brand building process. Workshops allow a good medium for brainstorming together and exchanging ideas. They should be well-planned and they should be led by a person who has expertise and knowledge about the topic of branding. If the cluster manager or other cluster employees do not have the required skills and knowledge, it might be useful to use an outside branding consultant to lead the workshop.

Workshops are especially important in the beginning of the brand building process, but it might be useful to organize also follow-up workshops. As branding is a continuous process, the work is never complete and there is always room for improvement and development. The follow-up workshops could be a place where these ideas for improvement are discussed. The workshops should be open for all cluster members and ideally everyone would get to affect the cluster branding process. In reality it will be extremely difficult to get all members to physically attend a workshop at the same time at the same place.

Another option could be some kind of a virtual platform, which would allow the members to exchange ideas, not only on branding but also on general cluster matters online. Virtual discussion forums have not been used by the ACF members and only a few of the interviewees were interested in this option. Airport Cluster Finland tried to use LinkedIn group page for virtual internal two-way communication between the cluster employees and the members. Even though, most of the representatives of the member companies are on LinkedIn, the group did not become an efficient medium for discussion. This had mostly to do with the working habits of individuals. The representatives of ACF member companies have not adapted social media into their everyday activities, and therefore social media as a channel simply did not work within ACF. However, depending on the nature of the cluster and the individuals involved, I believe that social media or some other virtual discussion forum might work better.

4.2.2 Storytelling

As we can see even from the various different definitions for the concept of cluster, we can say they are rather complex entities. Clusters include various kinds of members from companies to other types of organizations. Sometimes clusters are founded by a facilitator, sometimes they are formed on their own. Often clusters have certain functions they perform together with the cluster members, but there are also clusters that exist without any specific purpose. Due to the complex nature of clusters, it is extremely important that the cluster has an interesting and unique story that explains the cluster idea in a clear and understandable way.

Stories can help make sense out of complex issues like clusters. Stories are generally easier to remember and help us understand realities. The brand story can be based on the cluster's history; how and why it was founded or on some other interesting fact about the cluster. A good story differentiates the cluster from others and captivates the cluster's essence. What differentiates a story from other pieces of writing is that stories have plot and characters. These should be taken into account also when creating a cluster story.

When discussing the ACF story with the member companies, there seemed to be a consensus on that the cluster had a good story. The story was based on how a small and snowy country like Finland, actually has a lot of knowhow and expertise when it comes to airports. Finland is even famous for its snow related knowhow, "snowhow". This was the story ACF wanted to tell to the stakeholders. When asked whether the storytelling of ACF was successful, many of the members stated, that they did not feel like it was. In other words, they felt like the cluster story was good, but the communication was not. However, the cluster manager still considered the brand story, including the communication, as successful. According to him, the awareness about the cluster has increased significantly. This could be seen for example at exhibitions, where people seemed to recognize Airport Cluster Finland and know what it is all about.

The differences in the views of the cluster members and the cluster manager were, once again, probably due to the different expectations and ideas about successful results of storytelling. Whereas the cluster manager expected increased brand recognition and awareness, the members wanted concrete results like sales.

4.2.3 Website and Social Media

All interviewees agreed on the fact that online presence is a key importance when it comes to cluster branding. Both cluster website and social media channels were considered important tools for creating awareness, improving the overall reputation of the cluster and spreading general market or cluster information.

Website is a must in today's cluster brand building and brand maintenance. Visually the website should represent the cluster as a whole, but it should also introduce all the member companies and have direct links to their websites. This should also work vice versa in order to lead visitors to the cluster website and to increase cluster's online visibility. In practice, all cluster members should have a tag (ex. cluster logo) on their website to express their membership in the cluster. There should also be a link to the cluster website. The linkages between the cluster website and the websites of the member companies benefit both parties, since they increase both websites' visibility in search engines' results. This kind of website tag was also suggested for all ACF member companies, but only about 1/3 of members put the ACF logo with a link to their website. There are practical issues related to why some companies chose not to use the ACF tag. First of all, most of the contact people between the cluster and member companies are not people responsible for the company website. Therefore they would have to speak to the company's marketing/communication people and justify, why the cluster tag should be on the website. The bigger the organization, the harder it is to do. Especially the largest corporations have very strict communication guidelines, which probably would not allow extra tags or links on the company website. In the ACF case the companies who put the tag on their own site, were start-ups, small or medium-sized companies.

Cluster's own website should include a news feed with new content regularly. In addition, social media buttons could be added to the site leading the visitors directly to the cluster's social media pages. Social media presence is not important only for spreading out your own word, but also seeing and observing what others are doing, and what is happening in the markets in general. It is not inevitably necessary to be present on all social media platforms, but the right platforms should be chosen depending on the nature of the industry and the

cluster. For example, in a B2B case such as ACF, the members did not see Facebook as an appropriate channel to reach their target audiences. ACF is present in Twitter and LinkedIn, though. On those channels the cluster shares content about itself, its member companies, promotes upcoming events and fair participations and shares general market information. And, of course, observes others.

4.2.4 Fair Participations

One of the most important and useful branding activity for ACF members has been the joint fair participations. Once or twice a year, the cluster members have participated in some of the biggest trade fairs in the airport industry together, as a cluster. At the fairs the cluster has had one exhibition stand and all the member companies have had the possibility to bring their materials and representatives to the stand. Sometimes there has been a namely fee for the participation. Compared to the costs of one company participating in a trade fair alone, the fee is only a fraction of that amount. The costs of participating in a trade fair consist for example of the exhibition fee, planning and building of the stand, transportation of the marketing material, possible catering at the fair, travel costs etc. It is obvious that participating in a fair jointly with several companies is going to reduce the costs significantly. This has been extremely useful especially for the small- and medium sized companies, who simply could not participate in these kind fairs alone due to the high costs.

Promoting the cluster brand versus promoting each individual company's brand can be tricky at these events. This relationship should be carefully planned or the stand will only end up confusing the visitors. Even though all the companies are mainly interested in promoting their own company brand, the stand should primarily represent the whole cluster brand. This refers to the overall look of the stand including the colors etc. and most importantly to what the exhibitors will tell to the stand visitors. There can be several people working on the stand and even though they are primarily representing their own company, they are exhibiting at the cluster joint stand and that should show in their "elevator" speech. Instead of only promoting their own products and services, the people at the cluster exhibition stand should start with the cluster story and messages when talking to the fair visitors. Introducing the cluster should be included to every interaction with the fair visitors. It would be

recommendable to brief the stand personnel on how to work at the joint exhibition stand prior to the fair.

4.2.5 Events

A good way to promote the cluster brand is to organize own cluster events. These events should take place in phases 3 and 4 of the cluster branding process. In those phases the cluster already has gained awareness and credibility, which makes it easier to attract both speakers and visitors to the event.

The cluster events can be for example seminars with some specific and current theme related to the industry where the cluster operates in. ACF has organized annual seminars with a small exhibition area. The purpose of the exhibition area has been to give the member companies an opportunity to introduce themselves and showcase their offerings to airport professionals. According to the member companies, though, the exhibition area has not been the highlight of the event. Instead, the best part of the event has been the networking opportunities with important decision-makers ACF has invited to the event either to speak or to participate. Generally the ACF members have been eager to participate in these events organized by the cluster. Some companies hope for more speaking opportunities for the cluster's own companies as the quote shows:

> *"The cluster should promote the expertise and knowledge of the member companies by giving them speaker slots in the cluster's own seminars or webinars." (MNC)*

However, there is a fine line between organizing a neutral event for information sharing and networking purposes, and a sales and marketing event. The speakers and topics of the seminar should not be all related to the cluster and its members in order to avoid the feeling of a sales event. Especially if the participants of the event pay an attendance fee, which is typically rather high at least in airport related B2B events, the event should be featured with high quality speakers, topics and arrangements in general.

It should be noted, that organizing a high quality B2B event takes a lot of time and practical arrangements. The speaker recruiting should be started almost a year before the actual event and the marketing at least six months in advance. Organizing the event requires marketing

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efforts and social media is a good channel in promoting these kinds of events. Collecting feedback from the events is a key importance in order to improve the event in the future.

Other kinds of events that a cluster could organize are so called "open doors" events, targeted for potential new cluster members. These events could be organized for example around a success story of one cluster member, who would share their positive experiences about the cluster memberships and benefits with the potential new members. This way the current members would be activated in participating also in the attraction of new members. A large member pool is an advantage for everyone, since it may lower the cluster fees, increase the knowledge within the cluster, provide better networking possibilities etc. The open door events should be free of charge and the main goal is to attract new cluster members. ACF has attracted at least three new member companies by these "open door" events.

4.3 Cluster Brand as a Competitive Advantage

This chapter discusses why a cluster brand can be considered a competitive advantage for the cluster and its stakeholders. The issue is discussed from different viewpoints, including the perspective of the cluster as a whole as well as the perspectives of different kind of member companies. This chapter presents some of the actual benefits different cluster members, including start-ups, SME's and MNC's, have gained from the cluster brand. Lastly, the significance of clusters is discussed from a regional and national point of view.

4.3.1 The necessity of the cluster brand

Almost all interviewees agreed on the fact that a cluster needs to have an own unique brand (see interview quotes below). Even though all member companies already have their own individual brands, the cluster also needs a common brand that represents the cluster's identity as a whole. In addition, the brand is needed for increasing awareness and creating credibility, as the quotes from interviews show:

> "The cluster brand is absolutely necessary. A strong cluster brand benefits all cluster stakeholders, especially the smaller companies, whose own brands are not very known yet." (Start-up)

"Cluster brand is definitely needed. Belonging to a well-known cluster is a "credibility stamp" for those companies that are not very known." (SME)

"Yes, a cluster brand is necessary. But that is one challenging task to accomplish" (MNC)

There was also one interviewee, who said that a cluster brand is not necessary if it needs to be strongly linked to the cluster facilitator or cluster financier. This answer referred to an actual challenge in ACF branding, which occurred when the cluster facilitator (city development company Vantaa Innovation Institute Ltd) wanted to have a more visible role in ACF branding. An example of this would be, when ACF participated in an airport industry exhibition, their booth should have been branded as Vantaa Innovation Institute's booth. This would create confusion among the cluster members themselves, not to mention the confusion among the fair visitors. The interviewee referred to this kind of situation, in which the branding efforts of ACF would be meaningless, if the cluster was to promote the facilitator's brand. He concluded that in these kinds of cases, the cluster brand is simply useless. All interviewees agreed that the cluster facilitators and financiers do deserve credit for their input in cluster operations, but should be left out from branding, if not completely, at least the whole branding should not be built around them.

Since a cluster as an entity is rather complex due to its multi-stakeholder nature, the cluster brand can also function as a way to simplify the purpose of the cluster. A clear brand can help make the cluster more understandable both in the eyes of the outside stakeholders, but also in the eyes of the cluster members themselves. As stated, it is a key importance that the cluster members understand the cluster brand in order to be able to represent the brand in an appropriate and coherent manner. In a way, cluster members can be compared to employees of a firm, who also must understand the company brand in order to work accordingly.

The following chapters explain, how a strong cluster brand can be a competitive advantage specifically from the point of view of start-ups and SME's, MNC's and lastly from a national point of view.

4.3.2 Benefits to the member companies

All of the start-ups and small and medium-sized member companies interviewed for this study reported that they have benefitted from the cluster brand. The biggest advantage from the cluster brand has been the networking possibilities and access to decision-makers. The quote below proves that some companies have gotten inquiries, because of their membership in the cluster:

> *"We get many inquiries about our products with Airport Cluster Finland reference." (Start-up)*

The smaller member companies also felt that the joint fair participations under the Airport Cluster Finland brand were successful and gave them possibilities to attend the fairs as exhibitioners, which they could not have done by themselves.

During the interviews several interviewees stated, that they expected more commercial benefits from the cluster membership. When starting to discuss this with them more deeply, they often admitted though, that it is rather difficult to trace if a closed sale has its origins in cluster activities or not. In fact, it is more likely that the cluster brand will not create direct commercial benefits to those companies under that brand. However, belonging to a cluster with a strong and positive brand, can increase the company's attractiveness and credibility.

The larger companies did not report such clear benefits from the cluster brand. They have their own, often strong and known, brands so they did not feel that they have gained direct benefits from the cluster brand. However, they all agreed that the cluster brand is still needed in order to promote the cause, which in the ACF case was the Finnish airport related expertise. Even though the large companies did not report gaining benefits from the cluster brand as such, they did feel like they have benefitted from belonging to the cluster. The cluster benefits for them have not been closely related to the brand, but rather benefits from networking with other innovative companies and learning about the industry. Especially those companies, who did not consider airports as their primary markets, reported that they have learnt a lot and spotted new market opportunities because of the cluster.

It is inevitable that different stakeholders have different understandings and expectations when it comes to cluster activities, cluster branding and the benefits that follow. Some people/companies expect concrete results immediately, which usually leads into disappointments, since the cluster benefits are typically long-term and cannot necessarily be given a monetary value. Sometimes the chain is so long between the branding efforts and actual sales, that it is impossible to say whether the cluster and its brand have had anything to do with a closed sale. To others it is not all about the money and fast benefits, but they can see the bigger picture and how at its best a cluster can bring value on different levels, such as on a national level.

4.3.3 National effects of cluster brand

In addition to the benefits that a cluster can create for its member companies, there can also be significant national benefits created by the cluster brand and cluster activities. These benefits are not always obvious and cannot necessarily be traced back to the cluster, but should definitely be addressed when talking about cluster brand benefits.

When different kind of companies, connected by the same industry or technology, are brought together, very intensive knowledge sharing can take place. Clusters facilitate this cross-fertilization of knowledge, which can its best lead to completely new business innovations or business models. This is even likely, since the cluster member companies typically share some specific knowledge and understanding about the field or technology they all operate in. Still they all have unique expertise about their own products and services, which can be complementary information to the knowledge of the others. When these are combined, very good results may occur. Ultimately, the new innovations and new business opportunities facilitated by and created within a cluster can have a significant national impact. This is one factor that should be referred to, for example when applying for funds for cluster activities. The financiers generally appreciate if the cluster can benefit multiple stakeholder groups.

Cluster typically also benefits the geographical area it operates in. The cluster may attract new businesses, new employees and new talents to the region, which again can lead for

example into increased tax income for the city. The companies involved in the ACF activities have also noticed this, as the quotes below show:

"At its best, a cluster can create completely new business and new kinds of business models." (Cluster representative)

"If the cluster is a credible actor, it can affect policy makers and be included into important decision-making that can help the cluster with its own agenda." (Cluster representative)

The cluster brand can, in some cases, even increase the awareness of the country. ACF stakeholders were convinced that people who work in the airport industry definitely know now that Finland has an exceptional amount of airport expertise and especially the world famous "snowhow". Whether it is the right people, or if this awareness affects their buying decisions, leading to sales, is another question. But as said, cluster branding is about improving reputation without any specific commercial goals, whereas cluster marketing is what intends to affect the buying decisions of the customers. It is very important to emphasize this also to the cluster members, who tend to have unrealistic expectations about the effects of cluster branding.

4.4. Possible Pitfalls

This chapter presents some of the challenges, so-called pitfalls, related to cluster branding that may affect the process negatively.

4.4.1 Competitive mindset

Usually the member companies of the cluster have something in common, which can be used as the "red line" or the basis of the cluster branding. In the case of Airport Cluster Finland, for example, the common factor was the fact that all the member companies operated in the airport industry. In other words, airports were their direct or indirect customers, which means that the companies shared the same customer base at least to some extent.

In branding the common factors are essential in order to be able to form something unanimous for a heterogeneous group of companies. However, the fact that the companies operate in the same industry and have more or less the same customers causes also concerns among the members. Companies typically tend to see each other more as competitors than as partners. It is extremely important to try to change this mindset when a company joins a cluster, where the whole idea is based on cooperation and trust between the members of the cluster. According to some of the interviewees this is a very typical mindset especially within the Finns. At first this competitive mindset could be seen in the members of ACF as well as the quote from one cluster manager shows:

> *"In the early phase of the cluster, the companies were clearly way more reluctant in sharing information and especially contact information with each other. It has been quite delightful to notice, that the situation has changed. The companies are much more open with other cluster members." (Cluster manager)*

As the quote shows, the situation has changed, and according to the cluster manager, the members of ACF today see each other as partners more than as competitors. The companies might even promote each other in appropriate situations. The cluster manager mentioned an example; if one of the member companies has a sales negotiation abroad, they might mention that they belong to this network of Finnish companies and can recommend some of the member companies' products or services. This is extremely beneficial, since some of the products and services of ACF member companies, in fact, complement each other and function well together.

4.4.2 Inactive and uncommitted member companies

During the interviews conducted for this study, almost every interviewee agreed on the fact that the participation of the cluster members, in both the cluster branding process and the cluster activities in general, is vital. The cluster brand is supposed to represent the member companies and therefore the brand building process is impossible without the help and efforts of the cluster members. Yet, almost all interviewees admitted they had not been participating as actively in the cluster activities and branding as they should have, as the quotes also indicate:

"The only way to a successful cluster brand is commitment and cooperation of the member companies." (Start-up)

"Our cluster's branding efforts haven't been the most successful. One of the reasons for this is the passiveness of the members companies." (SME)

The reason for the passiveness was more or less the same for all interviewees; lack of time. On one hand, lack of time simply means that the cluster member companies do not have time to physically attend the cluster meetings and workshops. The headquarters and offices of the ACF member companies are located all over Finland. The cluster meetings and workshops usually take place somewhere in the Helsinki Metropolitan area, and for those that come from further, it meant that they would have to allocate almost a full workday for the cluster activities. Many interviewees told that especially during these economic times, they have to focus almost entirely on their own core businesses.

On the other hand, lack of time can mean also that the cluster members do not have time to familiarize themselves with the cluster ideology. Even if they found the time to physically attend the meetings and workshops, they cannot necessarily participate into the brainstorming and cluster development, due to their lack of understanding of the purpose of the cluster brand or the cluster in general. This has to do with the mindset that was mentioned before. If there are members whose mindset about the cluster is that they join, pay the fee and then just wait for some concrete results, they got it wrong. Successful cluster branding requires efforts from all the member companies and the first step of changing the mindset is to understand that. In a way the cluster is only as strong as its members. The cluster employees indeed play a key role, but at the end, it is the cluster members who show the direction where the cluster is going in regards to branding as well.

The wrong mindset about the cluster is problematic, because it leads to cluster members possibly spreading out the wrong message about the cluster. One of the main goals of cluster branding is to create the key messages the cluster wishes to communicate to its stakeholders. Those messages should be known and understood among all cluster members, so that the communication of the cluster is coherent. Cluster and its activities can sometimes indeed be a little difficult to understand due to the complex and multi-stakeholder nature of clusters. The

situation is pretty desperate if the cluster and its members don't even themselves know what their messages are.

During the interviews the cluster members were asked, how the cluster employees could activate them to participate more in the cluster branding and other cluster activities. No ideas came up. For the cluster members it is a matter of priorities, and their first priority is always their own business. In a way this has to do with the aforementioned mindset problem as well. The quote below shows, that there are, indeed, limited means to activate the members:

> *"How to activate the cluster members? That is an excellent question. If you come up with a solution, let me know." (Cluster representative)*

4.4.3 Lack of resources

Participation in the cluster activities is not the priority for any of the companies. Their main interest is, of course, in their core business and sometimes it is difficult to find time for active participation of cluster operations. Especially during times of economic turndown, everyone's main focus is on their own business and it becomes extremely challenging to activate cluster members. Both time and money are valuable, and sometimes time is even more hard to arrange than money. This is a shame, because if a company pays the cluster membership fee, it should also have the time to participate in developing the cluster in order to get the best possible return for the money. Unfortunately, as said time is scarce, and it is typical that at least some percentage of the cluster members are those that do pay the fee, but do not actively participate in cluster meetings or workshops and therefore do not get their saying in the cluster matters.

There is usually one (sometimes two or three) person per company who is the contact person between the company and the cluster. The contact person's personality und other qualities are very much related to how much the company participates in the cluster activities. Sometimes, this contact person changes, for example, if the previous contact leaves the company. This may drastically change the whole company's activity in the cluster. The contact person between the company and the cluster should somehow keep record on how the cluster participation has affected the company in order to save that information. The members themselves are also aware of the problem as the following quote shows:

"I have to admit that we haven't been participating in the cluster activities as much as we should have. The reason is that we are such as small company and have very limited resources at the moment." (Start-up)

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter summarizes the study and discusses its findings, recommendations and practical implications. In addition, the limitations of this study are addressed. Lastly, suggestions for further research are presented.

5.1 Research summary

The aim of this thesis was to study cluster branding. More specifically the idea was to find out, if cluster branding is a competitive advantage for the cluster and its member companies. At the same time the goal was to identify, what kind of concrete benefits a strong cluster brand bring to the cluster stakeholders. Lastly, the aim was to produce a model for cluster branding process, which would include some of the concrete actions and tools that can be used during the process. The idea was to produce actual guidelines that certain types of clusters could use in their branding processes.

After formulating the research problem and the research questions, the relevant literature was studied. The literature review consisted of three major themes; cluster development, brand as a strategic asset and branding approaches. The first theme included discussions on the different definitions of cluster, and finally the definition used in this thesis was determined. Cluster life cycle models were presented in order to understand, how and why clusters are formulated. Next, it was explained, what a brand consists of and why it is such a valuable asset for an organization. Lastly, different branding approaches were presented in order to understand that different kind of organizations require different branding strategies. Since a cluster includes many types of companies, it was necessary to study the different branding approaches to point out those branding features that could apply in the cluster context.

After studying the relevant literature, the data collection and analysis took place. The methodology of this research was qualitative and the method was a single case study. The case cluster was Airport Cluster Finland, a network of Finnish companies operating in the airport industry and aiming to promote the Finnish airport expertise together. The data were collected through ten semi-structured interviews with the cluster stakeholders. The sample included a variety of different kind of cluster stakeholders; cluster representatives, small and

medium-sized companies, large corporations and start-ups. The data analysis was done by using categorization i.e. dividing the answers into meaningful categories and identifying the key themes.

The findings showed that a strong cluster brand benefits all cluster stakeholders, especially the small cluster member companies, who don't have a strong brand of their own. The cluster branding process can be aligned with the cluster life cycle (Menzel & Fornahl, 2007) to guide which branding activities are the most relevant in each life cycle stage. The relevant brand elements in the cluster context were identified to be name, logo, tagline and brand story, while jingles and packaging (Farhana 2012) were considered irrelevant.

The findings showed that cluster branding is complex due to the large amount of stakeholders i.e. brand owners, involved. The stakeholders can differ in terms of sizes and turnovers, but also in their interests and expectations, which then affects their ideas on cluster branding. Due to the complex nature of clusters, cluster branding does not resemble exactly any branding approach, but rather combines elements from several different branding approaches. Cluster branding takes elements from corporate branding (Kotler & Pfoersch), because the cluster brand should capture all the dimensions of the cluster and its stakeholders, and in a way act as an umbrella brand for all the individual company brands inside the cluster. On the other hand, cluster branding resembles SME branding (Berthon et al., 2008) because in both cases the resources allocated for branding may be limited.

By identifying the relevant elements for cluster branding, a cluster branding process model was created. The model identifies four major phases in the cluster branding process and presents the key actions to be taken in each of the phases. Compared to the cluster brand management process model by Andersson et al. (2013), my model differs mostly by its linear approach. Whereas Andersson et al.'s model is presented as a circular model, and is more aligned with the circular cluster life cycle model (Andersson et al., 2013), my model sees cluster branding as a linear process that eventually comes to an end. My model assumes that also the cluster life cycle is linear (Menzel & Fornahl, 2007) meaning that ultimately the cluster faces a declining stage which does not lead into a new beginning but rather marks the end of the cluster and its branding activities. In my model I have identified only four major stages in the cluster branding process, whereas Andersson et al. identify six key stages. Andersson et al. emphasize the importance of research and analysis in the early phase of

cluster branding - an aspect that is not included in my model, since it did not come up in my data.

Overall, the research indicated that cluster branding should be treated as an own approach in branding, since it features unique elements due to the distinguished and complex nature of clusters. In addition, cluster brand should be added as a contributing factor into the academic discussion on why some clusters succeed or decline.

5.2 Recommendations

I strongly encourage clusters to put resources and efforts into cluster branding activities. As the findings of this study showed, a strong cluster brand is perceived to benefit the cluster stakeholders, especially the small and medium-sized companies. Belonging to a well-known cluster with a recognizable and appreciated brand, brings credibility for all cluster members. In addition a strong cluster brand attracts new companies to join, which grows the cluster and provides more networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities. Cluster growth also increases the cluster's finance due to the increased income from membership fees.

The findings of this study showed, that one of the biggest challenges in cluster branding is involving the stakeholders into the branding process. Since it is essential to involve the member companies, I recommend the cluster manager to brief all new member companies, not only about what the cluster membership can bring to them, but also what is expected from the members when they join the cluster. When a new company joins, I would recommend having some kind of "welcome session", where the cluster manager and the new member company can discuss the terms of membership in the cluster. In the session the cluster manager should explain the purpose of the cluster, the key messages, introduce the communication plan and explain what is required from the members. For example, all members should be encouraged to include the cluster in their own communication activities somehow. In the session the cluster manager can introduce the different options such as the cluster membership tag on the company website.

Airport Cluster Finland had a sub-project, Airport Concepts, where three new airport service concepts were created and branded separately. The separation of Airport Concepts from

Airport Cluster Finland was done mainly due to the fact that these two were financed by different parties. However, better and more coherent, brand planning is necessary, if similar projects are implemented in the future. According to the interviews with ACF stakeholders, the separate branding of Airport Concepts mainly created confusion, not only in potential customers, but also within the companies themselves, who were involved in the project. Therefore more focused and coherent branding is recommendable in order to avoid confusions. Even though the financiers' wishes need to be taken into account, they should not complicate the brand in the eyes of the target groups.

This thesis introduces a model for cluster branding process. In addition, concrete tools for cluster branding are introduced. I recommend existing clusters to use the model as a base in cluster branding and utilize the tools which have been successful for Airport Cluster Finland. I also encourage cluster managers and other employees, as well as cluster stakeholders to participate into the discussion of cluster branding and share their experiences in order to share best practices and help other clusters.

5.3 Practical implications

This section discusses the practical implications of this study.

First of all, this study shows the importance of a cluster brand and how it affects the overall success or decline of the cluster. A generic model for cluster branding process was created based on the findings. The model may be used to guide the branding processes of existing and beginning clusters. In addition, the findings section gives concrete tips on cluster branding that have been considered useful by the members of ACF. Other clusters may benefit from those ideas as well. The findings show that cluster branding is challenging. The lack of resources, especially time of the member companies, makes it challenging to include everyone into the branding process. The cluster manager and other employees play a key role in the cluster branding process. The discussions with the members of ACF also revealed that cluster branding should be focused and it is not recommendable to create sub-brands under the main brand in the cluster context. This refers to the attempt of ACF aiming to create three additional Airport Concepts brands.

Secondly, this study shows, how the cooperation of companies, research institutions and development agencies, can benefit all parties involved. Clusters are significant in terms of regional development and may increase the competitiveness of a region or even nation. Generally the cluster benefits the companies involved whether they are small or large companies. However, there is still work to do in changing the mindset of companies. Especially in a small country like Finland, where companies are small, but potential is huge, companies should treat each other more as partners than competitors. Porter (2000) states that "c*luster is a system of interconnected firms and institutions whose whole is more than the sum of its parts".* This means that companies and other actors are stronger together than each of them on their own. This should be utilized more and clusters are one way of implementing the cooperation. Branding, again, increases the strength of the cluster and therefore should be included into the cluster studies.

Finally, this study starts the academic discussion on the topic of cluster branding. The existing literature, as stated in the beginning, is mainly focused on cluster development and cluster life cycle. However, as the findings of this study show, the cluster brand may play a significant role in the overall success of the cluster, or may impact the decline of the cluster. Therefore the topic of cluster branding deserves more academic attention.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for further research

As was stated in the literature review, the definition of cluster is rather vague - according to some authors almost any network of companies can be called "cluster". This confusion in the definition can cause certain limitations to this study, since cluster in this study, is clearly defined as "*a geographic concentration of interconnected actors in a particular field that compete but also cooperate and have formed a network to serve a common purpose".*

Therefore the findings of the study can be best applied to clusters that fall under that definition. The outcomes of this study do not necessarily apply to any kind of network of companies, that some might call clusters. Using a single case study as the research method also causes certain limitations to the study, since it provides the perspective of only one cluster.

There is definitely room for further research in this area. Since, there is not much literature on cluster branding yet, there is an existing need for further academic studies. The topic is relevant and interesting, and there are plenty of sources for research data available. As stated in the beginning of this thesis, there are several clusters in Finland alone. In the Scandinavian scale there are dozens of clusters operating within different industries and regions. It would be interesting to study this same topic but with a larger scale. Instead of a single case study, a comparative study between two or more clusters could be conducted. Clusters differ by size, industry, region, goals and what not, which offers several different angles on forming a research problem for a comparative study. In addition to cluster branding, it would be interesting study for example the typical length of a cluster life cycle, and which factors affect it. The research could look at the time scale of the cluster life cycle, the actual reasons why clusters have been formulated and why they have declined.

All in all, clusters as topic provide a lot of different approaches and angles for further research. The findings are valuable, since clusters are important features of a competitive and modern economy. As it was concluded, clusters benefit not only the direct stakeholders, but they can have a larger effect on the region, or even the country it operates in. The topic deserves more academic attention, so that the huge potential of cooperation between companies i.e. clusters can be better understood and taken advantage of. The topic is important also in order to change the mindset of companies from seeing each other as competitors into seeing each other as possible partners. I will end by borrowing a quote from Penttilä (2015), the CEO of FinnCham who said that *"The only way to achieve productiveness is by cooperation"*.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview structure

Interview questions

1) What kind of expectations did you have when you joined Airport Cluster Finland?

2) How well have those expectations fulfilled?

3) Who do you think are the main target groups of Airport Cluster Finland's communication activities?

4) What do you think are the cluster's key messages to those groups?

5) In your opinion, what kind of brand does Airport Cluster Finland have?

6) In terms of branding, Airport Cluster Finland aimed to promote and build a brand around the airport expertise and knowledge in Finland. Was this succesfull? Why/why not?

7) Do you think your company has benefitted from the cluster brand? How?

8) Did you/your company actively participate in cluster branding or cluster development activities in general (meetings, workshops, presenting ideas, participating in surveys etc.)? Why/why not?

9) What is the role of cluster manager and other cluster employees in the cluster branding process? How do you see the role of the members?

10) All cluster members have an own brand. Is it necessary to have a coherent cluster brand? Is it a competitive advantage? Why/why not?

11) What do you think are the most important elements of cluster brand? In other words, what do you think a cluster brand consists of?

12) What do you think are the most important tools in the cluster branding process?

13) What do you think are the most important functions of a cluster in general? What are the most important factors to achieve these?

14) **Only for those who were involved in the Airport Concepts project:** You participated in a separate project with some other ACF member companies. In this project 3 concepts (winter conditions, airside solutions, and airport development) were created and branded separately from ACF brand. Do you think this project was successful in terms of branding and communication?

Appendix 2. Airport Cluster Finland member companies 2015

A & A Consulting Oy

Ahkera Smart Tech Ltd — Innovative technology to improve ground handling processes

Arctic Machine Oy — Road maintenance, De-icing

Champion Door Oy — Aircraft hangar doors

Efla Oy — Airfield lighting components

Exel Composites Oyj — Frangible composite structures for airports

Fastroi Oy — Movable work process management, Mobile solutions and applications, GPS/GSM vehicle systems

Oy Fibar-Group Ltd/Barrisol — Stretch ceiling systems

glowway	**Glowway Oy**	Self-illuminating tiles that glow in the dark and guide people ex. to exits
Gray Matter *Empowering Intuition*	**GrayMatter Software Services**	A BI, Analytics and Data Science Company
GSE ARCTIC	**GSE Arctic**	Ground support equipment, engineering and services for aviation
IDMAN	**Idman Airfield Lighting Oy**	Airfield lighting, docking guidance systems
EASTMAN The results of insight	**Eastman**	Winter maintenance, De-icing
LIMOWA	**Limowa**	The logistics centre cluster, network of logistics development and cooperation.
NEUROSONIC *Back in life*	**Neurosonic**	Relaxation and recovery
nextFLOOR	**nextFLOOR**	Low elevated flooring systems

Oplatek	Oplatek	Optics for Airfield Lighting Solutions
Pesark	Pesark	An innovative, reliable and co-operative design partner for demanding clients.
ROSTEK	Rostek Oy	Access equipment for building maintenance
SISU	Oy Sisu Auto Ab	Special heavy-duty trucks
MOVENTOR SKIDDOMETER	Skiddometer by Moventor	Friction testing & measuring systems
UNI Rest for you	Short Rest Solution Ltd	UNI rest for you
Sajas GROUP	Sajas Group	Forerunner in the manufacturing of technical brushes
tammerneon THE IMAGE BUILDER™	Tammerneon	Airport signs, LED displays, electric doors, control systems
VAISALA	Vaisala Oyj	Aviation weather solutions