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Re-imagining the city: branding migration-related diversity

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ABSTRACT

How do superdiverse cities re-imagine themselves in response to migration-related diversity? Based on a double case study on the branding strategies of two superdiverse Dutch cities, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, this paper shows that although diversity is part of the brand identity in both cities, it is not used prominently in urban planning or brand communications. Migration-related diversity is re-defined strategically (as 'cosmopolitan' and 'international') for two reasons: (1) to turn it into an asset that enhances the brand, and (2) to align the brand with existing policies and political discourses on migration and accommodate political pressures. City marketers have depoliticized place branding. Marketing logic pushed migration-related diversity to the background, because according to the city marketers diversity does not help a city to stand out. There is limited interaction between spatial planners and city marketers, and marketers use spatial planning selectively in place branding.

KEYWORDS

Place branding; cities; migration-related diversity; identity building

1. Introduction

International migration contributes to the diversification of cities. Cities are often the first locations where migrants arrive, settle, and make contact with the host society. An increasing number of cities have become so-called superdiverse cities (Crul, 2016), i.e. more than half of the population has a first or second-generation migration background. Diversity has also increased within urban migrant populations, which now contain a broader range of national backgrounds, cultural and religious orientations and social and economic positions.

However, cities respond differently to migration and their changing place identities. Some cities (such as Barcelona, New York, London or Leicester) have re-imagined themselves as happy superdiverse cities, defining migration and diversity as an asset that strengthens their economy and global positioning (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2009; Hassen & Giovanardi, 2018). They use their 'superdiverse' features to create images of the city as being inclusive and therefore invest in the development of a city identity that transcends national, faith and ethnic boundaries (see Foner, Rath, Duyvendak, &

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van Reekum, 2014). They may develop spatial plans in recognition of specific needs of ethnic groups, and celebrate diverse streetscapes (cf. Fincher, Iveson, Leitner, & Preston, 2014). Other cities (such as Paris and Liverpool) define migration as a challenge and are more reluctant to acknowledge migration-related diversity as part of their identity.

Differences in how and why cities re-imagine themselves under the influence of migration-related diversity are little understood. The differences cannot simply be explained by the scale or composition of migration as these 'superdiverse' cities face rather similar migration processes (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2009; Zapata-Barrero, Caponio, & Scholten, 2017). Therefore, this article examines how superdiverse cities brand themselves in the face of migration-related diversity, and unravels the marketing logics and political and administrative processes that engender selective representations of cities in place brands.

Place brands have not only become important marketing instruments to create images for external audiences, but also strategic instruments in urban planning (Eshuis & Klijn, 2017; Oliveira, 2016; Pasquinelli, 2014). Cities may align their policies and planning with the brand to position themselves in certain ways and develop particular identities (Eshuis & Klijn, 2017; Hassen & Giovanardi, 2018; Kavaratzis, 2008). Spatial planning may inform and influence city branding activities, for example when city marketers incorporate the visions of the future that are emplotted in spatial plans into the identity of the city brand. Both spatial planning and branding are about envisioning an aspirational 'imagined future' (see Ashworth, Kavaratzis, & Warnaby, 2015; Oliveira, 2016). Thus, they may potentially strengthen each other (Van Assche & Lo, 2011), but they may also clash if not aligned.

This paper aims to unravel how cities manage their identity through place branding in the face of migration-related diversity. It explicitly considers how spatial planning informs the place brand and how migration-related diversity is included in place branding. Place brands contain the associations that cities invoke about the place and particular cultural, ethnic and religious groups. In some cases, migration-related diversity is treated as a great asset in branding and urban planning (see and Fincher et al., 2014). However, institutionalized ideologies, discourses and policies on migration can also favour other responses, blocking inclusive place brands in which diversity plays a prominent role and enhancing identity narratives of a dominant existing culture.

2. Theoretical framework

How cities respond to migration-related diversity in their place branding strategies is not only a result of place branding policies and city policies on migration. Spatial manifestations of migration may also influence place brands, i.e. when diverse streetscapes are used in marketing campaigns. Thus understanding cities responses to migration-related diversity requires a thorough understanding of planning and branding practises and the embedding of both in governance. Drawing on literatures from migration studies, urban studies, planning and place marketing, this section first conceptualizes place branding and then explores the role of superdiversity in place branding.

2.1. Place branding

City branding is more than designing logos and slogans. It is also about developing a vision that fits the city's identity and local circumstances (Kavaratzis, 2008). Thus, city branding

is about selecting certain benefits and values of a city to tell a story about what it stands for. This is not easy because cities are complex 'products' that fulfil different functions such as being a tourist destination, residential area or transport hub. In practice, cities commonly simplify their narratives and present brands that ignore much of the complexity of cities and the role of local government (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Zenker, Braun, & Petersen, 2017 and Andersson, 2016). Several authors point to the importance of consultation between planners, branding professionals and residents to assure that the brand's selected assets are aligned with spatial reality and spatial plans for the future, and also supported by local residents (e.g. Van Assche & Lo, 2011).

Place branding literature shows that place branding can be used for various strategic purposes, particularly economic and social purposes. London, for example, has been criticized for using the superdiverse element in its brand, not to achieve social inclusion, but as a superficial and strategic proposition to attract narrowly-defined target groups, such as creative workers and international tourists (Falcous & Silk, 2010; Winter, 2013). This simplistic approach reduces branding to a marketing strategy through a one-size-fits all approach, showing limited understanding of planning aspects (cf Hassen & Giovanardi, 2018). Cities commonly apply economic place branding policies that are dominated by an economic rationale. These place branding policies aim to boost the economy and make the city more attractive than its competitors. Here, place branding is about creating images that attract investors, businesses, tourists and new residents. Social place branding policies, on the other hand, aim to shape a sense of place among citizens and contribute to a common urban identity (Ashworth, 2009). Instead of aiming at competition and differentiation, the primary purpose of social place branding is identification, social cohesion and creating collectivity (cf. Mommaas, 2002).

As with other policies, the institutional embedding of place branding influences policy goals and content. For example, if place branding is developed within an economic department this may result in a different policy than if it is developed within a spatial planning department or by an independent marketing body. Moreover, scholars have shown that place branding policies are shaped in interaction between various public, private and societal parties (Andersson, 2016; Boisen, Groote, Terlouw, & Couwenberg, 2018; Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). City branding policies involve many stakeholders and various institutional arrangements. City marketing is often delegated to specialized marketing organizations such as quasi-autonomous non-governmental agencies (Zavattaro & Adams, 2015) or private organizations (Kotler, 1993). City branding policies are hence not solely developed by local governments, but by various organizational bodies with more or less autonomy vis-à-vis the local municipality (Boisen et al., 2018). Thus, place branding is shaped by city marketers in city marketing bodies, and by wider urban policies including planning. In addition, place marketers shape place branding policies in processes wherein they try to align the place brand with wider municipal policies. If city marketers have a relatively autonomous institutional position vis-à-vis the municipality, it is easier for them to determine their own course of action and be less influenced by local migration and diversity policies or spatial planning policies.

As literatures on autonomous and semi-autonomous agencies in the public sector (e.g. Overman, 2016; Yesilkagit & van Thiel, 2008) have emphasized, the degree of autonomy of various organization bodies varies, and this influences how much room for manoeuvre agencies have to develop their own policies (see Yesilkagit & van Thiel, 2008). For place

branding this means that the degree of autonomy of the city marketing organization vis-à-vis the city council determines the extent to which city marketers are pressured to follow specific municipal planning or migration policies, or whether they can follow their own marketing-driven preferences regarding place branding policies.

2.2. Superdiversity and city branding

What role does superdiversity play in place branding? Superdiversity marks a transformation in the scale and nature of migration-related diversity. It involves an increase of 'newer, smaller, transient, more socially stratified, less organized and more legally differentiated immigrant groups' (Crul, 2016; Vertovec, 2007). This holds true not only for the immigrant's country of origin, but also applies to the socio-economic, cultural, religious and linguistic profiles of immigrants as well as to their migration channel and legal status (ibid). Migration-related diversity is conceptualized as any form of ethnic, social, political, cultural, religious, racial diversity within urban populations resulting from first or second-generation migrants.

Superdiversity is, as scholars have shown, primarily an urban phenomenon. It is the result of generations of migration changing the urban landscape (see, for instance Caponio a.o., 2018). In superdiverse cities it has become difficult to distinguish distinct 'minorities', as singular identities have become the exception rather than the rule. In fact, an increasing number of superdiverse cities can also be described as majority-minority cities in which the majority of the population has a migration background (Crul, 2016).

However, the fact that cities have become more superdiverse does not necessarily mean that this diversity is reflected in their place branding. Various reasons can be found in the literature for why migration-related diversity is not always directly reflected in place brands. First, place branding does not only fulfil an 'internal' function of representing the entire urban population and helping all residents to identify with their city, but also an 'external' function, oriented towards businesses and tourism. Branding policies often function as a tool to increase economic development and international competitiveness instead of enhancing social cohesion or providing a shared sense of belonging amongst residents. The use of diversity as a brand value, often in combination with values such as creativity and cosmopolitanism, could be a strategic approach to enhance the attractiveness of a city for investors and tourists (Goess, de Jong, & Meijers, 2016; Hassen & Giovanardi, 2018).

Secondly, cities can (and do) respond very differently to the rise of superdiversity. Some cities embrace diversity as a part of being a 'happy superdiverse city', and use superdiversity prominently in their place brand (Caponio, Scholten, & Zapata-Barrero, 2018; Hassen & Giovanardi, 2018). Branding superdiversity as part of the urban identity can provide a narrative of a 'shared sense of belonging' that helps people to identify with their city. Such an embracing of superdiversity is likely to come together with multiculturalist or interculturalist policies towards diversity. Multiculturalist policies emphasize cultural differences and encourage citizens to 'acknowledge and embrace each other's multi-ethnic customs' (Van Breugel, Maan, & Scholten, 2015, p. 14). Interculturalist policies abandon the idea of stable and fixed minority groups entirely. They revolve around the promotion of equal opportunities, fostering inter-ethnic contact and developing a shared sense of belonging within superdiverse communities (Cantle, 2012).

Conversely, some cities may be more reluctant to embrace superdiversity. This is likely to be the case in cities that have adopted more assimilationist or even differentialist approaches to diversity. Assimilationist policies are built on the belief that assimilation improves inter-ethnic relationships by sublimating them, whereby ethnic groups take on the identity of the dominant group and dissolve into it. Differentialist policies aim to keep social boundaries between groups in place, for instance by keeping open the possibility of return migration or repatriation. Both assimilationists and differentialists are unlikely to value diversity and will seek to develop place brands that emphasize the need for a common cultural framework or the dominant position of a specific (probably native) part of the population.

To understand if and why certain cities either utilize or ignore assets such as diversity in their brands, one needs to take a deeper look at the institutionalized ideologies, policies and planning, as well as the community narratives that often underlie such choices. Fincher et al. (2014) argue that the highly political national debates on multiculturalism (and other approaches to migration-related diversity) have shaped aspects of local planning, including physical infrastructure, planning for social mixing, including migrants or ethnically defined groups in local government strategies, planning contested urban landscapes (e.g. contested mosques) and multicultural encounters (such as festivals). They highlight that planning may engage with diversity in three ways: a) redistribution: managing social differences, including balancing competing interests and sharing public goods; b) recognition of specific needs of different individuals and providing services, and; c) encounter: responding to people in diversified settings. Thus it is relevant to consider the institutionalized ways in which cities have dealt with migration-related diversity – not only in their integration policies, but also more broadly reflected in planning strategies – because this may in turn influence how cities use diversity in their place brands.

Lastly, we need to address that there are different ways of dealing with diversity in branding: cities can explicitly highlight it, but it can also function as background. It is even possible to highlight this quality separately, but not as part of the discussion on what is distinctive in the brand. In this study, we want to unravel and understand the choices that cities are making, while clearly acknowledging that there is no objective need to include diversity in a city brand. Furthermore, cities that decide not to include diversity may do so for a variety of reasons that are not necessarily less justifiable or effective than those of cities that use an inclusive city brand.

3. Methods and data analysis

This study aims to understand why cities respond differently to migration-related diversity in terms of city branding. To analyze this, a double case study was conducted on place branding in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. In line with the logic of qualitative research, we deliberately selected two cases rich in information about the research subject (e.g. Cresswell & Poth, 2017). We selected two superdiverse cities (see Table 1) that apply city branding actively through targeted city branding policies and campaigns. We deliberately selected two cities that differ in terms of the political discourse on diversity so that we could assess how wider ideologies and discourses influence the place brand. Rotterdam, which has been ruled by populist municipal governments for several periods, is known for its harsh rhetoric regarding migrants (Dukes & Musterd, 2012; Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008). Amsterdam is characterized by a stronger pro-diversity discourse and even, according to some, by a

Table 1. Statistics on Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

Rotterdam	Total Population	641,326
	Number of nationalities	148
	% of the city population with a migrant background	52%
Amsterdam	Total Population	859,732
	Number of nationalities	162
	% of the city population with a migrant background	52%

'counter-discourse in which ethnic minorities are not *a priori* seen as a problem and where assimilationism is explicitly rejected' (Uitermark, Rossi, & van Houtum, 2005, p. 628).

In terms of data collection methods, we conducted 12 in-depth interviews with key actors involved in the formulation and implementation of city branding policies in the period 2015–2016. We conducted 6 interviews with *city branding advisors, policy advisors and policy makers* in the municipality of Amsterdam, including executive departments involved in implementing strategic choices with regard to city branding policies. Similarly, we interviewed 6 respondents within the municipality of Rotterdam and stakeholders working closely with the city on its identity. Respondents were selected based on their involvement with city branding policies or their expertise in the diversity domain. In both cities the core city branding officers were interviewed and selection was based on respondents' knowledge of who were crucial players in the field of branding. By conducting these 12 interviews we were able to cover the main actors and perspectives and produce a detailed picture of how and why migration-related diversity is either included in or left out of branding policies.

We used a topic list focusing on a) 'general' branding policies; b) if and to what extent migration-related diversity was part of brand identity and brand communications and c) reasons for incorporating or ignoring migration-related diversity in branding. As both cities' branding policies only go back to 2005, we asked our respondents to reflect on the situation from 2005 onwards. The interviews were transcribed and hand-coded. The data then helped us to refine our codes and reconstruct how and why Rotterdam and Amsterdam have included migration-related diversity in their branding strategies. In addition, we analysed local policy documents for the period 2005–2015 that explicitly focus on city branding in Rotterdam and Amsterdam to reconstruct these branding policies. We analyzed 5 key texts on city branding (policy documents and expert reports) for Amsterdam and 6 for Rotterdam. Both interviews and documents were hand-coded using a standardized topic book. Here too, a semi-open coding approach was used, taking the theoretical concepts as the basis for the codebook. Following our research question, the first part of the codes is related to the elements that form the city brand. These include codes identifying key brand values, symbols/images of the city, slogans, personalities or campaigns. The second part of the codes concerned cities' considerations on incorporating diversity in their brand, which for example, could be based on economic or political motives.[1] The resulting patterns are discussed in the following section.

4. Results

4.1. City branding in Rotterdam

City branding plays an important role in Rotterdam's policy attempts to improve the city's image. In 2003–2004 the municipality of Rotterdam decided to develop a 'brand' that fitted

the 'new Rotterdam' (Interviews with the municipality of Rotterdam). The new Rotterdam, which was rebuilt after the Second World War, could be characterized as a city with modern and innovative architecture, various cultural facilities and meeting places, a changing population composition, a growing service economy, and a port that still seemed somewhat distant from the rest of the city (Riezebos, 2014). The main ambition was to rectify Rotterdam's image as a 'cold and unsociable port city' (Municipality of Rotterdam, 2008a).

The municipality initiated a branding campaign, 'Rotterdam Dares', to emphasize Rotterdam's identity as 'a young international city on the water, with a straightforward and hands-on mentality', focusing on the city's long tradition of 'sleeves rolled up' and 'daring approaches'. 'Ambition, change and engagement' were chosen as the brand values and formed the building blocks of the 'new' imagery that was being created to promote Rotterdam (Riezebos, 2014; Interviews with municipality). The 'Rotterdam Dares' campaign aimed to support projects, festivals and initiatives that embodied the city's 'hands-on' mentality and 'daring actions'. While emphasizing Rotterdam's innovative, sensational and daring attitude, the city's 'international' and 'multicultural' character was acknowledged in city branding documents. For example, Rotterdam's 'multicultural capital' was framed as a 'source of creativity' (Municipality of Rotterdam, 2005). The brand value 'international' not only referred to Rotterdam's historical context as an international trade centre and port, but especially to Rotterdam's harbouring 'more than 160 nationalities' *and* its cosmopolitan atmosphere. The municipality of Rotterdam communicates feelings of pride when stating that this diverse population makes Rotterdam a bit 'un-Dutch' (ibid.).

A key factor driving Rotterdam's place branding strategy was the international economic ambition to remain a global port city. In 2007, Rotterdam launched a new brand tag that reflected this economic driver even more strongly. The 'Rotterdam Dares' campaign no longer fitted the international orientation that the municipality was specifically targeting (Riezebos, 2014; Interviews with city marketing advisors). The many nationalities and 'the wealth of cultures and ethnicities from all over the world' (Municipality of Rotterdam, 2008b) fitted the clear international focus that Rotterdam was pursuing and this was presented as a great *economic* asset for the city:

> *About 50% of the population has their roots in the rest of the world. The language skills, and knowledge of these international citizens, give access to overseas contacts and links to foreign markets.* […]. [Rotterdam World Story, 2008b, p. 9]

This means that the municipality recognized Rotterdam's diversity as an important *selling* point to reinforce its international image, which in turn, would attract foreign investors and entrepreneurs. With a main port that functions as an international junction, it is important to consider the expat community for whom a diverse city composition is appealing (Interview with Rotterdam Partners, 2015). City marketing activities to 'strengthen the (inter)cultural identity of Rotterdam, by treating the various nationalities as a strength of the city' were hence strongly connected to the international positioning of Rotterdam (Municipality of Rotterdam, 2007). However, this 'economic emphasis' on Rotterdam as a World Port, World City was criticized for being 'too business-orientated'. Many stakeholders (especially residents) did not feel represented by the brand. This prompted the municipality to develop a new communication strategy under the new slogan 'Rotterdam, make it happen' (Interviews with municipality of Rotterdam). The brand aimed to improve Rotterdam's image by emphasizing the 'mentality' that is so

typical of Rotterdam (Municipality of Rotterdam, 2014). Rotterdam's 'DNA' has been redefined, with 'international, worldly, groundbreaking, entrepreneurial, no-nonsense and raw' being the key values that underlie its brand identity (ibid.). The city chose to highlight its 'cosmopolitan' character as an advantage, but in more recent years the term 'multicultural' has largely been replaced with terms such as 'cosmopolitan' and 'international'. Furthermore, Rotterdam's cosmopolitan outlook is framed as part of the 'international' atmosphere that it aims to convey (Municipality of Rotterdam, 2014; Interviews 2015).

Whereas Rotterdam chose to incorporate diversity into its brand *identity*, diversity is barely translated into brand *communication*. Rotterdam chose not to emphasize cultural diversity in its city branding strategy. This does not mean that Rotterdam does not acknowledge diversity as being central to its DNA; rather it means that the city believes that it is not up to the municipality to put it explicitly on display. For example, the municipality's city branding hardly features events that celebrate cultural diversity, nor does it draw on ethnic quarters or the multicultural background of many businesses in the city. The following statement by one of the city's brand officers illustrates this:

> '*We have the West-Kruiskade as a multicultural street with its own Chinatown, and for our city branding it would be great if we could name it and put a label on it. But the entrepreneurs don't do that themselves, so why would we?* (Interview with Chief Marketing Office, 2015).'

According to respondents, the underlying rationale is that Rotterdam's cultural diversity 'speaks for itself' (Several interviews, 2015). Treating it as a 'given fact' shows acceptance of the city's identity. The city branding professionals consider that involving diversity explicitly in the brand strategy would feel as if they are problematizing the issue. Moreover, it would also feel as if they were making a political statement, which according to one of the respondents, '*is not desirable, given that branding is about promoting our city and not necessarily about solving and getting engaged in political debates*'. This shows how branding professionals prefer to focus on promotional activities that improve Rotterdam's economic situation and not extend their roles and ambitions to social policies and planning.

During our interviews, two exceptions were mentioned. Firstly, there is the events policy that Rotterdam has implemented since the start of Rotterdam Dares, in particular the 'Dunya Festival' and 'Summer Carnival', which have recently been combined in the Rotterdam Unlimited Program. These festivals celebrate Rotterdam's cultural diversity 'by providing a stage for music, art and cuisines from countries and cultures all over the world' (Rotterdam Unlimited, 2013). Although these festivals were initially started by residents of Rotterdam, they have become an important part of the city's events policy. The municipality of Rotterdam gives both festivals structural financial support. Secondly, the city aims to stimulate an image that fits well with Rotterdam's cultural diversity, by the selective use of photos in communications about Rotterdam. According to our respondents, the Rotterdam 'image-database' that individuals and companies can use for promotional purposes, is one of the few ways in which the municipality attempts to include diversity when positioning the city.

4.1.1. How planning-related aspects of diversity are taken into account in branding

The municipality's idea is that citizens, visitors, companies and students will *experience* Rotterdam's cosmopolitan atmosphere and streetscape when they enter the city. The

municipality believes that *others* than the municipality itself will communicate these experiences with and about Rotterdam, and that these stories 'are far more powerful and meaningful' (Interview with Rotterdam Partners, 2015). Moreover, the municipality argues that *because* diversity is so visible in Rotterdam's architecture and streetscape, it is not necessary to make it a core concept of the branding strategy. At the same time though, other aspects of planning which are also highly visible in the city, particularly Rotterdam's *modern* architecture, are key to the general branding strategy. While the general branding strategy is hence connected to planning, planning aspects related to migration-related diversity are hardly used at all in branding. This can be explained by the fact that city marketers in Rotterdam approach branding mainly from an economic perspective, thus barely integrating aspects that in their view do not contribute to this, such as certain social or spatial aspects of the city. Moreover, city marketers do not formally have to answer to planners (due to their position in the municipality). While our interviews revealed interaction with the economic and communication departments in the local government, there was no interaction with planners. This underlines the importance of meaningful interaction between city marketers and planners, as lack of such interaction prevents synergy between spatial planning and place branding that enriches urban governance.

Planning related to diversity in terms of social mixing has been part of Rotterdam's strategy to deal with housing issues and social problems. In 2005 the municipality initiated the 'Rotterdam Law' that was used as a planning instrument to spread lower and higher incomes more equally throughout the city. According to critics, the Rotterdam Law mainly served to get rid of certain 'disadvantaged' groups, migrants in particular. Strikingly, the city branded the Rotterdam Law as an exemplar of the city's daring and innovative character. City marketers evoked pride in the attempts to spread migrants throughout the city, while carefully avoiding highlighting Rotterdam's multicultural features and the politically sensitive debates on housing and social issues.

So, planning elements in the city are used selectively by city marketers. Migration-related planning elements are not a specific matter of focus in this regard for city marketers, even though they are aware of those elements and occasionally use them in specifically framed ways. As stated above: the lack of dialogue with planners prevents to include planning elements in structural and holistic ways, while it allows branding professionals sufficient autonomy to select how to frame the selected planning elements that are used in the brand. Hence in this case branding and planning are located in different pillars of governance, and the lack of collaboration endangers the unity of spatial developments and the place brand.

4.1.2. How the political context affects branding

The empirical data further shows that the local political situation influences the relation between migration-related diversity and city branding. Since the early 2000s, right-wing populism has occupied a prominent place in local politics, with the populist party 'Liveable Rotterdam' becoming the major party in the local elections of 2002 and 2014. This party draws on an assimilationist discourse regarding diversity and promotes anti-immigration policies. Furthermore, the Chief Marketing Office is embedded within the municipality, and therefore has to take existing policies and political discourses into account. This implies that it is difficult for the CMO to ignore the assimilationist discourse which

does not favour migration-related diversity. At the same time, the CMO is relatively autonomous from other municipal departments as it's not part of a specific department, but reports directly to the mayor. Our interviews with both parties show that the 'professional' logic of marketers – which is merely an economic perspective – clearly prevails in branding choices. Promoting diversity from a social agenda point of view is far removed from the marketers' perspective. The institutional distance between the municipality (e.g. city council) and the city branding bodies hence influences the extent to which the CMO is able to develop the Rotterdam brand.

Even though the content of the city brand is developed without much direct interference from local political parties, marketers are influenced by the broader political discourse in Rotterdam. The political discussions on migration-related diversity have made marketers more careful in their choices, because '*we don't want to get involved in politics*' (Interview with city branding officer, 2015). Part of guarding the distance between political players and their own organization, is accomplished by taking the political environment into account on a more 'strategic' level. The marketers emphasize that even though specific choices for certain brand communications are not directly influenced by the governing coalition of political parties, they are aware of the sensitivities surrounding diversity, especially since the emergence of Liveable Rotterdam.

We conclude that the present political discourse influences to what extent and in which form diversity is included in branding. By avoiding an explicit way of incorporating diversity in brand communications, city marketers prevent political debates on immigration prevailing in choices regarding the Rotterdam brand and thereby avoid pronounced political involvement. This means that the broader political discourse on diversity influences the strategic choices made by marketers and promotes a more implicit incorporation of diversity.

Finally, all interviewees indicated that Rotterdam '*is not yet using diversity to its full potential in branding the city*' (Several interviews in Rotterdam, 2015). Under the 'Make it happen' campaign, Rotterdam is exploring new ways of including these aspects of its identity in its communication about the city. As our findings show, this search for more ways to include diversity has mainly been affected by the pursuit of economic development and efforts to attract and bind investors and trade partners to the city.

4.2. City branding in Amsterdam

Amsterdam has developed an image of being a city with a long tradition of culture, innovation, creativity and a deeply-held entrepreneurial spirit (Gehrels, Van Munster, Pen, Prins, & Thevenet, 2003). In 2003 Amsterdam felt the necessity to reform its branding strategy, mainly because Amsterdam's competitive position was under pressure (Amsterdam Partners, 2004; Interview with Amsterdam Marketing). The municipality decided to redevelop its strategy, which first became visible in the restructuring of the branding on an organizational level. In 2003, Amsterdam Partners was established, a platform for communication and collaboration between local government, businesses and other organizations in this region that were involved in marketing or promotion (Gehrels et al., 2003).

Amsterdam – supported by a consultancy agency – defined 16 dimensions of Amsterdam as a means of identifying the key values on which to base marketing and branding: residential city, hub function, meeting place, city of canals, capital, business city, sex,

drugs, R&R, people, liveable city, architecture, compact city, artistic, nightlife, shopping city, city of events. These dimensions were fundamental to developing the city brand and provided insight into Amsterdam's priorities, opportunities and blank spots (Gehrels et al., 2003). A final branding element was the 'I Amsterdam' campaign, which according to the municipality, expressed the city's 'diversity, collectivity and the individuality of its residents'. (ibid.). The campaign intended to stimulate a sense of collective identity, by fostering pride and solidarity among its citizens.

More recently, Amsterdam Marketing – established in 2013 to conduct city marketing for the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area – has attempted to distinguish itself from other cities more emphatically by focusing on what is considered as its main DNA: Amsterdam's trade history, which has always facilitated entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation (ibid.). As in Rotterdam, planning is an instrument for branding, even though it tends to focus on communicating the city's 'gadgets'. There is limited scope for deep spatial consciousness.

4.2.1. How planning-related aspects of diversity are taken into account in branding

In Amsterdam, the city is aware of its spatial qualities, but reframes these qualities in terms of its core brand values: trade and innovation. The same goes for migration-related diversity. According to the respondents, the city's history of trade and commerce has contributed greatly to Amsterdam's renowned culture of tolerance and openness. The culturally diverse city composition that typifies Amsterdam is perceived as the *result* of its bustling economic activities, which have attracted migrants since the seventeenth century. Diversity is merely a result of Amsterdam's core values: although it is acknowledged as a quality, it is not part of the discussion on what is *distinctive* to the brand.

Amsterdam – in contrast to Rotterdam – is known for its discourse of inclusion and city policies that often resemble a pro-diversity attitude (Scholten, 2013). Even though diversity is not mentioned explicitly in its brand values, respondents said that 'creativity' doesn't only manifest itself in technology, the canal belt or the wide range of creative education programmes on offer, but is also closely associated with the city's multi-cultural composition. Similarly, Amsterdam's 'spirit of commerce' refers to both the trading houses in the city, Schiphol airport and the VOC mentality as well as to Amsterdam's culture of openness, international orientation and the multi-linguistic skills of many of its residents (Municipality of Amsterdam, 2004).

Similar to Rotterdam, the municipality acknowledges cultural diversity as a part of its identity that brings many merits. Terms such as 'cosmopolitan', 'world-orientated', 'openness', and 'diversity' are used frequently. Amsterdam's cosmopolitan character is mentioned as a source of strength: its diverse population exudes an open ambience that encourages encounters and exchanges between people, while also providing residents with useful skills such as multilingualism (ibid.). Our interviews also show how the economic value of diversity is constantly put forward as an argument for embracing this part of the city's identity. In contrast to Rotterdam, Amsterdam explicitly places diversity within the broader context of 'an open, tolerant society', which corresponds with the city's reputation of having an urban culture where liberal freedoms are highly celebrated. (Interviews in Amsterdam, 2016).

Nevertheless, the inclusive message that Amsterdam has acknowledged in its brand identity is not structurally reflected in brand communications. Similar to Rotterdam,

the municipality chooses to only use migration-related diversity in its brand implicitly. Diversity is acknowledged in terms of brand identity, but is less present in actual brand communications, even though it is still more evident than in Rotterdam. Promotional photos and videos are carefully selected to represent the many ages, sexes, cultures, religions, ethnicities that the city accommodates. In 2004 – when the branding strategy was revived – the city published a campaign booklet, in which the residents of the city were portrayed '*in all their diversity*'. The booklet was used as a means to connect many different people to the city (Interview with Municipality of Amsterdam, 2016). *Connecting* Amsterdam's residents to the city has been a constant ingredient in Amsterdam's branding strategy. This is not only driven by an economic argument, but also by a *social agenda*. In particular, in the first few years after 2004, attempts to revive the Amsterdam brand were accompanied by socially-driven motives to connect and involve residents with the city. The underlying message was an inclusive one: individual people – in all their diversity – could choose to become part of Amsterdam. The 'I Amsterdam' city slogan, which was initiated in 2004 was based on this idea:

> *I Amsterdam was about people, about a diversity of individuals that all are part of Amsterdam. (…). We tried to explicitly show that you are not judged based on 'the group' that you belong to, not at all. It is about individuals – that all have different backgrounds – but who all feel proud to be part of the city and who are all willing to commit themselves to this city (…).* [Interview with municipality of Amsterdam, 2016]

However, our interviews show that this motive gradually faded to the background. Over the past years, the use of the 'I Amsterdam' slogan has been commercialized and more explicitly used as a way of positioning the city more strongly on the world stage (Interview municipality of Amsterdam, 2016). Even though the political setting in Amsterdam allows for a focus on inclusiveness and openness towards diversity, Amsterdam's economic position has led to a shift towards a more marketing-driven focus.

The pressure that the city felt to improve its marketing performance has drawn attention away from branding as a way of identity building. This is reflected in the way in which diversity has been made apparent in the Amsterdam brand in more recent years. Firstly, incorporating diversity in the city brand is driven more by an *economic* logic, which approaches diversity as a necessity for economic growth. Statements such as '*If you want your city to prosper in terms of employment, entrepreneurship and quality of life – you will need diversity. You need to make people aware of this economic value*' show how the city has come to emphasize this approach to diversity. As will become clear further on, this 'economic' perspective of marketers dominates brand choices because of the relatively high degree of autonomy of the city marketing bodies. This economic frame also dominates the brand since city marketers mainly communicate with the municipal economic and communication departments, without much connection with other policy fields, such as the diversity or planning departments.

Secondly, and intertwined with the above: there is an increased reluctance to give diversity a *too* prominent place in the branding of the city. According to Amsterdam Marketing, the culturally diverse city composition does characterize Amsterdam, but is primarily approached as the *result* of the city's DNA (Interview with Amsterdam Marketing, 2016). Amsterdam's strong entrepreneurial spirit has traditionally warranted a certain sense of tolerance and openness, which in turn has attracted migrants from all over the

world. It is this entrepreneurial spirit that makes Amsterdam unique, not diversity in itself. In line with this, city marketers in Amsterdam acknowledge that other cities are even more diverse than Amsterdam, which makes emphasizing this characteristic not very useful in distinguishing the city on a world stage (ibid.).

4.2.2. How the political context affects branding

As in Rotterdam, we observed a tendency to avoid giving diversity too much prominence in the Amsterdam brand. Marketers felt that 'branding should not involve political statements' (Interview with Amsterdam Marketing, 2016). If political players are allowed to intervene 'the brand will be left to the whims of the short-term assessments of politicians', who often don't have a consistent long-term vision (ibid.). Moreover, such political statements make a city vulnerable from a marketing perspective, especially when other policies – for example regarding refugees or immigrants in general – contradict the message that one is explicitly communicating (ibid.). Diversity is therefore approached as an economic asset, avoiding emphasis on political discussions regarding diversity-related themes.

Taking a more subtle approach, the city preferred a strategy which enabled migration-related diversity to flourish without making it central to its planning efforts, whereby deliberate efforts are made to create opportunities for people from different backgrounds to engage in shared activities to address prejudice and foster new identifications and solidarities across differences (see e.g. Fincher et al., 2014). One example is the 24-hours-magazine published by the city council. Its aim is to encourage residents of Amsterdam to visit other parts of the city to experience all kind of initiatives, festivals and encounters that they did not yet know about. The underlying idea is for the municipality to encourage its residents to engage in all kinds of activities to develop a feeling of 'pride' as a resident of Amsterdam. This fits with the idea that 'the planning of the urban realm more broadly will have profound impacts on the nature of intercultural encounter and solidarity in multicultural cities' (ibid. p. 45). Moreover, while there was no deliberate strategy of branding professionals and planners in this case, it does show that the incorporation of the physical landscape (exposing different parts of the city landscape) in the branding strategy can be fruitful in creating a meaningful synergy.

In contrast to Rotterdam, the economic logic of marketers appears to collide with a more social positioning of the city that is encouraged by other stakeholders. Led by the municipal diversity department, Amsterdam labelled 2016 as the 'Year of Diversity' and a large campaign was rolled out to celebrate the 180 nationalities that the city is home to. The 180 nationalities campaign was, however, only initiated after the diversity department of the municipality intervened and insisted on doing so. Interestingly, in Amsterdam we do not necessarily see much competition between narratives on diversity in the political sphere; rather any competition seems to exist more between departments within the city council that encourage more inclusive branding and brand professionals who take a different view on how politics and branding should relate to each other. In their eyes, incorporating a political stance into branding makes it almost impossible to create a sustainable, long-lasting brand.

Another sentiment that was observed within the municipality was that 'a city like Amsterdam can no longer deny the superdiverse city that it is, because the city can't survive without it' (Interview with municipality of Amsterdam, 2016). Moreover, the current political context – in which populism and anti-migration standpoints are gaining in popularity –

leads some respondents to believe that emphasizing an inclusive message on how residents are connected to the city and should take pride in their citizenship, is needed more than ever. In line with this, the mayor's cabinet initiated a social media communication campaign to get across the same message (Interview with Mayor's cabinet, 2016). The campaign is intended to create a sense of belonging among 'vulnerable' migrant youth, who do not seem to identify with the city and society at large and who are therefore at an increased risk of radicalizing. Even though we observed that marketers are cautious about using branding communications for socially-driven purposes, we can see how branding is intertwined with social policies in the case of Amsterdam.

4.3. Conclusions

This study examines how cities re-imagine themselves through place branding in response to superdiversity. This addresses a broader debate in the literature on the strategic and selective representations that place branding creates of urban identities, emphasizing and strengthening certain developments over others and becoming a strategic instrument in urban planning (e.g. Lucarelli, 2015; Oliveira, 2016; Paddison, 1993). Our study focused on two superdiverse cities: Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

Our analysis shows that both cities indeed acknowledge migration-related diversity as a main characteristic of their brand identity. Diversity is approached as part of their historical tradition and is therefore treated as part of their DNAs. However, an important strategy in both cities when dealing with migration-related diversity was not to use diversity prominently in brand communication.

This study provides several explanations as to why migration-related diversity is acknowledged, but hardly communicated in the place brand. Firstly, the study highlights that marketing logic pushed 'diversity' to the background in brand communication because city marketers consider that 'diversity' does not help the city to stand out from its competitors.

City branding bodies in Rotterdam approach diversity as 'a given fact', something that does not need much emphasis. This is also manifest in how city marketers draw selectively on planning elements: they highlight the city's modern architectural accomplishments, but not the multicultural streetscape that is also an authentic feature of the city. The same goes for Amsterdam, which treats diversity as 'a natural result' of the city's trading history and entrepreneurial spirit; city marketers stress that it is not diversity that makes the city unique, but the entrepreneurial spirit that has produced the city's cosmopolitanism.

Thus, marketers did not view diversity as an asset that differentiates their city from other cities: reasoning from their professional marketing logic they wanted to communicate the unique selling points of the city, i.e. Amsterdam's entrepreneurial spirit and Rotterdam's hard work mentality, rather than diversity in itself. The rise of superdiversity was not denied, but considered irrelevant in marketing terms.

Secondly, this political and discursive contextuality of place brands means that cities with similar forms and degrees of migration-related diversity may differ in how diversity is included in place branding. Rotterdam's brand communication changed under the influence of the harsh political discourse regarding immigration issues and the upsurge of an assimilation discourse in the municipality. This discourse gave city marketers less scope to actively include migration-related diversity. In Amsterdam, diversity

was linked to the city's long standing discourse of 'an open tolerant society' where liberal freedoms for people from all sorts of backgrounds are celebrated. However, under pressure of Amsterdam's competitive position, city marketers focused more on the economic than the social agenda. Diversity became subsumed under the notion of the entrepreneurial spirit.

Thirdly, both cities revealed a clear preference for depoliticizing their place branding strategies and distancing them from the broader public and political debates on migration-related diversity. In Rotterdam, the city branding bodies responsible for the brand were searching for new ways to utilize the potential of diversity, but were cautious about mixing branding policies with broader political discussions on migration and integration. In Amsterdam we found similar attempts by marketers to avoid interference by particular administrative departments or politicians. In Amsterdam, however, it was difficult for branding agencies to distance themselves from the strong pro-diversity discourse in municipal government.

Regarding the relationship between planning and branding, this paper shows that spatial planning is selectively used by city marketers in their place branding efforts. City marketers are aware of the city's planning elements and spatial qualities, and use these strategically in the brand. Hereby, the spatial manifestation of migration-related diversity is not considered very valuable for the brand, and other spatial manifestations are considered more important. Because city marketers have sufficient autonomy vis-à-vis spatial planners, they can use specific spatial qualities and particular aspects of spatial plans in the brand, while neglecting others. This results in city marketers neglecting elements of migration-related diversity that may be present in spatial developments or visions. In addition, we witnessed limited interaction between city marketers and planners. City marketers interact more intensively with economic and communication departments. The fact that planners and branding professionals are located in different pillars of governance is not necessarily problematic, but the lack of collaboration did allow branding professionals to selectively use physical assets of the city in their narratives. There is 'mimetic alignment' between spatial planning and branding regarding diversity, rather than interaction. This means that spatial planners and city marketers are both guided by the same dominant discourses on migration-related diversity because both show similarities in how they frame, use or neglect diversity.

Connecting our analysis of place branding to the literature on migration-related diversity, this study helps us to understand that place branding is a more complex process than merely reflecting objective social transformations in the city, such as the rise of superdiversity. It reveals the resilience of political and discursive filters through which this diversification is perceived and portrayed. Place brands represent dominant marketing logics, as well as broader discourses and political preferences with regard to diversity.

Note

1. The codebook is available from the authors on request.

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