

# Place Attractiveness and Image. A research agenda.

Edited by Christophe Alaux, Laura Carmouze,  
Vincent Mabillard, Martial Pasquier



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# Table of contents

Editors .....	III
Contributors .....	V
Introduction .....	VII
Part 1: Emerging Trends in Place Branding	
<u>Chapter 1</u>	
The Image of the Inclusive City:	
Reflections of Inclusion Branding in Boston and Cologne .....	01
> Run Zhao	
<u>Chapter 2</u>	
City Attractiveness: To be green or not to be green?	
A Comparative Study of 8 European Cities .....	23
> Joël Beney	
Part 2: Dynamic of Relationships between Actors	
<u>Chapter 3</u>	
Managing the International Attractiveness	
of Subnational Territories: Insights from the management	
of the international attractiveness of the Paris Region	
on the eve of the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games .....	49
> Etienne Doré-Lesachey	
<u>Chapter 4</u>	
Clusters as Place Brands: Overview and Future Research .....	75
> Dario Giuffrè	
Part 3: Attractiveness for residents and tourists	
<u>Chapter 5</u>	
Places and Residential Attractiveness: A systematic Literature Review .....	97
> Perrine Alberola	
<u>Chapter 6</u>	
Filming Activity as a Tool for Influencing Place Image .....	131
> Manon Châtel	

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## Editors

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# Contributors

**Perrine Alberola** is a PhD student in Management Sciences at the Research Center in Management Sciences (CERGAM) and teaches public management at the Institute of Public Management and Territorial Governance (IMPGT), Aix-Marseille University (AMU). Her thesis aims to understand residential attractiveness of cities and initiatives available to match local supply with local demand. Her thesis focuses on place marketing, public management and urban planning sciences, with an interdisciplinary approach.

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**Run Zhao** is a PhD candidate in the Erasmus Initiative collaboration programme, Inclusive & Prosperous Cities, at Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands. With a master's degree in public administration and a bachelor's degree in business administration, she brings experience from the urban planning consulting industry. Her research focuses on the synergy between inclusive urban public policy, urban project governance, and city branding.

# Place branding – A focus on actors, attractiveness, and emerging trends

This book results from a PhD workshop held in Aix-en-Provence in June 2023. The workshop was organized conjointly by Aix-Marseille Université (France), the Université de Lausanne (Switzerland), and the Université libre de Bruxelles (Belgium). It provided PhD students from all over Europe with a great opportunity to present their thesis' projects or their most recent papers. A special session, focusing specifically on place branding and marketing, gathered six contributions. These contributions then received particular attention from supervisors from all three universities, and underwent a revision process. They form the chapters presented in this book.

The book consists in three parts: 1) emerging trends in place branding, especially in cities; 2) a focus on the dynamics that characterize the relationships between actors of a city or region; and 3) attractiveness for residents and tourists (especially when places are used as filming locations). The first part relates to a global phenomenon to which cities cannot escape: the general path towards sustainable transition in many places around the world. Numerous cities are participating in the development of a more sustainable planet. Sustainability is typically seen as a “catch-all” term, that covers many dimensions. Here, the two chapters dedicated to new trends in place branding, that accompany this transition to more sustainable places, focus on two main aspects: being “green” and “inclusive”.

Chapter 1, written by Run Zhao, addresses the issue of inclusiveness in cities, including a case study on Cologne, Germany. She depicts a contrast between what is presented as, in many regards, a model in inclusivity, and a reality where efforts are still to be made. Moreover, she reflects on the potential of this aspect to brand a city and to use such branding to attract targets, and what kind of targets. In Chapter 2, Joël Beney investigates how cities position themselves as green, how they are perceived in this regard, and how they may use this aspect in their branding efforts.

The second part focuses on the main actors behind place-branding and -marketing processes. Since organizations and individuals in charge of promoting a destination are central, it remains essential to better understand how they form, structure, and implement place branding. The increasing call for more participatory approaches, and the coordination challenges faced by most places, necessitate a refined understanding of these bodies tasked with improving place image and attractiveness.

Chapter 3, written by Etienne Doré-Lesachey, investigates the inter-organizational relationships between local and regional authorities on the eve of 2024 Olympic Games held in Paris, France. It discusses the challenges faced, the potential for increased cooperation (also after the event), and the main issues to consider. In Chapter 4, Dario Giuffrè concentrates on a specific aspect of attractiveness strategies designed by places: clustering. Clusters refer to closely related economic actors that have acquired specialized resources and expertise in the same business and geographical area, revealing tensions around the coopeitition logic. This calls for further research on the functioning of clusters, but also on their construction as brands, which can in turn not only increase attractiveness of the cluster, but of the region as a whole.

The third part concerns the design of place-development strategies that target specific groups and activities. While residents' attraction, and retention especially, is not completely new – cities and regions faced with emigration of people and talents have already thought about this issue for decades – residential attractiveness has often been overshadowed by economic and tourism matters. However, due to several factors (teleworking and the increased time spent at home in general), residential attractiveness has become a preoccupation for most places, now promoting life quality and lower rent/buying prices, especially outside of big city centers.

In Chapter 5, Perrine Alberola addresses residential attractiveness through the prism of geographical areas, and the related typologies. To do so, she conducts a systematic literature review that presents what has been done so far in research, and what remains to be explored. Regarding tourism, most academic contributions have focused on destination marketing. In Chapter 6, Manon Châtel prefers a different perspective, and concentrates on places as filming locations. She investigates the role played by films/series in place branding. This approach is grounded in contemporary reality, since we have observed increased flows of tourists visiting places associated with a movie or series (e.g., Iseltwald in Switzerland).

The main objective of the book is to provide the readers with compelling paths for further research in place branding, emphasizing the importance of emerging trends, stakeholder and interorganizational dynamics, and strategies (with a focus on activities and target groups).

The aim of this book is to open up new perspectives: on the one hand, by showing the research carried out by European doctoral students; and on the other, by identifying the problems encountered by public and private players in the field of territorial marketing.

**Christophe Alaux, Laura Carmouze, Vincent Mabillard, Martial Pasquier**

Part 1:  
**Emerging Trends  
in Place Branding**



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# City attractiveness: to be green or not to be green? A comparative study of 8 European cities

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1 – Introduction .....	P. 24
2 – Definition of the main concepts .....	P. 25
3 – Literature review .....	P. 27
4 – A scale in three dimensions .....	P. 29
5 – Method .....	P. 30
6 – Results .....	P. 34
7 – Discussion and conclusion .....	P. 40

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JOËL BENEY

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## Abstract

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This chapter explores the increasing importance of sustainability in place branding. Many cities have incorporated this aspect in their positioning to enhance attractiveness and competitiveness. We investigate whether cities perceived as green, through their environmental features, have gained a decisive advantage in attracting visitors, foreign investors, and businesses. The chapter introduces the concept of green city branding and provides a conceptualization of positioning in city branding. It establishes indicators for assessing the green positioning of cities and conducts an empirical analysis to compare the intensity of green positioning among eight cities that belong to the European Capital Cities Network. It also examines the disparity between green brand identity and environmental place identity. The findings reveal that while most cities leverage their environmental performance, others still rely on greenwashing to differentiate themselves from competitors. The chapter suggests promising avenues for further research regarding green and sustainable city positioning.

Key words: Positioning, Brand identity, Place identity, City Branding, Green city branding, Sustainability, European Green Capital Award.

# 1 – Introduction

In response to a growing global imperative, cities around the world have embarked on a transformative journey by embracing “green” initiatives to become more sustainable and reduce their carbon footprint. Following this trend, a growing number of cities have adopted and often used interchangeably the buzzwords *green* and *sustainable*, which encompass a wide range of interpretations. While some initiatives are characterized by an explicit focus on a limited number of well-defined goals, others emphasize a multidimensional dimension (Andersson and James, 2018). At the same time, cities are incorporating sustainability into their branding strategies to position themselves, enhance their attractiveness as a destination, and increase their competitiveness (Joss et al., 2013). While this trend is clearly identified in the literature, cities often struggle, in practice, to effectively promote their environmental policy (e.g., “Net Zero”<sup>1</sup> objectives) to the targeted public (Goess and al., 2016). Against this background, we have identified two gaps in the literature. The first relates to the effective integration of green attributes perceived as a distinctive advantage in city-brand positioning, leading to long-term improvements. The second refers to substantiation, as green city branding has not always been consistent with the place identity.

This chapter contributes to the research on green city branding. More precisely, it aims to assess the relationship between city positioning and sustainability with a focus on the environmental dimension through a comparative study of eight European cities. In this regard, we contribute to the place-branding literature in three ways. Firstly, from a theoretical standpoint, we define and adapt the concept of positioning in city branding from a brand-identity perspective. Secondly, we propose a methodological approach to assess the intensity of green positioning, through the creation of a scale and the definition of relevant indicators. And thirdly, we create typologies that link green-positioning intensity and environmental performance to suggest avenues for future research.

The *European Green Capital Award*<sup>2</sup> (EGCA) is used here to analyze green city branding. Therefore, our study aims to respond to the following research questions (RQs): do European City Award winners or finalists capitalize on their green characteristics, and consider them as a decisive advantage (RQ1)? Do cities with higher rankings in environmental indexes emphasize their green attributes and

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<sup>1</sup> Net zero refers to the balance between the amount of greenhouse gas (GHG) that's produced and the amount that's removed from the atmosphere. It can be achieved through a combination of emission reduction and emission removal.

<sup>2</sup> Since 2010, this award has been annually granted to a European city that demonstrates efforts to improve its urban environment, implement positive initiatives, and demonstrate best practices in environmental management ([https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/urban-environment/european-green-capital-award/applying-eu-green-capital\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/urban-environment/european-green-capital-award/applying-eu-green-capital_en))

performance as the main features of their brand positioning (RQ2)? How consistent is a city's green positioning with its actual environmental state (RQ3)? We hypothesize that cities within the EGC Network may use the green argument as a differentiating attribute to position themselves against their competitors, and that cities ranking higher in environmental performance indexes emphasize green aspects in their positioning.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 2 covers the existing literature on sustainability and green city branding. Sections 3 and 4 build upon theoretical insights, exploring the concepts of brand identity, place identity, and positioning, which constitute the theoretical basis for the construction of the indicators used here. Section 5 focuses on data collection and analysis. The empirical results are presented and commented in section 6. Finally, the last section provides a discussion and proposes avenues for future research.

## 2 – Definition of the main concepts

### 2.1 Sustainable development, Sustainability and Green City

Sustainable development has emerged as a key element in defining place identity, complementing traditional markers. One of the challenges in integrating sustainability into place branding is the interpretation of sustainable development (Gustavsson & al., 2012). Adding to the complexity, *green* and *sustainable* are frequently used interchangeably, often due to a broad understanding of the concept of sustainable development in the field. In this study, we adopt the widely accepted definition put forth by the Brundtland Commission in 1987, which characterizes *sustainable development* as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This foundational definition was already grounded in the three pillars of social solidarity, economic efficiency, and ecological responsibility. It was further validated by the United Nations in 2015, through the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. By adhering to this definition of sustainable development, we can make a clear distinction between the terms “sustainable” and “green”, with the latter referring specifically to the environmental dimension of the broader concept of sustainability.

Focusing on city-level actors, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) proposed the concept of *urban green growth*, recognizing that cities contribute both to economic growth and environmental degradation, while also presenting opportunities for implementing complementary and integrated environmental protection and economic-development policies at the

local level (Demaziere, 2020). Following this trend, many European city governments have embraced green growth, through strategies that encourage eco-innovation and entrepreneurship in sectors such as renewable energies, biofuel-related industry, carbon capture and storage, transport, and agriculture (Busch & Anderberg, 2015). However, local authorities not only respond to citizen, economic, and state pressures but also develop strategies to position themselves as global *green cities* (Andersson, 2016). Copenhagen, Freiburg, and Stockholm, for instance, have actively promoted themselves as green cities. This not only benefits the locals, but also serves to attract external target groups (e.g., potential future residents). Following Breuste (2023), we define the concept of *green city* as a “*city in balance with nature*”, where all forms of nature play a significant role in the urban form and function as part of the green infrastructure. Green cities are often characterized by features such as verticality, compactness, high density, walkability, mixed economies, robust public transit networks, and environmental protection (Anderberg and Clarke, 2013; Demaziere, 2020).

## 2.2 Green city branding

Recognizing the evolving landscape, cities are increasingly acknowledging the importance of aligning their brand strategies with the goals of sustainability and climate change mitigation. It serves not only to shape a city's profile, but also to attract specific target groups. This focalization on the process of promoting a city's environmental initiatives and sustainability practices to attract tourists, businesses, and residents is defined by McCann (2013) as *green city branding*. Its significance for cities is exemplified in two studies. Gustavsson and Elander (2012) demonstrate in their comparison of three Swedish towns that Växjö successfully branded itself as “*the Greenest City in Europe*”, while mitigation efforts in the other two towns remained relatively unknown externally. In their comparative study on city branding in polycentric urban regions, Goess et al. (2006) found that cities in the Rhine-Ruhr region focus less on ecological modernization in their branding efforts compared to cities in the Randstad region, even if the German cities initiated many projects and even realized considerable improvements in their environmental performance. The results of the two comparative studies reveal a gap between the perception of a city as a brand and substantiation showing the significance for cities to emphasize their environmental efforts in communication campaigns.

Green city branding serves as a means for cities to differentiate themselves from their competitors, and demonstrate their commitment to environmental protection, to attract both external social and financial capital to the city (Kalandides and Grésillon, 2021). Nevertheless, as suggested by Busch (2015), a neo-lib-

eral, entrepreneurial mindset may sometimes lead to the implementation of superficial green urban policies deliberately designed to prioritize place image and economic growth over effectively addressing environmental issues potentially resulting leading to another buzzword: greenwashing.

## 3 – Literature review

### 3.1 Brand and place identity

Most of the research in place branding has focused on the gap between *brand image* (perceived image) and *brand identity* (projected image), while less attention has been paid to the gap between brand identity and place identity. *Brand identity* in the context of cities refers to the unique identity crafted and desired by city officials, aimed at differentiating the city from others based on an understanding of residents, clients, competitors, and the business environment (Cai 2002; Pike 2007; Wäckerlin et al., 2020). Brand identity is conceptualized as an emission, influenced by spreading activation theory, in contrast to brand image, which reflects the perception of the brand (Cai, 2002; Vuignier, 2018). *Place identity*, on the other hand, encompasses the essence and unique characteristics of a place that shape its character and facilitate its identification. Cities can benefit from a heightened awareness of their distinctive features, population, history, and traditions. For example, Grenoble, known as the “Capital of the Alps”, leverages its natural environment as a key attractiveness factor. The challenge lies in effectively incorporating these elements into branding while preserving the authenticity and avoiding the instrumentalization of place identity for marketing purposes. Overall, a comprehensive understanding of both brand identity and place identity is crucial for successful place branding, as it involves aligning the projected image with the authentic essence and unique attributes of the place.

### 3.2 Positioning

With many studies primarily focusing on a single destination, the issue of brand positioning within the comparative context of multiple cities remains significantly under-researched (Hanna and Rowley, 2019). The concept of positioning in place branding<sup>3</sup> is subject to diverse interpretations, leading to differences among marketing scholars and practitioners. Some view positioning as an issue of creating an image, while others see it as a decision related to segmentation or emphasis-

ing specific product features (Saqib, 2020). In the place-branding literature, positioning is mostly defined as the reason why clients should prefer a particular territory. *City brand positioning* consists in defining a brand in a competitive context, which requires brand differentiation. It can be defined as the process of gaining a desired position in the audience's mind, by owning a specific set of associations, in the context of competing brands (Janiszewska and Insch, 2012). The positioning of a city expresses a desired identity that one aims to develop and promote. Meyronin (2015) adds the distinction between endogenous and exogenous targets in the positioning definition. Relevant criteria for effective city brand positioning can be categorized based on the following characteristics. First, it must be credible, accurately reflecting the ambitions of the territory, verifiable by the target audience and consistent with the actual conditions of the place (Janiszewska and Insch, 2012). Second, it should be different, emphasizing a distinct reason for choosing the city over its competitors. Third, it should be sustainable, because the territorial positioning corresponds to a long-term vision of the city (Chamard, 2014).

From a marketing perspective, Gollain (2014) refers to Kotler (1994) to mention the strategic significance of brand positioning in which positioning is understood as a key component of the STP concept (Segmenting, Targeting, Positioning) and adapted to the place branding literature. Like segmentation and target group selection, positioning matters for defining a brand strategy. It is the final step, serving as the overarching concept around which the implementation of the entire marketing strategy is structured. During this stage, the objectives and targets selected in the previous phases must be translated into two key elements of any marketing strategy: positioning and customer promise. While these objectives can be ambitious, they must be proportionate to the actual comparative advantages of the territory and the human and financial capacities available to territorial marketers to be consistent (Proulx and Tremblay, 2006). It is crucial to recognize that place brand positioning must also reflect the identity of the city, as the brand identity is not only an abstract advertising concept.

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<sup>3</sup> Following Boisen et al. (2018), we consider place branding as a strategic, long-term, and identity-driven activity that encompasses the alignment between the perceived image of a place (brand image), the desired perception of the place (brand identity), and the actual characteristics of the place (place identity).

## 4 – A scale in three dimensions

Within this framework, the chapter will explore three types of positioning strategies: brand positioning, marketing positioning, and communication positioning. They constitute the basis for the development of the scale (see Table 1).

### 4.1 Brand positioning

The first dimension of our scale is the *brand positioning*. Kavaratzis (2004) underscores the importance of gathering and promoting the place as a unique and distinct entity under a well-defined brand identity. Temporal (2002) treats positioning as one of a brand's key strategic pillars that determine the brand-management process. The global positioning of the shared brand, also known as the umbrella positioning, involves determining precisely and for all the intended targets, the city's position in the market in relation to specific competitors, and communicating a clear value proposition to customers which is shared by the stakeholders of the city. This synthesis of positioning can be achieved through the formulation of a vision that reflects the desired perception of the place according to the public (Chamard, 2014). Karvelyte and Chiu (2011) emphasize that defining a coherent vision and setting clear goals is a central stage in the city brand development process, as it enables effective prioritization of planned initiatives. The main objectives of this stage include the definition of city brand elements such as core idea, identity, positioning and promising of value (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009).

### 4.2 Marketing positioning

The second dimension, *marketing positioning*, focuses on the selected targets within each market and among the key stakeholders. Cities can use *segmented* or *undifferentiated* strategies, meaning they can either target niche markets or adopt a broader approach. Unlike the global positioning, market-oriented positioning reflects a deliberate policy and intention rather than a result. While each sub-positioning for different stakeholder groups may have subtle differences, they should be compatible and mutually supportive when considered together (Gilmore, 2002). Janiszewska and Insch (2012) propose four major positioning based on this approach that differ in the targeting strategies: the concentrated positioning, the exclusive positioning, the interrelated positioning, and the uniform positioning. When communicating their advantages, based on economic, geographical, or human resources arguments, cities have the option to adopt specific position-

ing for a specific clientele or general positioning (Proulx and Tremblay, 2006). If a global brand policy has been established, targeted marketing actions should align with it. In contrast, when no brand policy is in place, efforts should focus on enhancing the territory's overall reputation through diffuse marketing actions (Gollain, 2014).

### 4.3 Communication positioning

The final dimension of the scale is *communication positioning*. It reflects the construction of all the implicit or explicit actions that express the city brand positioning and strategy towards its target audiences. Communication positioning represents the support for the brand, which carries meaning, gives meaning to targets and results in the creation of value about the place. It involves showcasing and promoting the most distinctive advantages of the city in relation to its defined competitors (Bourkache and Tessa, 2015). A well-defined positioning guides strategic communication choices, including subjects, style, and tone. This approach involves various promotional tools such as slogans, personal selling, public relations, and publicity (Florek and al., 2006). While logos and slogans contribute to the differentiation and uniqueness of a place, they represent just one aspect of communication and should not be confused with the overall place-branding strategy (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009).

## 5 — Method

### 5.1 Indicators

In this study, we drew inspiration from the work of Tsaour et al. (2016) who developed a scale to measure Destination Brand Identity following guidelines provided by Churchill (1979) and Wang et al. (2007). Firstly, we conducted a literature review on sustainability and place branding to identify potential item samples. Second, we generated item samples based on the identified literature. Then, we performed the first data collection and conducted measure reanalysis to refine the items. Finally, we determined the scale for measuring green city positioning. The indicators developed in this chapter can be found in Table 1.



Dimensions	Nbr Items	Indicator	Description	Author
Brand positioning	5	Frame of reference	The global or umbrella positioning of the territory will be translated into an expressed promise.	Chamard (2014)
		Strategical positioning	Positioning as one of a brand's key strategic pillars determining the entire management process.	Temporal (2002)
		Global Vision	The definition of the vision and goals followed by the city is a critical stage in city brand development process: 'without a coherent vision, it is difficult to prioritize various projects.	Karvelyte and Chiu (2011)
		Continuity of positioning	Green place branding consists of making use of previous environmental efforts in a locality to define a new identity.	Andersson (2016)
Marketing positioning	6	Selling points	The precise sub-positionings for each stakeholder group, although each is subtly different, should be compatible and mutually supportive when taken together.	Gilmore (2002)
		Sub-positioning	Based on economic, geographical, or human resources arguments, cities have the option to adopt specific positioning for specific clientele or general positioning.	Proulx and Tremblay (2006)
		Main attributes of the cities	Develop four major positioning strategies may be adopted depending on the approach to the target group.	Janiszewska and Insch (2012)
Promotion positioning	6	Green Award winner	Positioning a city means highlighting and promoting its most differentiating advantages in an optimal way in relation to cities or municipalities defined as competitors.	Bourkache and Tessa (2015)
		Green promise	Promises The word "sustainable" features prominently on the site but translates as "green" in English.	Kalandide and Grésillon (2021)
		Green actors	The reflection of the stakeholders in the city.	Demaziere (2020)
		Green Label	The visual presentation and identification of a place.	Florek and al. (2006)

Table 1. Dimensions of the scale to assess the intensity of cities green positioning

Note: More details about the design and variables used to build the indicators can be found in Annex 1.

## 5.2 Data collection and analysis

The assessment of city positioning is conducted through an examination of the projected image, or brand identity. To achieve this, we adopted a comparative study with the primary objective of defining indicators and developing a scale that enables the evaluation of the intensity of the green positioning among eight selected cities. We collected data from the cities' Visit and Invest websites, and from their promotional and marketing agencies' strategies, and we analyzed the projected image to their external targets (see Table 2). Therefore, a combination of qualitative and quantitative content analysis was used. The construction of a typology that integrates the created scale. Then, the environmental situation of the cities was measured through the environmental criteria of the *IESE Cities in Motion index (CMI<sup>4</sup>) 2022* and the *Global Destination Sustainability-Index (GDI<sup>5</sup>) 2022*.

We investigate city-branding processes in eight European cities (see Table 2): Copenhagen, Glasgow, Ljubljana, Oslo, Reykjavik, Stockholm, Tallinn, and Valencia, with a specific focus on analyzing green city branding through the European Green Capital Award (EGCA). According to Demaziere (2020), the EGCA is probably the best way for European cities to brand themselves as green. It recognizes cities with a strong environmental track record, encourages further sustainability efforts, and showcases exemplary cities as role models for best practices and experiences. In line with Demaziere's assumption (2020), these cities were selected based on their potential to emphasize their green identity in positioning strategies. From the pool of thirty-six previous EGCA winners and finalists, we narrowed down the selection to cities included in the Cities in Motion Index 2022, which forms the basis of our environmental axis, while excluding those with populations exceeding one million and those not part of the Global Destination Sustainability-Index 2022 (GDS-Index) as we assumed they might have less potential for adopting a green positioning, given that participation in the index is a voluntary commitment.

Before presenting the results, it is important to precise that the selected cities rank among the top 50 out of 183 in the environmental dimension of the CMI 2022. The CMI 2022 defines sustainable development as a "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" and assess it in various dimensions. The environmental dimension of the index includes indicators related to air pollutants, water quality, and the sustainability of a city's production and urban development structure. As mobility and urban planning constitute independent dimensions, they are not reflected in the Figure 1.

<sup>4</sup> Cities in Motion Index 2022 (<https://media.iese.edu/research/pdfs/ST-0633-E.pdf>)

<sup>5</sup> Global Destination Sustainability-Index (GDI) 2022 (<https://www.gds.earth/2022-results/>)

City	Inhabitants	Country	EU Region	Type	Visit websites	Invest websites
Copenhagen	>500k	Danemark	Western Europe	Capital	<a href="http://www.visitcopenhagen.com">www.visitcopenhagen.com</a>	<a href="http://www.copcap.com">www.copcap.com</a>
Glasgow	>500k	UK	Western Europe	4th city	<a href="http://www.peoplemakeglasgow.com">www.peoplemakeglasgow.com</a>	<a href="http://www.investglasgow.com">www.investglasgow.com</a>
Ljubljana	>500k	Slovenia	Western Europe	Capital	<a href="http://www.visitljubljana.com">www.visitljubljana.com</a>	<a href="http://www.ljubljana.si/en/ljubljana-for-you/work-and-business/">www.ljubljana.si/en/ljubljana-for-you/work-and-business/</a>
Oslo	>500k	Norway	Western Europe	Capital	<a href="http://www.visitoslo.com">www.visitoslo.com</a>	<a href="http://www.oslobusinessregion.no">www.oslobusinessregion.no</a>
Reykjavik	>500k	Iceland	Western Europe	Capital	<a href="http://www.visitreykjavik.is">www.visitreykjavik.is</a>	<a href="http://www.investinreykjavik.com">www.investinreykjavik.com</a>
Stockholm	>500k	Sweden	Western Europe	Capital	<a href="http://www.visitstockholm.com">www.visitstockholm.com</a>	<a href="http://www.stockholmbusinessregion.com">www.stockholmbusinessregion.com</a>
Tallinn	>500k	Estonia	Eastern Europe	Capital	<a href="http://www.visit tallinn.ee">www.visit tallinn.ee</a>	<a href="http://www.investinestonia.com/regions/tallinn">www.investinestonia.com/regions/tallinn</a>
Valencia	>500k	Spain	Western Europe	3rd city	<a href="http://www.visitvalencia.com">www.visitvalencia.com</a>	<a href="http://www.investinvalc.com">www.investinvalc.com</a>

Table 2. Characteristics of the eight cities selected

## 6 – Results

Before presenting, in a second stage, the coherence between the cities' green branding strategy and the justification of the place identity, the first part of this section presents the brand identity emphasized in their positioning by the cities on their websites specifically targeting external audiences and strategies.

### 6.1 Green positioning, not an absolute priority

As discussed in the theoretical part, a city brand identity should encompass various dimensions that accurately represent the aspirations of the brand. At least one of these dimensions must differentiate the city from competing destinations. For us to answer to the first research question: do European City Award winners or finalists capitalize on their green characteristics and consider them as a decisive advantage (RQ1), we focus on the environmental dimension in the positioning strategies of the selected eight cities. In our study, we adopted a four-stage intensity scale: *low*, *medium*, *strong*, and *green*, as depicted in the right part of Table 3. We found that being perceived as green through awards (European City Award) does not necessarily drive cities to prioritize their green characteristics in brand positioning.

While the city of Glasgow derives its name from the Gaelic word “*Glaschu*”, meaning “*dear green place*”, and expresses aspirations to become one of Europe's most sustainable cities in the GDS-Index (2022), its positioning does not primarily emphasize its green attributes (*low*). Valencia and Tallinn integrate more environmental settings (*medium*), particularly when promoting the city as a tourist destination. The lack of green global integration could be explained as green city branding consists of making use of previous environmental efforts in a city to define a new identity (Anderberg & Clark, 2013). Notably, both cities are only recent winners of the EGCA, with Valencia in 2023 and Tallinn in 2024.

By contrast, Oslo, Copenhagen, and Stockholm (*strong*) have a long tradition of climate mitigation initiatives and are widely recognized as green, sustainable, and eco-friendly cities. The three Nordic cities adopt a more sustainable integrative and balanced strategy when it comes to differentiate themselves from the competition. Finally, Reykjavik, which won the Nordic Nature and Environment Prize in 2014 and was proclaimed the Greenest City in the world by Green City Times, along with Ljubljana, the first European capital to declare a Zero-Waste goal, both adopt a green positioning (GDS-Index, 2022). These small and medium-sized cities often focus on specialization as a strategy to enhance their international reputation and emphasize creative and innovative urban-development strategies that promote their environmental advantages.

	Slogan	Type of city strategy	Vision visit	Vision invest	EUCGA Date	Description visit	Description invest	Goals visit	Goals invest	Why city? Attributes visit	Why city? Attributes invest	Mention ECGA Visit	Mention ECGA Invest	Sustainable on first page visit	Sustainable on first page invest	Supplier %	Labels GDSI	Intensity of green	Intensity of green positioning
Glasgow	0.5	0.3	0	0.5	0.6	0	0.5	0.1	0.4	0.1	0	0	0	0	1	0.82	1	6	Low
Valencia	0.5	0.5	1	0	0	0.5	0.3	0.5	0.1	0.7	0.2	2	0	1	0	0.40	0.7	8	Medium
Tallinn	1	1	2	2	0.1	0.4	0	1	1	0.5	0.4	2	1	1	1	0.40	0.3	10	Medium
Oslo	1	1	1	0.5	0.4	1	1	0.1	1	1	0.2	0	0	2	2	0.87	0.7	13	Strong
Copenhagen	0.5	1	1	1	1.0	0.3	1	1	1	1	0.3	0	0	2	1	0.84	0.7	13	Strong
Stockholm	0.5	1	1	1	0.7	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	0	0	2	2	0.90	0.7	15	Strong
Reykjavik	2	0.5	2	2	0.8	1	0.5	1	1	1	0.5	0	0	2	2	0.69	0.7	18	Green
Ljubljana	2	0.4	2	2	0.6	0.5	1	0.4	0	0.4	0.4	2	2	2	1	0.44	1	18	Green
Total	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	24	

Table 3. Integration and intensity of the cities' green positioning among our city sample.  
 Note: From 0 to 6. Low green positioning: 6 to 12 Medium green positioning, 12-18 Strong green positioning, 18-24 Green positioning.

## 6.2 The higher the ranking, the greener the positioning?

From the results observed in our scale (see Table 3) and the arguments developed in the previous section, although most of the cities compared integrate their green attributes strongly into their positioning, for a minority of the cities they are not a priority. In this section, we tested whether a causal relationship can be defined between higher rankings in environmental dimension of indexes and greener positioning can be defined by answering to our second research question: do cities with higher rankings in environmental indexes emphasize their green attributes and performance as the main features of their brand positioning (RQ2)? The Figure 1 provides a unique perspective on the link between green brand identity and place identity, focusing on the consistency of positioning based on indexes. The analysis incorporates the brand identity and place identity to develop a representation that highlights the link between the two dimensions. From these figures, a linear causality between the high ranking in indexes and the intensity of green positioning cannot be observed. As seen in the Figure 1, cities with higher rankings in environmental indexes tend to incorporate their green attributes and performance in their positioning but not as the central aspect. Furthermore, each city adopts a diverse positioning to differentiate itself from its competitors, based on its attributes, resources and strategies.

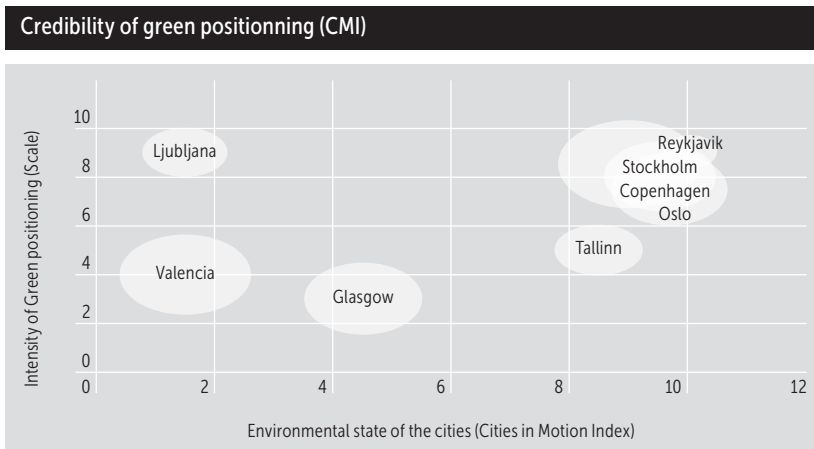


Figure 1. The intensity of green positioning in relation to the environmental performance of cities

Note: The x-axis represents the adaptive ranking of the cities in the environmental dimension of the CMI and the y-axis, the intensity of green positioning of the cities based on the scale illustrated in Table 3. The size of the bubbles represents proportionally the size of the cities in term of population.

The results suggest that cities like Oslo, Copenhagen, and Stockholm which rank high in the environmental dimension of the CMI 2022, (respectively 2nd, 3rd and 6th ranks) prioritize a sustainable development approach that balances economic, social, and environmental dimensions. They not only integrate a significant number of environmental features in their brand positioning but also consider the societal and economic dimensions of sustainable development. This can be perceived in the brand, marketing, and communication positioning dimensions. While Stockholm and Copenhagen adopt a global or umbrella brand approach, Oslo follows a more differentiated brand strategy, where the place itself is perceived as the brand rather than a logo or visual identity. The three structures which constitute the Oslo Brand Alliance following a common storytelling and sharing the same values operate and collaborate in project mode. The three Nordic cities have in common not only to integrate their green dimension in a broader comprehension of sustainability, along with the economic and social dimension, but also to develop it in other priorities and more general strategic goals and activities on their websites visit and invest.

Reykjavik (1<sup>st</sup> rank) emphasizes its geographic nature-based and environmental aspects when it comes to positioning its brand to attract exogenous targets. The city brand's strategic mission is to develop compelling storytelling based on four interconnected brand pillars that create a circular brand story: *“Our nature has shaped our people, people innovate, innovation drives sustainability, which helps nature thrive”* (GDS-Index, 2022). As seen in the scale in Table 3, the city adopts a green positioning focusing on the environmental dimension of sustainability. Nevertheless, differentiation implies a certain level of specialization that cannot satisfy all the external targets or all the stakeholders of the place. Other cities opt for a more global or balanced positioning strategy. Instead of positioning themselves as leaders or innovators in specific market niches, cities like Valencia (47<sup>th</sup> rank) and Glasgow (20<sup>th</sup> rank) communicate a range of general strengths that encompass multiple economic, geographical, and human resource attributes. While Valencia has made efforts to promote sustainable and green tourism, its branding revolves primarily around a vibrant Mediterranean lifestyle and positioning itself as an attractive hub for people, business, and talent. Cities adopting this approach aim to convey the message that they offer something for all external targets.

General positioning is often adopted when there is a lack of a clear vision (Proulx and Tremblay, 2006). Tallinn (9<sup>th</sup> Rank) strives to specialize as a green and global destination and a leader in green transformation in Estonia. However, its communication on the *Visit website* predominantly focuses on conventional features. The city has a long-term strategy *Tallinn 2030*, which set the overall objective of a *“healthy city environment and sustainable use of natural resources”* by the year 2030. We suggest that they should develop a comprehensive branding strategy and enhance coordination among the different organisms to gain in visibility and coherence.

### 6.3 Consistency of Green positioning

Based on the findings of the study, we can identify four distinct city profiles and construct a typology with two dimensions which allows us to answer to the third research question regarding the consistency of the city's green positioning with its actual environmental state (RQ3). The creation of a typology opens interesting paths for future research. It can interestingly be observed that most of the selected cities exhibit a green positioning that aligns with their actual environmental state and that the variation of methodology used by different indexes has an impact on the results.

Based on the results observed in Figure 1, the typology presented in Table 4 reveals that Glasgow and Valencia adopt a weak but consistent positioning regarding their environmental performances, while Copenhagen, Oslo, Reykjavik, and Stockholm demonstrate a strong integration of their high climate mitigation performances in their positioning. Both positioning profiles are credible as they accurately reflect the place identity and the city's ambition. However, the city of Tallinn still has a potential to enhance its branding as a green city, which could further improve its attractiveness. Such a conceptualization of city branding is particularly relevant for medium-sized cities that are less concerned by environmental issues caused by the agglomeration of economic and demographic resources, typical of large cities.

In medium-sized cities, a city branding approach based on urban projects promoting the utilization of renewable energy or the introduction of green spaces might not only be more convincing than in larger cities but also concretize sustainability objectives (Goess et al., 2016). Ljubljana, as depicted in the Table 4, appears to align with this assumption but exhibits an inconsistent positioning. For example, the city still capitalizes on and promotes its European Green Capital Award, obtained in 2016. These environmental results of Ljubljana could be surprising as the city remains the first European capital to declare the Zero-Waste goal with a total of 67% of waste recycled in 2017 and 54% of waste recycled. Ljubljana's title of European Green Capital has significantly enhanced its global recogni-

	Low environmental performance	High environmental performance
Weak green positioning	Glasgow, Valencia	Tallinn
Strong green positioning	Ljubljana	Reykjavik, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Oslo

Table 4. Typology of consistency in green positioning



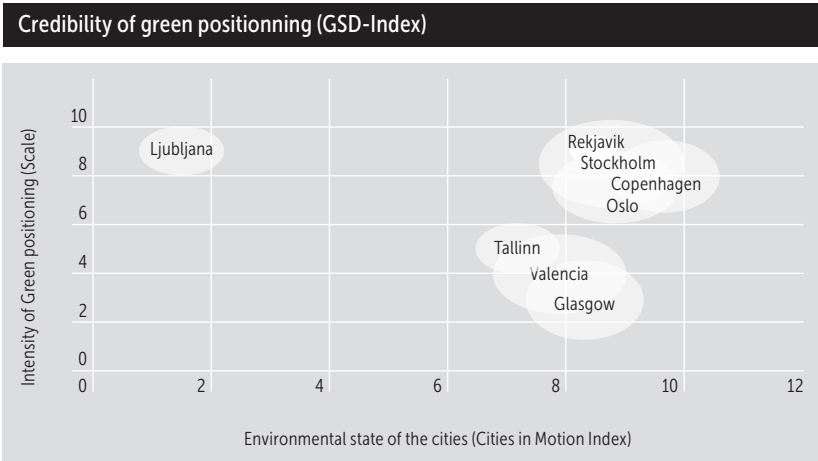


Figure 2. The intensity of green positioning in relation to the environmental performance of cities (GDS-Index)

tion, positioning the city as a leading sustainable, green, tourist, and innovative destination. In the Greenbook of EGCA, the European Commission emphasized on the important role that local authorities play in improving the environment, and their commitment to genuine progress. The focus is set on the effort produced to improve the performance of the city and not on the absolute results. It is also important to emphasize that some of the city's achievements in climate change mitigation were not considered by the CMI 2022. Furthermore, the data collected constitute only a snapshot of the reality of the city in 2022. These observations could emphasize the results observed for Ljubljana.

In order to test our typology with a second index (see Figure 2) we examine the environmental performance as measured by the GDS-Index 2022. The environmental dimension of the index encompasses various aspects of the destination such as climate change commitment, carbon emissions, renewable energy usage, resource and water management, public transport, and air pollution levels. Consequently, changes appeared in the representation of the credibility of green positioning. A mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators were mobilized to measure the environmental performances of the cities.

When comparing the results depicted in Figure 1, integrating the environmental performance measured by the GDS-Index, slight changes are observed in the positioning of Valencia and Glasgow. This reflects more the vision formulated by Glasgow, as it aims to be at the forefront on climate change with ambitions to become the UK's first carbon neutral city by 2030 and a world leading center for sustainable policy and innovation. Glasgow has featured within the top 10 of the

	Low environmental performance	High environmental performance
Weak green positioning		Tallinn, Glasgow, Valencia
Strong green positioning	Ljubljana	Reykjavik, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Oslo

Table 5. Typology of consistency in green positioning

GDS-Index since 2016. These cities show improved environmental performances according to the GDS-Index methodology. The updated results are incorporated into the typology below.

## 7 – Discussion and conclusion

The chapter proposes a comprehensive adaptation of positioning in green city branding, focusing on the city's projected brand image (brand identity) rather than external perceptions (brand image). It also introduces an innovative methodological approach using indicators and a reusable scale to evaluate the intensity of green positioning in cities. Finally, we develop an interesting typology that opens avenues for future research. In this chapter, we emphasize the importance of brand identity being consistent with the attributes of place identity for successful positioning.

The results of the study give some insights and provide some background for future investigation in the field. It is found that being perceived as green through awards (European City Award) does not necessarily drive cities to prioritize their green characteristics in brand positioning (RQ1). Cities with higher rankings in environmental indexes tend to incorporate their green attributes and performances but not as the central aspect of their positioning (RQ2). The study suggests that cities like Oslo, Copenhagen, and Stockholm prioritize a sustainable development approach that balances economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Finally, most of the selected cities exhibit a green positioning that aligns with their actual environmental state (RQ3).

This chapter meets with limitations. The dimensions of the positioning scale in city branding and the intensity of green in positioning require verification and further investigation to consolidate the measurement tool. Then the measure-

ment of city positioning conducted through a snapshot analysis in 2022, based on strategic and website content analysis limits a generalization of the results. A longitudinal perspective would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the results obtained. Additionally, a more extensive analysis of city strategies, resources, governance, and brand management would offer a deeper insight into the significance of the green dimension in city positioning. Another limitation remains in the integration of the CMI 2022 and the GDI-2022 results in our typologies. While the rank was considered for the CMI, the percentage scores attributed to the destination in the GDI-2022 were used due to data availability. These methodological differences limit the robustness of our results in the analysis regarding the consistency of the green positioning and has an impact on the development of our typology. Furthermore, the variation in methods used by different indexes to measure the environmental performances of cities constitute an additional limit. The results obtained are dependent on the specific definition of green and the selection of indicators employed by the indexes to assess the environmental performance of cities.

## 7.1 Future research

The need to measure complex and intangible issues such as the positioning of a city, has led to an increased demand for measurement tools that can translate qualitative into quantitative assessments. Most of the research dedicated to place positioning in the field of marketing and place branding have focused on the perceived image of a place (brand image). Traditionally, qualitative methodologies such as case studies and field interviews, and theory-testing methodologies such as surveys and experiments have, for a long time, been the dominant methodologies. Constructing effective measurement tools to measure the concept of city-brand positioning represents a compelling path for future contributions, based on a comparative approach. The integration of a broad selection of cities with green positioning for comparative research would also bring more validation for the scale. Performance indicators play a crucial role in assessing and comparing the success of city policies and their branding strategies. Future research could explore socio-economic, geopolitical, and historical variables to support and complement the alignment between brand image and place identity in sustainability and green place branding.

The question of whether it is meaningful to isolate the environmental dimension from the broader concept of sustainability opens the door to further investigation and offers promising avenues for future research. It would be valuable to examine how this isolation may influence the potential trade-offs or synergies between environmental dimension and other dimensions of sustainability. While

sustainability encompasses social, economic, and environmental aspects, future research could explore the concept of green cities, their positioning, and the overall effectiveness of sustainability initiatives. A unification of the concept around the 2030 Agenda<sup>6</sup>, could set a common basis for the development of the field. By addressing these research gaps, we can advance our understanding of the interconnectedness of sustainability dimensions and inform more effective and integrated strategies for branding sustainability in various contexts.

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<sup>6</sup> Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development introduced in the Resolution adopted on 25 September 2015 by the General Assembly of the United Nations, setting 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets to be attained in 2030, which balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.

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## Appendix 1

### Indicator structure of the scale

Dimension	Nbr Items	Indicator	Description (unit of measurement)
Brand Positioning	5	Frame of reference	Slogan of the city
		Strategical positioning	Type of city strategy
		Global Vision	Vision invest
			Vision visit
Continuity of positioning	ECGA Date		
Marketing Positioning	6	Selling points	Description invest
			Description invest
		Sub-positioning	Goals invest
			Goals visit
		Main attributes of the cities	Why city? Attributes invest
			Why city? Attributes visit
Promotion Positioning	6	Green Award winner	Mention ECGA on website invest
			Mention ECGA on website Visit
		Green promise	Sustainable on first page invest
			Sustainable on first page visit
		Green actors	Supplier Performance in % from the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index)
		Green Label	Sustainable strategy, sustainable destination certificate, sustainability performance Labels GDSI



<b>Scoring</b>
0= no green/sustainable, 0.5 = general or economy/social , 1 = sustainable or nature/environmental/green 2 = nature/environmental/green as main vision
0= no green/sustainable, nb item green/nb item total = general or economy/social 1= one objective which is environmental /sustainable
0= no green/sustainable, 0.5 = general or economy/social 1 = sustainable or nature/environmental/green, 2 = nature/environmental/green as main vision
0= no green/sustainable, 0.5 = general or economy/social 1 = sustainable or nature/environmental/green, 2 = nature/environmental/green as main vision
2010 = 1 2024 = 0
0= no green/sustainable, nb item green/nb item total = general or economy/social 1= one objective which is environmental /sustainable
0= no green/sustainable, nb item green/nb item total = general or economy/social 1= one objective which is environmental /sustainable
0= no green/sustainable, nb item green/nb item total = general or economy/social 1= one objective which is environmental /sustainable
0= no green/sustainable, nb item green/nb item total = general or economy/social 1= one objective which is environmental /sustainable
0= no green/sustainable, nb item green/nb item total = general or economy/social 1= one objective which is environmental /sustainable
0= no green/sustainable, nb item green/nb item total = general or economy/social 1= one objective which is environmental /sustainable
0= no, 1= yes 2= yes, on the first page
0= no, 1= yes 2= yes, on the first page
0= no, 1= yes 2= yes, on the first page
0= no, 1= yes 2= yes, on the first page
% based on the GDS-Index
0= No achievement, nb of achievements /total of achievements 1 = Sustainable strategy, sustainable destination certificate, sustainability performance

N°	Autoren, Titel und Datum / Auteurs, titres et date
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Nous offrons aux responsables du secteur public des formations accréditées, une recherche de pointe, des expertises étayées et des avis éclairés.



### Formations accréditées

Nos formations couvrent tout le champ de l'administration publique. Leur contenu s'adapte à l'évolution du savoir et des besoins. Leur formule est flexible et leur pédagogie interactive.



### Recherche de pointe

La recherche que nous développons est orientée vers l'innovation, qu'elle soit fondamentale ou appliquée. Nous la menons le plus souvent avec des partenaires universitaires suisses ou internationaux.



### Expertises étayées

Nous apportons notre expertise aux autorités en Suisse et à l'étranger, à tous les échelons institutionnels. Nos conseils sont fondés sur les acquis de la science administrative et sur une large expérience de terrain.



### Avis éclairés

Nous communiquons notre savoir et le résultat de nos recherches. Nous nous engageons dans les débats académiques au niveau international. Nous apportons un regard fondé sur les acquis scientifiques.

## Formations consécutives & continues spécifiques certifiantes

- Doctorat en administration publique
- Master of Advanced Studies in Public Administration (MPA)
- Master of Arts in Public Management and Policy (Master PMP)
- Diploma of Advanced Studies (DAS) en administration publique

## COMMENT?

Notre Institut cultive une approche interdisciplinaire orientée vers la satisfaction des besoins de nos parties prenantes, au niveau local, national et international.



### Interdisciplinaire

Nous cultivons une approche interdisciplinaire et un travail rigoureux. Nous relevons ce défi grâce à de solides ancrages disciplinaires couplés à une démarche collaborative.



### Centré sur les besoins

Les besoins de nos parties prenantes – administrations, étudiant-e-s en particulier – sont au centre de nos préoccupations. Le pluralisme de nos méthodes leur garantit des résultats probants.



### Local, national et international

Nous opérons au niveau local, national et international. Nos formations intègrent les acquis de l'expérience dans tous ces contextes. Nos recherches les utilisent comme champ empirique.



### Indépendant

Nos avis sont indépendants et nos résultats impartiaux, quels que soient nos partenaires, les activités que nous conduisons ou leurs bénéficiaires.

## Formations consécutives & continues spécifiques certifiantes (suite)

- Certificat exécutif en management et action publique (CEMAP)
- Certificate of Advanced Studies en administration publique (CAS) dans différents domaines
- Séminaire pour spécialistes et cadres (SSC)

The main objective of the book is to provide the readers with compelling paths for further research in place branding, emphasizing the importance of emerging trends, stakeholder and interorganizational dynamics, and strategies (with a focus on activities and target groups).

It is divided into three parts. The first part relates to a global phenomenon to which cities cannot escape: the general path towards sustainable transition in many places around the world. Numerous cities are participating in the development of a more sustainable planet. Sustainability is typically seen as a “catch-all” term, that covers many dimensions. Here, the two chapters dedicated to new trends in place branding, that accompany this transition to more sustainable places, focus on two main aspects: being “green” and “inclusive”.

The second part focuses on the main actors behind place-branding and -marketing processes. Since organizations and individuals in charge of promoting a destination are central, it remains essential to better understand how they form, structure, and implement place branding. The increasing call for more participatory approaches, and the coordination challenges faced by most places, necessitate a refined understanding of these bodies tasked with improving place image and attractiveness.

The third part concerns the design of place-development strategies that target specific groups and activities. While residents’ attraction, and retention especially, is not completely new – cities and regions faced with emigration of people and talents have already thought about this issue for decades – residential attractiveness has often been overshadowed by economic and tourism matters.