

Doctoral Dissertation

Branding Danang: The Role of Higher Education in City Branding

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# Dissertation Abstract

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, cities are in increasing cooperation as well as competition to attract resources for sustainable development. Place branding, therefore, has been utilized for place development all over the world (Allen, 2007; Cleave & Arku, 2015; Cleave, Arku, Sadler, & Gilliland, 2016, 2017; Hafeez, Foroudi, Dinnie, Nguyen, & Parahoo, 2016; Jensen & Richardson, 2005; A. H. J. Lee, Wall, & Kovacs, 2015). Among the top cities, London maintains its position as the “Capital of Capitals,” with the notable characteristic of having over 40 higher education institutions located in the town (The Resonance, 2017, 2018, 2019). Notably, during the COVID-19 pandemic that has been spreading globally since early 2020, higher education has played a role in the practice of community empowerment (Saleh & Mujahiddin, 2020). Universities have roots from cities (Bender, 1988) and can create attractiveness for cities through their partnerships with businesses, communities, and governments (Kresl, 2015). They belong to cultural assets to establish the city identity in the cases of Oxford, Cambridge, St. Andrews (UK), Heidelberg, Tübingen, Göttingen (Germany), Salamanca (Spain), Coimbra (Portugal), Bologna (Italy), and Princeton, Berkeley (USA) (Muñiz-Martínez & Cervantes-Blanco, 2009). However, their potential for partnerships with cities has not been realized properly (Klaic, 2012).

Govers (2011) implied that pursuing a multi-brand might not be adapted to locality including Danang, a livable tourist city and a pioneer in Vietnamese branding. Fortunately, both residents and businesses need cultural activities and business opportunities (Merrilees, Herington, & Miller, 2012) that can be enhanced by boosting the role of universities. Given that universities’ contributions in city branding in tourist cities (Albino, 2015), Danang can rely on its thirty one higher education institutions to harmonize different stakeholders. In the urban planning (Danang UPI, 2013) and the vision of Danang to 2045 (Resolution No. 43-NQ/TW, 2019), higher education was especially appreciated by the government at both state and local levels. The city is preparing for seven universities that will be opened

soon. Remarkably, Danang promotes the University of Danang (UD) as a critical part of training human resources and conducting scientific research in Central Vietnam, with 21% of the workforce qualifications was forecasted to be university and college graduates by 2020 (Danang IPC, 2016). It was ranked in the top 401/450 best Asian universities (QS University Ranking 2020 of Quacquarelli Symonds, United Kingdom), 3/67 among Vietnamese universities (uniRank). Besides, the local government earns nearly 49% in total of the public land fund (1.174 ha) for education and training center. Furthermore, focusing on students – whose expectations reflects those of other city audiences – can ensure the quality of life, experiences, and business climate mentioned by Boisen, Terlouw, Groote, and Couwenberg (2017). However, those tertiary students' perceptions with their host cities have been largely ignored (Insch & Sun, 2013).

Additionally, Tsukuba Science City – a unique Japanese city that has some similarities with Danang (governance, top-down reconstruction, transportation, vision, values, rich nature) – is well-known as the center of scientific research and education, a successful case of building reputation using higher education. Hence, this study aims to build a place brand of Danang as a "University City" based on an identity-image match approach to increase place brand adoption and reduce conflicts among target groups (Braun, Eshuis, Klijn, & Zenker, 2018). Based on the relationship between place identity and place image in studies of Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005), Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), and Zenker (2011), the study explores the brand attributes of Danang as a higher education destination. After that, the role of universities in city branding and the successful elements of a university city are considered to build the appropriate projected image of Danang.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 City Branding***

According to Kong (2012), city branding can be used as a strategy to attract different city stakeholders, including talented workers. A prosperous city branding must create a unique brand identity that represents the city culture, heritage, people, and make it mutually agreeable to target groups. These audiences are visitors, investors, residents, companies or intermediaries, students, commuters, export markets (Braun, 2008) who understand the city brand based on their own lens (Merrilees, Miller, & Herington, 2012). Green, Grace, and Perkins (2016) analyzed the evolutionary path of city branding in practice, including five stages: primitive, boosterish, entrepreneurial, formalized, and brand-focused.

From 2000 to present, researchers had been considering city branding as an essential component of urban place management in which city image is treated as a brand. Basically, a place brand is a network of associations in the consumers' mind, in which, identity and image are centralized (Boisen et al., 2017; Zenker and Braun, 2017).

### ***2.2 Place Brand (Place Brand Identity, Perceived Place Image, and Projected Place Image)***

The identity of a place is the extent to which an individual can recognize it among others (Lynch, 1960). In other words, identity is the first obvious distinction of a place people have in their minds. Aaker (1996) supposed that the brand identity includes two components: the core identity (timeless essence of the brand), and the extended identity (more details to complete the picture). City identity can be understood as visible and invisible traits that form the essence of the city (or its personality) while a city brand image is a set of emotional and cognitive mental representations of the city brand that individuals associate with (perception of the personality) (Muñiz-Martínez & Cervantes-Blanco, 2009). Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) regarded identity – an expression of cultural understandings – as the mobile input of the process of place branding. Briefly, city identity is what preferences help distinguish the city (i.e., geography, climate, history, infrastructures, monuments, tourism, policy, culture, people, religion, business, architecture). It includes city representation, activities, and benefits brought to stakeholders through government apparatus change. Besides, mission and vision, values and personality that help memorize the city can also be mentioned.

Cities can be promoted via cultural amenities, and the nature of the city image is the intersection between city branding and city identity (Riza, Doratli, & Fasli, 2012). In other words, place image results from branding efforts based on place identity (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). Understanding the image of cities perceived by their “audiences” can define how strong the brand is. According to Zenker (2011), specific groups of stakeholders have their own perceived place images that determine their satisfaction with place cohesion.

A projected image contains the created meaning that defines place identity with narratives and visuals enabled by media and ICT (Govers & Go, 2009). This term is commonly used in tourist destination studies, and Ji (2011) defined it as the ideas and impressions related to a destination that are intentionally or unintentionally expressed. It is created for marketing purposes, while an unintentional image is formed independently (Andreu, Bigné, & Cooper, 2000). Overall, the city projected image is

formed through the promotional activities of destination agents (pull factor) and news or information about the place from the other sources (push element) (Andreu et al., 2000). Regarding higher education, students tend to rely on information from universities (online/offline communication channels), interpersonal sources, and even career services (Obermeit, 2012; Simões & Soares, 2010). Therefore, branding a university city definitely requires the participation of higher education institutions to create a stable place brand.

### ***2.3 The Role of Higher Education***

Culture is required when defining city brands (Alexa, 2012). Nowadays, when mentioning the culture of a city, people often think about cultural institutions. Civilization is the core of a culture that can be visualized through science, art, and technology. These achievements are kept in cultural institutions, taught in educational institutions, and added in research institutions (Wagner, 1981). Nevertheless, festivals, events, and arts are the dominant applied cultural themes in destination branding. The role of educational institutions as cultural manifestations has not been adequately studied in place branding

Bradley, Hall, and Harrison (2002) indicated that there are two approaches used in studies about place promotion regarding the linkage of place to the political economy and the practical aspects of urban marketing. Higher education today contributes to place promotion in both trends. They contribute to the city prestige or city identity through local development (Arbo & Benneworth, 2007; Boucher, Conway, & Van Der Meer, 2003; Harloe & Perry, 2004; Shaw & Allison, 1999; Uyarra, 2010), university branding (Chatterton, 2010; Glinka, 2017; Rekettye & Pozsgai, 2015; Roostika, 2017), and academic tourism (Albino, 2015; Bradley et al., 2002; Høyer & Naess, 2001; McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017; Pitman, Broomhall, McEwan, & Majcoha, 2010; Quezada, 2004).

### ***2.4 University Cities***

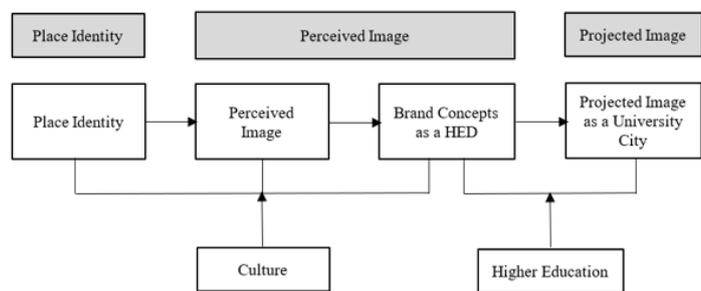
In their book, Million, Heinrich, and Coelen (2017) proved that education positively contributes to urban development via its influence on the neighborhood, the city, and the region. It can be said that cities need to become “learning cities” before experiencing the long journey of winning the “knowledge” pride. This concept is repeated many times by Longworth (2006), who believed that learning regions have global opportunities by increasing their global roles through learning communities. In America, “college town” is a typical urban place dominant by higher education (Gumprecht, 2003). Another type

of college town is a student (-friendly) city. Student-friendly cities are HEDs characterized by students–host community relationships that emphasize student attraction, assistance, housing, empowerment, and interaction (Russo, van den Berg, & Lavanga, 2003). In recent years, there has been an increase in research on the growth of university towns or university cities, in which “engaged universities” are described by Mayfield (2001) as the institutionalization-related university–community linkages.

When considering the role of universities in forming a university city, it is necessary to mention the triple helix of university–industry–government relations. This triangular relationship model is adapted by H. Y. Lee (2002) in analyzing the success factors of science city projects, e.g. Tsukuba Science City—a university city mentioned earlier. It has been proved to be a proper mechanism with which to bolster the academic reputations of places (Agarwal, Seretse, Letsatsi, Marumo, & Mokgwathi, 2018; Etzkowitz, 2002; Kola, 2019; Razak & Saad, 2007).

### 2.5 Research Framework

Based on the literature review, a research framework (Figure 1) is built to answer these research questions: *How does culture help form the city identity of Danang? How do students perceive Danang as a city and as a higher*



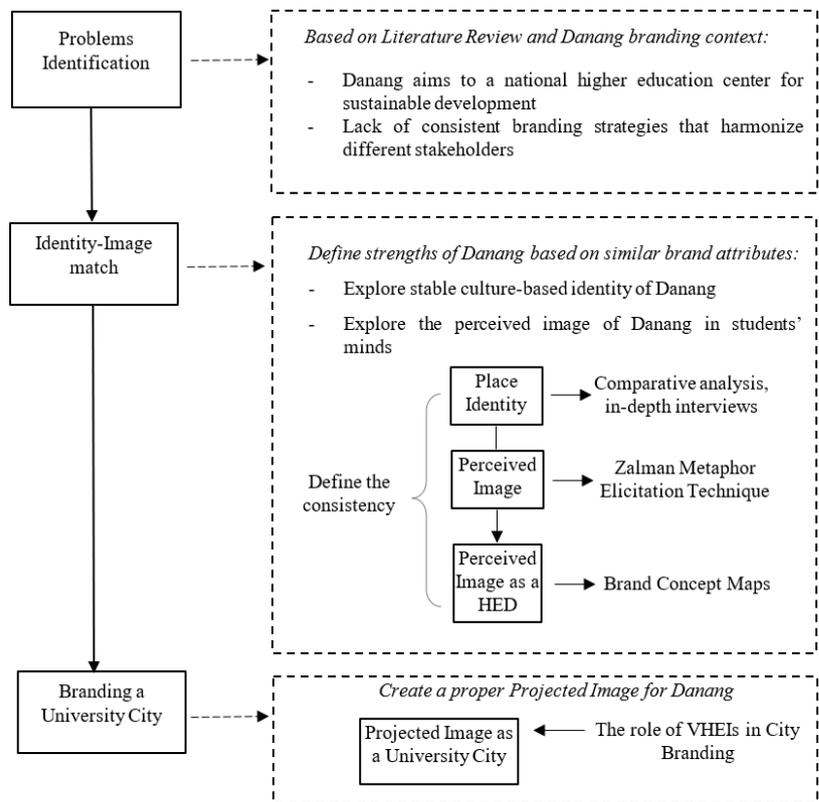
**Figure 1. Research Framework for Branding a University City**  
 Source: Developed by the author

*education destination? How can universities aid in city branding in the case of Danang?* In line with objectives and research questions, the research hypothesis is the following: “*The potential of Danang to be a higher education destination is being overlooked, and therefore, Danang can be promoted as a higher education destination using its universities.*”

Commonly, researchers considered place image the result of identity-based place branding. This trend is the reason why the projected image is analyzed from overt/covert induced agents’ data sources to evaluate whether the current branding strategies of specific localities are successful or not. In this study, a bottom-up approach is selected to forming a consistent projected image of a university city. The more the brand attributes perceived by students are consistent with place identity (especially on cultural elements), the stronger they are. These strengths are the basis for branding Danang as a university city through enhancing the role of universities.

### 3. Methodology

In order to solve the research problems, I apply a mixed methodology in which the qualitative method was the dominant one. A qualitative approach is appropriate in exploring the brand traits that contribute to the city identity. It is also helpful in identifying the perceived image and the role of universities in city branding. I measured the satisfaction of



**Figure 2. Research Process**  
Source: Developed by the author

students with every brand attribute of Danang as a higher education destination by calculating the gap between their expectations and the city's real performance.

Figure 2 shows the research process. The first phase focused on exploring the consistent traits between the place identity and the perceived image. Notably, the perceived image here is divided into two categories, including the general image of Danang and the perception of Danang as a Higher Education Destination. Next, the second phase concentrated on creating an image of a University City that relies on the power of universities located in Danang. Besides, a mechanism to boost the projected image is implied with lessons from a successful case.

I used a comparative analysis with two data sources to answer the first research question. The secondary data was retrieved from historical documents and the lyrics of songs about Danang. The primary data was gathered from in-depth interviews with 21 Danang opinion leaders who have witnessed the city's development for a long time. By identifying the similarities between 2 data sources, I evaluated the role of cultural elements in the formation of Danang's identity.

The central part of this mix method involved answering the second research question. Two techniques were used at this stage, and a total of 345 students participating. The first one was the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) (Coulter & Zaltman, 1994). It has a US patent and was

proposed by Professor Zaltman. It was originally used to define the place image of a Nepalese village. The second one is the Brand Concept Maps (BCMs) method proposed by John, Loken, Kim, and Monga (2006). The use of BCMS is common in measuring brand equity through exploring brand image. In city branding, Brandt and de Mortanges (2011) and Sebastian Zenker and Suzanne C Beckmann (2013) applied these techniques in their studies. Nevertheless, only Brandt and de Mortanges (2011) mentioned the ZMET at the elicitation step to explore brand associations for the BCM. However, they did not follow the rules of the ZMET strictly. These two techniques are useful in quantitatively analyzing qualitative data.

Content analysis was used to answer the third research question. The secondary data was retrieved from the websites of 51 universities in Vietnam to define their contributions to city branding with frequency statistics. The role of universities in Danang branding was examined through a comparison with the roles of universities in the branding of other university cities.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### 4.1 The Role of Culture in City Identity Formation

**Table 1. Danang identity**

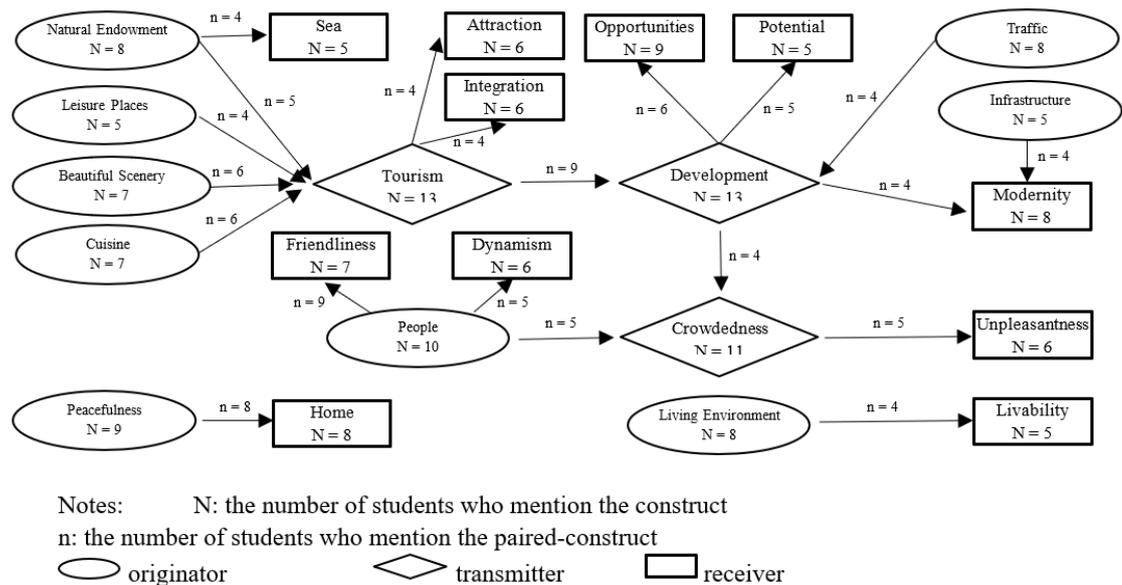
Vision	Livable city
Mission	Environmental orientation, IT application
Imprint	Natural endowment, Tourism, Events
Urban	Growing urban
Education	Comprehensive educational system
People	Friendly
Values	Safety, Environmental consciousness

*Source: Analyzed from in-depth interviews*

Danang, as stated by influential leaders, has a vision of a livable city with environmental orientation, IT (information technology) application. Currently, Danang is a safe and friendly city with natural endowment, tourism, infrastructure, people, events, and a complete educational system. These attributes were mentioned by at least 52.38% of interviewees (except 47.62% belongs to IT industry). In addition to the traits shown in Table 1, some negative attributes such as Privatization, Unskilled labor, the loss of traditional visible cultural elements that mainly result from the trade-off for economic development. Although arts (music) identify Danang with the natural endowment, Tien Sa port, landscapes, bridges across the Han river, humanity-oriented, and memorable place, cultural imprints seem to be blurred. Only two songs mention the Cham Museum. Concerning folklore, except 'Hò' (Quang chanty), the other

kinds are not shown. This absence partly explains why Danang songs nowadays have not lived in locals' hearts yet.

#### 4.2 The Perceived Image of Danang



**Figure 3. Danang consensus map in students' mind**

*Source: From the analysis result of the author*

Figure 3 shows the consensus map of Danang. The map shows the reasoning process between primary constructs or originators (circles), transmitters or connectors (diamond shapes), and destinations or ending points (rectangles). Among them, primary constructs lead to other constructs, while final constructs are dependent consequences. Transmitters represent the linkages between them and between originators and other connectors. Therefore, fundamental constructs and transmitters engender the remaining ones. In this study, nine originators (*Natural Endowment, Leisure Places, Beautiful Scenery, Cuisine, Peacefulness, People, Living Environment, Traffic, and Infrastructure*) and three connectors (*Tourism, Development, and Crowdedness*) should be focused on Danang communication strategies.

Danang appears as an ideal destination for visitors (due to its nature-based attractions, beautiful landscapes, leisure places, cuisine, and hospitality), for living settlement (owing to its livable, peaceful, hometown feeling, working environment, and modernity), as well as for entrepreneurs (because of its potential, development, dynamism, and developed infrastructure). However, the absence of elements related to higher education confirms that influential leaders have overlooked higher education in establishing the city identity.

#### 4.3 Brand Concepts of Danang as a Higher Education Destination (HED)



cooperation, ministries' sponsorship, and youth orientation are essential lessons.

## **5. Implications**

As can be seen from the data analysis results, the research hypothesis is approved. It means that the opinion leaders are missing the most significant factor to promote Danang using universities. Given that students very much perceive Danang as a potential higher education destination, the political leaders should review its image to modify the way it is projected.

The study gives some implications for harmonization between tradition and modernity. The urban planners should earn special spots for natural preservation and spread community consciousness via local people and students. In terms of communication, Danang must attract authentic tourists who are cultured visitors and respect the city values. Besides, it is necessary to build university-city co-branding to enhance the image of Danang as a destination to live, to visit, to study with the interference traits between its identity and image. Listening to students' voices is an effective way to slow down the high speed of urbanization and tourism development. The city governors need to create a catalyst for branding Danang, considering the triple helix model deployment.

## **7. Conclusions**

The research scope only includes undergraduate students, not graduate students, because almost all master/doctoral programs in Vietnam do not require the full-time attendance of students. However, this study is the first one that examines branding a university city with a bottom-up approach based on an identity-image match. It discovers that the potential of Danang as a higher education destination is overlooking. Notably, although the difficulty of approaching influential leaders caused by political issues, the primary data of this research is a valuable reference source for any scholar who is interested in place branding.

Additionally, the study offers a new viewpoint from a specific stakeholder – students who can harmonize the conflicts among the other groups. Besides, the study gives a process to rebrand a touristic city to an upper level of a university city. Therefore, it not only appears at the right time for branding Danang but also bridges the gap in knowledge about branding a university city. Similar studies can be repeated to conduct interviews with university managers in the future. Depending on the types of universities they hold, city decision-makers will select the most appropriate option for their promotion strategies.