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THE CITY BRAND CHAMPION OF IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION OR EMPTY MARKETING TOOL?

By Elizabeth Collett

THE CITY BRAND

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
I. Introduction	1
II. Exploring the Relationship between Immigration and Branding	2
A. Branding to Attract Talent.....	3
B. Branding to Promote Social Cohesion.....	4
III. The Challenge of Creating a Representative Brand	6
IV. Conclusions	7
Works Cited	9
About the Author	11



Executive Summary

As the global competition for talent and human capital escalates, cities are becoming more innovative in their efforts to attract and retain residents. Although cities have long relied on advertising to draw in tourism revenues, many localities are now turning to branding strategies to build inclusive identities that appeal to both new and existing residents. For some, immigration has become a key component of their brands. In cities with large existing immigrant populations, diversity may be a selling point used to draw in international investment; other cities may develop inwardly focused identity-formation strategies to respond to perceptions that increased diversity has strained social cohesion.

Regardless of the type of strategy they pursue, cities face several challenges in developing their brands. Successful media campaigns can be expensive, resource-intensive operations, and developing an authentic brand that reflects the heterogeneity of a city population is an extremely difficult task—made more challenging by the need to speak to several different audiences within and outside the city. Whether inwardly or outwardly focused, campaigns that do not truly reflect the values and culture of local residents will not be well received. Finally, to be successful, branding requires broad and sustained commitment not only from local political leadership but also from key community stakeholders. The long-term effect of brands that are abandoned or remade after each election, or lack support from multiple parties, will be small.

In cities with large existing immigrant populations, diversity may be a selling point used to draw in international investment.

Ultimately, however, branding efforts will only be as strong as the cities they reflect. Local competitiveness and attractiveness rely first and foremost on core elements such as a thriving industrial sector, a robust labor market, or links to research and innovation centers. And without broader dialogue, flashy marketing strategies alone will not address problems of inequality. Without a strong foundation on which to build, a city's brand (no matter how sophisticated) will only go so far.

I. Introduction

Over the past decade, an increasing number of cities and towns have invested in branding strategies and campaigns. This trend is closely linked to the globalized nature of modern travel and communications, challenging municipalities to distinguish themselves both from their neighbors and from cities of similar size across the world (though, somewhat ironically, these strategies tend to look very similar). Such strategies are designed to achieve a number of goals—bring in tourists, attract new business and talent, and reaffirm the core values of the city for existing residents—which may or may not be complementary.

The concept of branding a location is relatively new. Cities have long advertised their most alluring qualities. Consider “Paris: City of Romance” and its offshoots “Copenhagen: Paris of the North” and “New Orleans: Paris of the South.”¹ But such campaigns simply target tourists, whereas branding a location is more deeply connected to its identity and future aspirations. It communicates not only the image of a country, region, or city but also projects the identity, values, and broader culture and characteristics of its resident population. In this sense, branding a location is more complex than branding a corporation or

¹ Other references to Paris include “Kansas City: Paris of the Plains,” “Carrboro: Paris of the Piedmont,” and “Detroit: Paris of the Midwest.”



product, as populations and their assets change over time.²

For industrialized countries, immigration can be both a driver and feature of marketing efforts. First, cities recognize the need to attract talented, creative, and skilled residents to support economic growth. The brand must show the city to be a rewarding and exciting place to live, work, and develop a business. Second, cities are increasingly aware that rapid changes in neighborhood demographics may negatively affect community cohesion. They hope to build a brand that invokes a common, binding identity among local residents, and inspires the community to be fully inclusive. Recent immigration may be featured in branding strategies, but can also be a factor complicating their success.

Immigration and diversity can in themselves be selling points. A number of cities—and not only global leaders such as London and New York but also smaller cities such as Barcelona and Vancouver—emphasize their cultural openness, diversity, and overall cosmopolitanism as key assets. However, these drivers can also present risks: if the brand overstates the openness of the city, it risks being undermined by any subsequent community conflict. Similarly, if a brand does not authentically reflect the views and opinions of the community, it will not hold up over time.³

Immigration and diversity can in themselves be selling points.

The goal of this report is to explore the relationship between marketing and communications campaigns, immigration, and processes of immigrant integration. Specifically, the report will ask whether city branding strategies can effectively balance the twin goals of attracting skilled and creative residents while developing an identity that is “diversity-proof,” and do so in a context of high turnover and significant social inequality. It will highlight the various motivations and tactics of municipal governments as they develop marketing and communications strategies, particularly those directed toward potential and existing immigrant populations, as well as key elements of successfully elaborated and communicated brands.

II. Exploring the Relationship between Immigration and Branding

For some cities branding has little to do with either immigration or diversity. This is not to say that these topics are not important to local governments, but that the role of immigrants in these cities is considered separately from the marketing strategy itself. The French city of Lyon developed an extensive program of activities in 2007 around the brand *Only Lyon*, highlighting the city as a locus of economic development with international flavor. The program cost the city 600,000 euros in the first year, and 1.5 million euros in subsequent years.⁴ However, the city only recently invested in any discussion of diversity as part of the city’s identity, despite the fact that foreign-born residents compose 14 percent of the population.⁵

For those cities that do attempt to address immigration through branding this is usually undertaken as a project separate from the city’s main marketing strategy, involving different stakeholders and highlighting different aspects of the city. For example, Rotterdam’s *World Port World City* campaign focuses on the city

2 Mihalis Kavaratzis and Gregory Ashworth, “Place Marketing: How Did We Get Here and Where Are We Going?” *Journal of Place Management and Development* 1, no. 2 (2008): 150–65.

3 Jorgen Stiegel and Soren Frimann, “City Branding—All Smoke, No Fire?” *Nordicom Review* 27, no. 2 (2006): 245–68.

4 Smart City Team, “City Branding: The Case of Lyon (France)” (presentation, April 2013), www.slideshare.net/SmartCityTeam/city-branding-the-case-of-lyon-france-and-stockholm-sweden.

5 Council of Europe, “SPARDA: Lyon, France,” <http://hub.coe.int/shaping-perceptions-and-attitudes-to-realise-the-diversity-advantage>.



as a center of trade, exchange, and innovation, but has little to do with the image of migrants themselves. In parallel, the city promoted the concept of “Urban Citizenship,” focused to a great extent—but not exclusively—on immigrant populations. The effort, launched in 2007, promoted pride in the city and the principles of “reciprocity” and “participation” as key elements of being a “Rotterdammer.”⁶ It did so using a bottom-up approach; a series of dialogues on urban citizenship were created through more than 250 group sessions involving more than 15,000 stakeholders and individuals. The dialogues were a first step toward building a common identity—that includes immigrants and nonimmigrants alike—and acknowledging certain key challenges, such as the discrimination faced by some members of the community, and the negative connotations of the term *allochtonen* (“foreigner”).⁷ Steps have been taken to integrate this initiative with Rotterdam’s main brand, though this has been a slow, subtle process.⁸

A. Branding to Attract Talent

One category of city discourse is designed to attract talent, highlighting the particular assets—local amenities, established business sectors—that might encourage people to start a new life in the city. These strategies tend to be directed toward prospective residents at the higher end of the skills range or with particular creative talents that will add value to the city overall.⁹ A plethora of models and indexes rank global cities according to their ability to remain competitive and attract both talent and capital; examples include the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) “Hot Spots” reports and the Anholt-GfK Roper City Brands Index.¹⁰ While a few global destinations—notably New York, Paris, and London—top these lists each year, this does not mean that smaller cities have less to offer. What is notable about efforts to attract talent through branding is that cities are promoting existing assets, rather than building an identity. This is a communications effort, which does not necessarily require outreach to and collaboration with its residents, and as such relies on the particular facets of a city most likely to attract new residents. Different types of cities market different features, as outlined below:

- **Iconic cities.** These include large, global destinations such as New York and London, whose fame and allure are almost (but not quite) self-perpetuating. Branding efforts seem almost superfluous in the face of such celebrity, but it is clear that even these cities are engaged in further strengthening their assets. In the words of New York City’s former mayor, Michael Bloomberg: “Cities at the top must continuously find new ways to meet the future demands of a talent-driven market.”¹¹ In London the emergence of Fashion Week as a key date on the city’s calendar, and New York’s recent focus on developing new technology sectors, reflects the constant evolution and rebranding that the largest cities are striving for.
- **Specialized cities.** For cities without an iconic presence, developing a specialized sector can be a key way to attract talent and investment. The obvious examples include technological innovation in Silicon Valley (or, indeed, any of the copycat Silicon geographies),¹² biotechnology in Boston and nearby Cambridge, in the United States, or the political hubs of Washington, DC, and Brussels. In all of these examples, a critical mass of actors creates a cluster effect, attracting

6 City of Rotterdam, “Urban Citizenship: The Slogan is Participation,” January 23, 2007, www.rotterdam.nl/JOS/Document/mee-doen/Urban%20Citizenship%20The%20Slogan%20is%20Participation.pdf.

7 Stijn Verbeek, Peter Scholten, and Han Etzinger, *Final Country Report: The Netherlands* (Attitudes towards Migration, Communication and Local Leadership (AMICALL) reports (Rotterdam: Erasmus University, 2012), www.compas.ox.ac.uk/fileadmin/files/Publications/Research_projects/Urban_change_settlement/AMICALL/AMICALL_NL_Country_Report2.pdf.

8 Conversation between author and Rotterdam officials, October 31, 2013.

9 Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

10 GfK, “London and Sydney Knock Paris Off the ‘Best City’ Pedestal,” (press release, September 30, 2013), www.gfk.com/news-and-events/press-room/press-releases/pages/london-and-sydney-knock-paris-off-the-best-city-pedestal.aspx.

11 Michael Bloomberg, “Cities Must Be Cool, Creative and In Control,” *Financial Times*, March 27, 2012, www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/c09235b6-72ac-11e1-ae73-00144feab49a.html?siteedition=intl&siteedition=intl#axzz2gVUARE5.

12 Monty Munford, “Silicon Plateau, Silicon Gulf and Silicon Bog: Who Can Match the Valley?” *Sunday Telegraph*, March 10, 2013, www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/9918665/Silicon-Plateau-Silicon-Gulf-and-Silicon-Bog-who-can-match-the-Valley.html.



further investment as well as specialized workers.¹³ Such cities need to attract future as well as existing talent—often by promoting the academic prowess and research capacity of local universities—and communicate the ways in which the cluster itself is nurtured and supported by the city. City brands that rely on a single sector to attract talent are left vulnerable, however, if that sector falls into decline. This is a lesson learned by the city of Detroit, which is now attempting to revive itself following the collapse of the automotive industry.¹⁴ The city is developing new sectors, such as fuel-cell technology, and attempting to rebrand itself as the “comeback city.”

- **Unique selling point (USP) cities.** Some localities distinguish themselves by identifying key aspects of city life that are not shared by the majority of competing locations. Basel in Switzerland is a biotech hub, but lacks the bustle and excitement of a large city, and is less likely to draw young graduates. Thus, the city’s marketing materials focus on the advantages of family life in the region: safe, clean neighborhoods; good schools; and effective public infrastructure.¹⁵ Other cities focus on geographical advantages, whether proximity to a mountain range or a coast, and play on unique historical features to draw people.
- **Lifestyle cities.** The lifestyle afforded by some cities—San Diego, Barcelona, and (more recently) Berlin—attracts younger, more flexible workers. These “cool” cities trade on their reputations as trend-setting locations, hubs of creativity, and places to enjoy life. This type of more nebulous branding falls outside the control of city governments, however, and it is often achieved through word of mouth and informal networks. (And, arguably, once a brand is packaged and proactively championed by administrators, the “cool” factor quickly evaporates.)

Regardless of how sophisticated the marketing strategy, ultimately each city is only as attractive as its bottom line. Without a thriving industrial sector, an open economy, or links to higher education, a city’s brand will only go so far.

B. Branding to Promote Social Cohesion

A second category of city discourse looks inward, developing messages to both reflect and inspire unity within a city. Rather than simply advertising their wares, some cities are investing in a process of introspection that is ultimately unpredictable—it may not produce the ideals of city leaders. Today, every metropolis is a complex mosaic of communities, identities, and characteristics that cannot easily be integrated into a single identity.

A number of cities across Europe—from large cities such as Zurich (*Living Zurich*) in Switzerland, to smaller localities such as Kirklees (*Belonging to Dewsbury*) in the United Kingdom— have attempted this difficult task over the past few years.¹⁶ Their efforts often stem from the realization that a city has become fragmented and segregated: in Istanbul, the government developed a campaign, *Yours Istanbul*, to promote being an “Istanbulite” among recent migrants and long-term residents alike. The campaign included posters and cultural events involving local celebrities.¹⁷

13 A lengthy discussion of clustering is outside the scope of this report, but it may be noted that marketing clusters requires careful consideration, especially when the target audience is a relatively small group of highly specialized workers.

14 Steve Tobocman, *Revitalizing Detroit: Is There a Role for Immigration?* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2014), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/revitalizing-detroit-is-there-a-role-for-immigration.

15 BaselArea, *The Location of Choice for Life Sciences* (Basel, Switzerland: BaselArea, 2011), www.baselarea.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Pdfs/Life_Science_broschuere_englisch.pdf.

16 Doris Lüken-Klaßen and Friedrich Heckmann, *Intercultural Policies in European Cities* (Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2010), www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2010/32/en/1/EF1032EN.pdf.

17 Ibid.



Box 1. Berlin: A Changing Brand for a Changing City

In 1989, as the Cold War ended, Berlin underwent a process of reunification; two vastly different communities were suddenly expected to form a cohesive whole. The initial challenge was to establish a single identity for a city, and community, that had been artificially spliced by a symbolic structure, the Berlin Wall. Much of the early branding focused on new architectural icons: Potsdammer Platz and the Bundestag became emblematic of the new Berlin.

In 2008 the city began an internal exercise to establish an identity that resonated with Berliners themselves. At the launch of the campaign *BeBerlin*, the mayor highlighted the centrality of citizens to the city's identity, celebrating the 3.4 million "facets" that make up the city. He also acknowledged the challenges faced by the city, including high unemployment and economic decline, much of it caused by the initial split. Over time, *BeBerlin* has been supplemented by *Visit Berlin*, a more explicit exercise to invite tourism and business, but an echo is retained in an incorporated campaign called *Be International*. At the same time, the Berlin Senate has developed a number of more specialized communication initiatives to promote public service opportunities among immigrant groups, under the umbrella *Berlin Needs You*.

Source: City of Berlin, "Rede des Regierenden Bürgermeisters von Berlin, Klaus Wowereit, zum Start der Markenkampagne, be Berlin," (news release, March 11, 2008), www.berlin.de/landespressestelle/archiv/2008/03/11/95999/.

How cities develop a local identity varies enormously. Marketing campaigns designed to draw tourists and new residents are less interested in the views and values of city residents themselves, focusing instead on the opinions of businesses and tourist organizations. But for cities desiring to create an authentic brand that reflects their resident population, the views of those residents are vital. An assessment of the marketing strategies of Aalborg and Hoerring (in Denmark) suggested that the failure to canvas a broad range of residents about their locality resulted in a bland and ineffective brand.¹⁸ Some cities base their branding campaigns on a series of stakeholder consultations in an attempt to articulate a common identity. Here, engagement with residents is a means to an end. Meanwhile, in other cities, such as Rotterdam, dialogue with citizens is promoted as an integral part of identity formation, and of more importance than the brand that results.

Some cities have developed brands following particular conflicts or incidents. For example, *I Love Hackney* was developed after a television program pronounced the London borough to be the worst place to live in the United Kingdom. Other catalysts are more complex. In Amsterdam the *We Amsterdammers* program was developed following the murder of controversial filmmaker Theo Van Gogh, amid fears that social tension within the city would explode. The program, which ran from 2004 to 2009, cost 17.7 million euros.¹⁹ Similarly, after a racially motivated murder in 2001, Oslo launched a high-level awareness raising campaign called *Oslo Extra Large—OXLO*, which introduced a number of citywide measures to increase tolerance, such as diversifying the city government's hiring criteria, promoting political participation through citizenship, and supporting increased cooperation between different agencies and levels of government.²⁰

An identity-based brand needs to remain flexible in order to adapt to changing populations and concerns. Successful campaigns also require consistent and committed leadership. In 2006 Antwerp developed the brand *This City Is for Everyone* with an explicit reference to the high levels of diversity within the Belgian municipality. In 2012 the incoming right-wing city government abandoned this brand.²¹ The implication

18 Stiegel and Frimann, "City Branding."

19 Verbeek, Scholten, and Etzinger, *Final Country Report*.

20 Cities of Migration, "Oslo Extra Large: Oslo Kommune," May 31, 2010, http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/oslo-extra-large/.

21 Gazet van Antwerpen, "Nieuw bestuur schrapt slogan 't Stad is van iedereen' (oproep)," January 11, 2013, www.gva.be/dossiers/gemeenteraad/nieuw-bestuur-schrapt-slogan-t-stad-is-van-iedereen.aspx.



for residents is that the city is no longer open and inclusive, a position reinforced by a number of local policy announcements, such as charging foreign-born residents a fee to register in their locality (a national obligation for all residents).²²

III. The Challenge of Creating a Representative Brand

While the two types of branding strategies discussed above have distinct goals and content, they share some causal links. For example, it is more difficult to attract skilled workers and investors to a city experiencing internal conflict, inequity, or discrimination. Indeed, a number of external brands emphasize diversity as an asset. Meanwhile, a strong image overseas can stir local pride in residents and help form an internal identity. While a number of outside-focused brands highlight diversity, few cities to date have attempted to integrate the two branding strategies.

One difficulty in linking internal- and external-focused marketing campaigns is that each targets very different immigrant cohorts. Strategies to attract talent tend to be focused on a rarefied stratum of mobile and educated workers. Whether classified as the “creative class,”²³ or simply “expats,” these groups are considered valuable for their skills, tendency toward innovation, and preexisting economic and social capital. Meanwhile, strategies to develop a binding identity within a city must deal with those who actually live on its streets, irrespective of skill and status. A brand that truly reflects a globalized city must encompass all residents, both native born and immigrant, and a diverse range of ethnic and cultural identities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and motivations for living in the city.

Diversity is particularly difficult to incorporate into a brand when socioeconomic and spatial inequalities exist between immigrant and native-born groups within a city.

Critics have noted that while many cities are happy to be cosmopolitan, there is a difference between this idea and the multicultural diversity that actually exists within a locality.²⁴ Diversity is particularly difficult to incorporate into a brand when socioeconomic and spatial inequalities exist between immigrant and native-born groups within a city. For a strategy to be able to look both inwards and outwards, it must reflect the common ideals of the existing immigrant population while attracting new, high-value expats. The tension here perhaps explains why many cities adopt a two-track approach. For example, online marketing materials often include an expat section²⁵ that has little or nothing to do with the detailed integration strategies elaborated elsewhere. The implication here is that expats are a separate cadre of immigrants, who have priced themselves out of integration interventions, while other immigrant groups are required to take responsibility for integration and participate in available schemes.

This is linked to a second challenge, namely, that the multiplicity of identities and communities within a city mean that the establishment of an overarching narrative can be difficult, particularly if different

22 The policy change was later annulled by the provincial governor of Antwerp as it was deemed to contravene European Union (EU) law, and basic principles of equality.

23 Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*.

24 Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, Eleonore Kofman, and Catherine Kevin, eds. *Branding Cities: Cosmopolitanism, Parochialism, and Social Change* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2008).

25 See, for example, the expat button on the “I Amsterdam” webpage: www.iamsterdam.com/en-GB/living/Expatscenter.



Box 2. Copenhagen: Two Brands, One City

In some cities one can identify a loose intersection between externally oriented brands and those that look inwards, yet this does not seem to be any more than coincidental. For example, *OPEN Copenhagen* is declared to be the only values-based city brand, and incorporates subthemes such as *Open for Tolerance* and *Open for Change*. Meanwhile, the city of Copenhagen has also developed a campaign designed to reach immigrant groups, entitled *Engage in CPH*, with the goal of becoming the most inclusive city in Europe by 2015. Its vision statement is:

“Copenhagen is the place where you feel at home, trust the neighbors and the institutions and play an active role through local democracy—for example, on the school board or in the sports club. You can get an education and a job and if you are religious, pray freely in your church, synagogue or mosque, following your faith.”

While the campaign has a strong diversity and anti-discrimination theme, it is explicitly aimed at promoting a sense of belonging among all Copenhageners. However, the links between this and *OPEN Copenhagen* remain unclear. Similarly, Amsterdam’s *We Amsterdammers* campaign resonates with the externally focused *I Amsterdam* brand in its phrasing. However, the content differs enormously, and it is hard to identify the results of the first campaign in the presentation of the second.

stakeholders have conflicting goals.²⁶ Given that brands require authenticity and constant reflection in order to be sustainable, the introduction of the immigrant population, both future and current, is an additional complexity that has left most cities choosing to address external, but not internal, immigrant identities. However, without strong community identification and support, a brand will be worthless.

Finally, branding efforts require significant investment. Indeed, *I Amsterdam* has an operating budget of more than 2.5 million euros per year.²⁷ While brands designed to attract investment can rely on financial support from existing businesses and chambers of commerce, those that seek to develop cohesive identities rely solely on limited local government resources. In addition to this, it is not easy to justify investments in projects with amorphous outcomes that are not easy to evaluate and benchmark. Establishing the worth of such projects is difficult: while participants highlight their usefulness, there have been few formal evaluations that have verified the value of community communication strategies.²⁸ As cities face significant downward pressure on their finances, such endeavors become harder to justify.

IV. Conclusions

Brands need to reflect reality, both to inspire the loyalty of existing residents, and to attract business and new residents on a *sustainable* basis. Thus, to succeed, any marketing strategy needs to reflect both the tangible assets possessed by a city, and the identity of its current residents. This includes the history, sociology, natural identity, and politics of a place. However this can be hard when where communities are fragmented, segregated, or disconnected from the mainstream.

In terms of attracting high-value immigrants, a brand is only as strong as the fundamentals upon which it relies, such as economic growth. A successful marketing campaign merely puts the city in its best light.

26 Nicolas Papadopoulos and Louise Heslop, “Country Equity and Country Branding: Problems and Prospects,” *Journal of Brand Management* 9 (2002): 294–314.

27 John Heeley, *City Branding in Western Europe*, Contemporary Tourism Reviews (Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers Ltd, 2011), www.goodfellowpublishers.com/free_files/fCityBranding.pdf.

28 Verbeek, Scholten, and Etzinger, *Final Country Report: The Netherlands*.



Meanwhile, communications strategies designed to build an internal identity for city residents may transform community conflict or perceived societal dislocation to find genuine points of connection within a diverse group. In this sense, brand development can be a positive process for cities to undertake, and can be as important as the frame that results.

Brands need to reflect reality, both to inspire the loyalty of existing residents, and to attract business and new residents on a sustainable basis.

A recent review of communications strategies across Europe highlighted a number of elements for success, particularly for strategies to promote social cohesion.²⁹ Many of these are equally applicable to branding strategies:

- **Committed leadership.** Without commitment—not just from city staff but from political leaders—the brand will remain a superficial marketing tool. Equally, if high-profile leaders make public statements that contradict the central tenets of a city’s identity, its effectiveness will be weakened.
- **Broad stakeholder involvement.** Involving stakeholders, and residents themselves, in the process of creating a brand can maximize its authenticity, legitimacy, and local support over time. Brands created without involving a broad cadre of interested parties tend to be uninspiring and bland.
- **Clear goals for achievement.** Some cities have engaged in expensive communications strategies without a clear set of goals. These are at best ineffective, and at worst counterproductive. Even branding strategies with great intentions can fail when their goals are unclear or mismatched with community needs.
- **Established benchmarks for success, and evaluation.** Across the board, few cities have extensively evaluated the success of their branding approaches. For some strategies, an increase in tourism, or business investment, can become the key benchmark, but this is not useful to assess how strategies affect immigrants, and immigration. Finding ways to evaluate success, and monitoring the effects of branding strategies, is key.
- **Constant evolution.** As cities become more diverse, their strategies will need to adapt. A fixed brand will become less effective over time, and even counterproductive if it no longer reflects the identity and aspirations of its residents. Cities that choose to engage in branding should consider it a long-term investment.

²⁹ Ibid.



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About the Author



Elizabeth Collett is Director of Migration Policy Institute Europe, and Senior Advisor to the Migration Policy Institute's Transatlantic Council on Migration. She is based in Brussels, and her work focuses on European migration and immigrant integration policy.

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