

# PLACE AS BRAND:

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PERCEPTIONS OF PLACE AND THEIR ROLE IN BRANDING FOR  
CREATIVE CLUSTERS IN THE NETHERLANDS

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## ABSTRACT

The clustering of creative industries is a particularly abundant research topic as it delves into the broader issue of the relevance of place. The breadth of research on the topic has adopted the representational perspective, focusing on socialization and informal exchanges of knowledge as key to creative clustering. However, this study makes use of the non-representational perspective that sees the physical environment as essential to understanding creative clustering. By combining non-representational clustering literature with branding literature, this thesis investigates the role of place as a branding device for creative clusters located in post-industrial buildings and explores the relationship between the perceptions of individual entrepreneurs about place, the perceptions of the cluster and its branding processes. More specifically, it focuses on relevant elements of the built form that play a role in creative production, reputation-making and, ultimately, branding. The research was conducted via social media content analysis and qualitative interviews with micro-cluster managers and creative entrepreneurs located within. Results suggest the existence of complex dynamics between the physical location of a micro-cluster, the stakeholders involved and the branding processes of such organizations. Place is an active and recognised source of inspiration and reputation for the workers within it; consequently, creative clusters indeed actively make use of the locational behaviour of creative entrepreneurs in their branding. The research concludes that place is a central element of the branding of post-industrial micro-clusters and proceeds to presenting the most popular place branding strategies that were found.

**KEYWORDS:** creative clusters, location factors, creative entrepreneurs, built form, non-representational perspective, place branding

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## 1. Introduction

The role of creative industries is becoming increasingly prominent in advanced urban economies (Scott, 2000), as their potential influence on urban economic development has been noticed by local policymakers who have started fostering their presence through various development strategies meant to boost certain areas and rebrand old industrial regions as creative clusters. The clustering of creative industries is a particularly abundant research topic as it delves into the broader issue of the relevance of *place* in the social sciences (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010). Since the main output of creative industries is symbolic and aesthetic rather than utilitarian (Scott, 2000), the coming together of individuals producing such content is a particularly distinctive process to investigate. Several authors studying the topic have highlighted the idea that spatial agglomeration is particularly important for the creative industries (Hall, 1998; Pratt 2000; Scott 2000; Drake 2002). Literature on this topic is primarily concerned with investigating the competitive advantages of locality as well as the reasons why creative entrepreneurs choose to establish in specific clusters.

As Heebels & van Aalst (2010) note, studies on creative clustering can be divided in two categories: the representational perspective that is concerned with the geographical proximity to facilities and people and the non-representational perspective which stresses the “experience and meaning of the urban environment” (p. 360). Rooted in Thrift’s (1999) epistemological theories of the social sciences, this dichotomy aligns with Helbrecht’s (2004) understanding of the role of cities and geographies in knowledge societies. Helbrecht has developed a system composed of two different conceptual lenses: the first one is the ‘right eye’, and sees the world from the point of view of “abstraction, construction, and representation” (2004, p. 192), whereas the second lens - the ‘left eye’, sees the world through means of “concrete, experience and dwelling” (2004, p. 192). Helbrecht argues that in analysing the relationship between space and creativity, both “eyes” are necessary.

The breadth of research on the topic has adopted the first perspective and focused on socialization and informal exchanges of knowledge as key to creative clustering. More specifically, it suggests that the geographical proximity of clustering offers benefits to creatives such as increased opportunities for face-to-face contact, an informal coming together of ideas and information which prompts the generation of synergetic advantages that transforms a cluster into a creative field (Scott, 1998). This spontaneous synergy of tacit knowledge appears in academic literature under different names: Storper and Venables call it local “buzz” (2004), Grabher calls it “noise” (2002). Molotch (2002) recalls economist Alfred Marshall’s term of “industrial atmosphere” (1890) in relation to this phenomenon, explaining that “the very air people breathe together causes certain productive things to occur and not others” (p. 666).

However, the current study aims to focus on the latter perspective, meaning on the role *physical* space plays in processes of inspiration, reputation, and branding for creatives. Helbrecht (1998) is one of the first scholars to popularize the idea that the physicality of place is of great significance for workers of the creative industries, indicating that creatives are "space people" (Helbrecht, 1998, para 16) to whom their living and working environment matters greatly; in this context, she mentions the importance of interior designing. Consequently, the creative self is constructed under the impact of the materiality of objects, spaces and appearances that are treated as "totems attached with meaning" (Helbrecht, 1998, para 16). Place, then, becomes the main material and imaginary site for the production of signs and images that characterizes the activities pursued within the creative industries (Helbrecht, 1998).

One of the main studies adopting this perspective is Drake's 2003 study on the extent to which creative workers perceive place as a source of stimuli, a catalyst for their production processes. After conducting interviews with workers in the craft metalwork and digital design industries, Drake concludes that locality acts as a stimulus in different ways. For the purposes of this paper, the most relevant ones are locality as a "resource of visual raw materials and stimuli" and locality as "a brand based on reputation and tradition" (Drake, 2003, p. 518). Employing this perspective as a starting point, this paper investigates the role of place as a branding device for creative clusters located in post-industrial buildings and explores the relationship between the perceptions of individual entrepreneurs about place, the perceptions of cluster and its branding processes. More specifically, through adopting a non-representational perspective, this study examines the importance of locality as a branding device by focusing on relevant elements of the built form that play a role in creative production, reputation-making and, ultimately, branding. In the process, inspired by Helbrecht's (1998, para 13) findings, several questions arise: How is environment perceived and constructed by employers and employees in creative micro-clusters? Is locality an asset for producing cultural capital? What is the relationship between the identity of such an organisation, its physical location and the identity of creative entrepreneurs located within?

Previous research indicates that local traditions and historical background are important for creative entrepreneurs' locational decisions and creative processes (Drake, 2003; Smit, 2011). Therefore, in order to capitalize on and enrich existing academic findings, the current research chose to focus on creative micro-clusters housed within former industrial buildings, a type of built form that is particularly attractive to creative workers due to the working conditions it can offer (Zukin, 1989). More specifically, two buildings within the Netherlands were chosen as case studies for this research. The first one is A-Lab, a creative & tech hub situated in Amsterdam within the building of a former Shell laboratory on the North bank of the IJ River. The second one is Het Industriegebouw, an

eclectic community building housing tech start-ups, creative entrepreneurs and retail stores, which is located in Rotterdam in a post-war industry building designed by the reputed architect Hugh Maaskant.

### 1.1. Research question & sub-questions

Bearing in mind the existing literature and context of the research, the main research question was formulated as following:

**RQ: *What is the role of place in constructing the brand of creative micro-clusters?***

In order to answer the main research question, four sub-questions were formulated that incorporate theoretical concepts related to the main research question:

*Sub-question 1: What are the initial motivations of creative entrepreneurs to locate in a creative micro-cluster?*

The existing literature on locational factors distinguishes between hard factors and 'soft' factors when discussing the motivations of highly-skilled knowledge workers to locate in a specific place over another, be it country, region or even building. Hard factors refer to the classic, tangible factors that influence profitability directly such as rent, size, local prices and subsidies, accessibility, whereas 'soft' factors are more intangible and have no visible impact on the economic outcome (Dziembowska-Kowalska & Funck, 2000). Examples of 'soft' factors are: "access to sources of specialised information, in particular technology-oriented research institutions, the presence of a creative and impulse-giving socio-economic environment, and the availability of a broad and diversified supply of highly qualified personnel" (Dziembowska-Kowalska & Funck, 2000, p.2). Other 'soft' factors researched within specialized literature refer to the "look and feel" (Helbrecht, 1998) of a place, the identity and atmosphere (Zukin, 1989) or the visual qualities of the environment (Smit, 2011). The present study chooses to focus on 'soft' factors, in particular those relating to the qualities of the built form – corresponding to the non-representational perspective. However, before expanding on this perspective, the study will explore the initial locational factors of creative entrepreneurs in order to differentiate between the relevance of hard and soft factors.

*Sub-question 2: How do creative entrepreneurs perceive the role of place?*

After establishing initial location factors (both hard and soft), the present study examines the perceptions of creative entrepreneurs but also those of the management of the micro-clusters about their locality through the lens of existing literature pertaining to the non-representational perspective. More specifically, the present study will particularly build upon Drake's (2001) findings

about place as a source of inspiration and reputation. Likewise, Hutton's (2006) study on the role of spatiality in post-industrial knowledge clusters and Smit's (2011) research on the influence of local visual quality for creative workers will provide the framework in terms of relevant place-specific elements (e.g. architecture, internal building configuration, historical background) that might trigger and enhance these perceptions. Coupled with existing literature, qualitative interviews with both creative entrepreneurs and micro-cluster management will help answer this question.

*Sub-question 3: How do creative micro-clusters incorporate creative entrepreneurs' perceptions of place in their branding?*

The next research step to be taken after determining the motivations and perceptions of place of the stakeholders involved is to examine if and how these perceptions are incorporated in the branding processes of the micro-clusters that are being researched – in this sense, the aim is to discover whether micro-clusters tap into known locational behaviour for their branding. In addition, this stage of the research also determines what elements of locality in general are important for such organisations. In answering this question, the study will examine visual social media content from both micro-clusters.

*Sub-question 4: How are place branding processes perceived by entrepreneurs situated within creative micro-clusters? Are they incorporated within their own branding?*

The last sub-question is related to individual entrepreneurs within these micro-clusters and whether they make use of locality and micro-cluster brand in their own branding processes. The aim is to investigate the nature of the relationship between individuals and micro-clusters: is it a top-down, bottom-up or perhaps a mutual branding mechanism?

## 1.2. Academic and social relevance

This topic is of great scientific relevance, as studies in the field have not focused so far on the importance of locality in the active branding of creative clusters. Moreover, as this topic is predominantly investigated via qualitative interviews, the study aims to bring new insight through the usage of a different methodological approach by combining interviews with social media content. The goal of this approach is to create a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics between these organisations, their locations and their branding strategies. Therefore, the present research incorporates the perceptions about place of both individual entrepreneurs and micro-cluster managers when choosing location. As suggested by Heebels and van Aalst (2010, p. 361), this paper also aims to cover a gap in current research by focusing on the relationship between quality of place and the process through which creative entrepreneurs create credible reputations in such



clusters. Lastly, the theoretical approach chosen for this study represents a welcome departure from standard approaches to studying creative clustering as there is a dearth of research dealing with the topic from a non-representational perspective.

From a social perspective, this study provides guidelines for the management of post-industrial micro-clusters looking to attract and retain high-skilled people to their enterprises by better understanding what impact their constructed brand has on this process. In addition, from an urban planning perspective, this could provide some practical lessons for the economic development of out-of-use buildings and former industrial areas. Likewise, this research could contribute to the understanding of the relationship between macro and micro branding processes, and provide suggestions on how they could be synchronized and centralized in order to achieve mutual brand reinforcement on both the cluster and individual entrepreneur's sides. In terms of practical relevance, the findings of the research carried out will be important for the collaborating clusters and will enable them to improve their branding processes and better understand the locational behaviour and motivations of the creative entrepreneurs within.

### 1.3. Thesis structure

The structure of this master thesis is guided by the main elements required to conduct research at this level. Firstly, the theoretical framework presents the main theories that the present study was built upon with regard to the role of place for creative entrepreneurs and creative clusters and situates it within a broader academic context. Secondly, the methodology chapter underlines the chosen research design and methods of data collection and analysis so as to answer the research question. The fourth chapter discusses the results of the interviews and social media analysis and elaborates on the main findings of the thesis. Lastly, the final chapter will provide a conclusion with regard to the research questions and discusses the relevance of this study.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter will present an overview of the academic research that has already been done in relation to the locational decisions of entrepreneurs within creative clusters. The first section will introduce the concept of clusters and entrepreneurs in relation to the creative industries. Next, the second section will briefly review the main theories within the representational perspective on locational behaviour. From the third section onwards, general literature on the non-representational perspective is introduced by focusing on the importance of place as physical space and built form, with separate sections dedicated to the most relevant theories to the current research question: place as inspiration, place as reputation, and finally, place as brand. The fourth section provides an overview of general branding literature and how it applies to places and organisations. Lastly, a conclusion aims to bring the literature together with the research question and provide a clear argumentation of this paper's contribution to the existing body of literature on the topic.

### 2.1. Clusters, entrepreneurs, and the creative industries

This section introduces the main concepts mentioned within the proposed research questions in order to easily identify the objects of empirical research in the current thesis. More specifically, it aims to clarify the basic concepts of clusters and clustering, creative entrepreneurs and lastly, the creative industries.

The concept of clustering is not new in academia and there are several business scholars that aimed to explain the geographic concentration of firms within the same industry. In this sense, Porter defines a cluster as "a geographically proximate group of inter-connected companies and associated institutions in a particular field, linked by commonalities and complementarities" (Porter, 2000, p. 254), however this definition is quite broad in that it only highlights the importance of local proximity and a common field rather than specifying what benefits this co-location might entail.

However, researchers have pursued this line of examination ever since the emergence of neoclassical economics. One of the first theoreticians of the industrial cluster is Alfred Marshall, who noted, in his 1890 seminal work *Principles of Economics*, that locations concentrated with similar industrial activities generate increased gains in the form of agglomeration economies for firms through access to a larger pool of skilled labour with lower search costs, better access to specialized suppliers with lower transportation costs, and finally, knowledge spillovers that occur among rivals within the same industry without financial compensation (Marshall, 1890). The factors identified by Marshall already indicate potential motivations for firms and individual entrepreneurs to locate

within clusters, however this perspective is more concerned with reduction of costs and purely economic gains – what is commonly known as tangible, “hard” factors. On the other hand, specialized literature shows that there are intangible, “soft” factors that might determine individuals to join a cluster such as access to a professional network (Dziembowska-Kowalska & Funck, 2000), the “look and feel” (Helbrecht, 1998; Smit, 2011) and atmosphere (Zukin, 1989) of a place. The latter factors are central to the research question of the current study and will be explored in further depth in the following sections.

One particular issue to be clarified is that of the scale of a cluster. The breadth of literature dealing with clustering and knowledge creation has focused on the territory level of nation, region, or city, but little research has focused on the level of communities (Capdevilla, 2013). Capdevilla (2014) takes on a micro level of analysis and argues that co-working spaces and other localized spaces of collaboration have similar features as industrial clusters and can be conceptualized as micro-clusters in terms of knowledge dynamics. *Table 2-1* provides an overview of the similarities between clusters and co-working spaces according to Capdevilla’s research, which concludes by proposing that the term micro-cluster can be applied to such co-working space as they exhibit the same knowledge dynamics, but at a lower scale. This clarification is particularly important for the present study due to the choice of the case studies, which are indeed, a type of co-working buildings that ascribe to the characteristics mentioned below. Therefore, it suggests that the existing literature on bigger creative clusters and districts can be applied at a micro level as well and clarifies the understanding of the concepts of cluster and micro-cluster as theoretically interchangeable with the mention that one occurs at a macro level (organizations), while the other occurs at a micro level (smaller firms, entrepreneurs, consultants, freelancers).

	<b>CLUSTERS</b>	<b>COWORKING SPACES (CWS)</b>
Type of members	Organizations	Micro-firms, entrepreneurs, freelancers
Level of geographic impact	Region, city	City, district
Interaction with local citizens	Limited	Medium / High
Public policy intervention	High / medium	Low
Shared resources	Infrastructures (public and private) and shared services	Office facilities and services (printers, internet connection, etc.)
Type of relationships between insiders	Collaboration and competition	Mainly collaboration
<b>Knowledge dynamics</b>		
Interaction modes between members	Formal and informal, face-to-face and virtual	Informal face-to-face
Type of knowledge shared	Tacit and codified	Mainly tacit
Local buzz	Knowledge shared within the cluster	Knowledge shared within the CWS
Global pipelines	Interaction with distant similar clusters	Interaction with other local and distant CWS

Table 2-1. Characteristics comparison between clusters and CWS (Capdevilla, 2013, p. 10)

Since the present study is preoccupied with creative clusters which refer here to those operating in the creative industries, a clear understanding of the creative industries is also necessary. Various definitions exist, but for the purposes of research, this study will employ the definition given by the UK Government's Department of Culture, Media and Sport: "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (Department of Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS], 2001, p. 4). DCMS also mentions the sectors included within, as of 2015: Advertising and marketing, Architecture; Crafts; Design - product, graphic and fashion design; Film, TV, video, radio and photography; IT, software and computer services; Publishing; Museums, galleries and libraries; Music, performing and visual arts (DCMS, 2015). Therefore, the population of the present study will include workers operating within these sectors under the name of *creative entrepreneurs*, referring to those who create or identify opportunities to provide a cultural product, service or experience and are able to gather the resources in order to exploit these opportunities (Rae, 2007).

## 2.2. Representational perspective

This section reviews the main theories pertaining to the representational perspective on clustering and locational behaviour. This is important in order to understand the broader context of the current study. As mentioned before, the majority of studies on locational behaviour have been conducted through the representational perspective, the “right eye” of Helbrecht’s binocular vision (2004). In other words, these academics approach any account of the world as if it “does not contain the object of study, but rather constructs a specific representation of it” (Helbrecht, 2004, p. 193). For Thrift, this is the “building perspective” (1999, p. 301), which posits that “worlds are made before they are lived in” (Ingold, 1994 as cited in Thrift, 1999, p. 301).

The common denominator of all representational clustering theories is that the creation of knowledge does not happen in isolation (Helbrecht, 2004), but based on successful flows of information between individuals. When looking strictly at the creative industries, the creative milieu is conditioned by the transfer of information among people: “there must be a certain density of communication, which seems to require a rich, old-fashioned, dense, even overcrowded traditional kind of city” (Hall, 2000, p. 644).

Perhaps the most comprehensive study on why face-to-face contact matters in the creative industries is that of Storper and Venables’ (2004) on what they call “buzz”. The term, according to the authors, to the supercombined effects of the advantages of face-to-face contact, a combination that generates increasing returns for those involved (Storper & Venables, 2004, p. 366). These advantages consist from: better, faster and more frequent communication; trust and incentives in workplace relationships which increases commitment, screening and socialising which creates a sense of belonging and being up-to-date, as well as acts as a motivator for better performance on display (2004, p. 354). The authors argue that reaping the full benefits of this “buzz” can only happen when individuals are co-located, so within geographical proximity. Fluid working environments typical of cultural, creative and new technology industries operate on the basis of a high exchange of tacit knowledge and “buzz”, therefore fully benefitting from clustering. With regard to relations between the various stakeholders involved in a creative production process, Grabher (2002) touches on a similar note in his article on the significance of the relationship between temporary and permanent systems, demonstrating that project-based working relies on a social interdependence between networks, local relations, institutions, and firms. As a result, this process facilitates learning processes, enhances reputation and builds trust.

Likewise, Currid’s study of the creative industries in New York (2010) indicate the significance of socialization and access to other people in the industry as a result of agglomeration.

According to the interviewees, the dense clustering of different creative individuals within a limited geography facilitates the occurrence of social and economic transactions as well as betters the creative process via informal reviewing of each other's work as well as by gaining inspiration from each other (Currid, 2010). From an economic standpoint, Lorenzen and Frederiksen (2007) stress that creative industries cluster to benefit from localization and urbanization economies, which among others, include the specialization and diversity of industry. This allows for coordination between related *and* unrelated knowledge bases, which drives up efficiency and supports innovation due to spillovers that occur between knowledge bases.

In conclusion, the representational perspective stresses the importance of trust, socialization, and the informal exchange of knowledge as reasons for clustering. The generation of knowledge and innovation is seen as strictly dependent on human interactions and social encounters. Therefore, the representational perspective is highly preoccupied with the institutional conditions of knowledge production and learning processes, regarding the production of knowledge as "quintessentially social in character" (Helbrecht, 2004, p. 195). Within this perspective, place is only relevant in the sense that it offers the spatial proximity required for intensive social and institutional proximity. However, this line of argumentation does not offer the full explanation of post-industrial knowledge clusters, which is why a different perspective must also be adopted, a perspective that can complement and enhance the representational frame of research.

### 2.3. Non-representational perspective

This section will present the main theoretical perspectives researched within the non-representational approach to creative clustering and locational behaviour. To begin with, in order to better understand the paradigm that the current paper adopts in investigating "place" as a theoretical concept, an introduction to the origins of the non-representational perspective will be provided. In addition, the idea of place as material space is introduced, focusing on a specific case: the industrial building. Then, the paper will analyse the three main themes that have emerged from previous research on the non-representational approach to space and the creative industries. First, the relationship between space and inspiration will be explored. The second central theme examined is space as source of reputation. Lastly, existing insights on the materiality of place as source of branding will be examined.

As mentioned before, the perspective that this thesis adopts is deeply rooted in Helbrecht's (2004) understanding of the role of cities and geographies in knowledge societies, more specifically by assuming the second lens, the 'left eye' (2004) that focuses on the physicality of dwelling. At the basis of this perspective is Nigel Thrift's 'nonrepresentational theory' (1999) which posits that "dwelling comes before thinking" (Helbrecht, 2004, p. 194). As Thrift argues, this particular perspective arises from the idea that a representation of the world cannot be extracted from the world because "we are slap bang in the middle of it, co-constructing it with numerous human and non-human others" (1999, p. 296). Even before the formulation of Thrift's binocular approach, Helbrecht first remarks the importance of the "look and feel" in her 1998 study of Vancouver advertising and design companies, in which she investigated how the urban environment impacts the production of cultural capital. Her study is similar to the present study in the sense that it aimed to investigate how individuals employed in the creative industries perceive and construct the environment they work in.

In this context, Helbrecht developed Thrift's framework further by shedding light on the importance of the bare geographies of specific places in terms of their physical layout and landscape structures for the locational choices of knowledge-based societies. By taking on this perspective, Helbrecht notices three issues that become apparent: innovation and invention, thinking and knowledge production, as well as the role, and the look and feel of urban landscapes (2004, p. 196). These themes prefigure the main findings that existing academic research on the non-representational perspective has uncovered in relation to the role of place for the creative industries. Consequently, the following sections will provide an in-depth examination of these findings with the aim of providing a context for the current research.

### 2.3.1. The material place

This chapter will first introduce the topic of place as material space and built form in terms of how previous research has examined the issue, providing a starting point for the more detailed analysis that will ensue in the following chapters. Next, it will focus on a particular instance of the material place – industrial spaces – and provide the historical background necessary to better understand the chosen case studies of the current paper.

#### 2.3.1.1. From function to symbol

As mentioned before, the central focus of the non-representational perspective is on the physical space and form of a place. Previous research on the materiality of spaces in the past has placed great importance on its relationship to functionality. More specifically, Markus (1994) looks at connections between the visible features and design of a building to purpose, intent and the social relations it produces. He describes buildings as not just physical shells, but imbued with social purpose: there is no other class of object which through the production of material forms purposefully organises space and people in place" (1994, p. 27). Markus provides a classification of historical buildings: buildings for recreation (e.g. 18th century London coffee houses); buildings for the production of "invisible knowledge" such as theatres and for the production of "visible knowledge" such as libraries; buildings for exchange purposes such as public markets, and lastly, buildings for the production of "ephemeral knowledge" (e.g. exhibitions, dioramas) (Markus, 1994, p. 213).

It can be observed that this classification has been produced according to the function of the building, however there has been a transition from functionalism to symbolism in the understanding of the built form. In this sense, Lash & Urry (1994) note the shift in focus from the use-value of an object to the post-modern "sign-value", with materiality becoming highly aestheticized as a result of the increasingly important image component of a subject that has also come to bear economic significance (p. 15). Exploring this perspective further, Zukin (1995) ties this to locality even further through her examination of the symbolic economy of cities. Thus, since the 1970s, one can notice an increased "symbiosis of image and product" (p. 8) in which the production of symbols constructs "both a currency of commercial exchange and a language of social identity" (p. 24). This increasingly symbolic understanding of physical space and built form is indicative of the connotative richness that it can provide to creative workers. In addition, it highlights a clear paradigmatic shift in the perception of the materiality of space which prefigures the themes that have emerged within specialized literature.



### 2.3.1.2. *The industrial place*

This symbolic shift with regard to spaces is suggested by Hutton's research on post-industrial knowledge clusters in London, Vancouver and Singapore (2006), which notes that historical buildings provide cultural assets for creative production districts, and are now used by local workers and residents for sensory or aesthetic purposes, for historical appreciation or for cultural inspiration (Hutton, 2006, p. 1836). These older structures are particularly attractive for new enterprises due to their physical configuration, construction and durability, as well as appealing historical background and other representational values. In brief, Hutton suggests, in order for an older heritage structure to be "materially" appealing, it must possess specific advantages in terms of the following characteristics: "external building scale and style", "internal building configuration" and "microscale features" such as decoration, design and a personalized creative workspace (Hutton, 2006, p. 1834).

An instance of such attractiveness can be observed in the past couple of decades in the increasing projects of revival of industrial buildings, warehouses and factories, effectively transforming old industrial landscapes into buildings of a post-industrial landscape (Hamnett, 2003) by "incorporating new production industries, housing, consumption and sites of urban spectacle" (Hutton, 2006, p. 1836). Zukin (1989) studies at length the 1970s trend of converting old industrial buildings into residential areas but also into spaces of production and exchange - she discovered that these *lofts* initially appealed to artists who created live-in studios, who were attracted by the low rents but also by the aesthetic potential of these spaces: generous proportion, large windows, high ceiling, durable and more valuable materials which provided the perfect setting for exhibiting large works of art and experimenting with avant-garde decors. She argues that the popularization of such areas was also prompted by a change in middle-class patterns of consumption in the sense that they acquired a growing appreciation for 'the arts' and historic preservation which led them to protect and re-appropriate these spaces (Zukin, 1989). This highlights a deeper focus on space and time, a melancholy over the end of the industrial era, where the "loss of function" is romanticised (Zukin, 1989, p. 59).

Markus (1994) suggests that industrial buildings were initially designed with the aim of enhancing productivity and in such a way that control could be maintained over production and supervision could be maximised, whereas today, these refurbished industrial buildings are specifically designed to cater to skilled knowledge workers part of the new production industries (Hutton, 2006). The focus has, indeed, shifted towards "amenity, aesthetics, identity, and freedom" (Hutton, 2006, p. 1835), which become closely linked with processes of workplace personalisation. The reasons for this shift might reside in Pratt's (2001) observation that managers of new creative

production industries tend to hire their employees from among freelance workers who are typically known to oppose corporate norms and sterile aesthetics. Consequently, they have adopted design practices and amenities that attract such individuals who value the personalisation of their working space (e.g. artwork decorations, bicycle stalls, or 'foozball' tables). In conclusion, this transition suggests that built forms in the old industrial economy were about exercising control, whereas social and design values in post-industrial working spaces are all about freedom, especially in terms of identity and behaviour: the industrial building has evolved from a production labour box to a more skilled labour accommodation, a "'seductive space' of aesthetic amenity for privileged professionals and creative industry workers" (Hutton, 2006, p. 1835).

The above observations highlight the inextricable tension between the "industry-shaping power of spatiality" and the "space-shaping power of industrialization" (Soja, 2002, p. 166). In this sense, it is evident that certain distinctive characteristics of built form and environment play a role in the configuration of novel, urban industrial complexes such as the creative clusters that the current paper has chosen to focus on. As mentioned before, industrial structures first struck appeal with artists (Zukin, 1995) also because of the favourable physical features they possessed. In line with this, according to Hutton (2006), the new industrial spaces of the postmodern city possess the following conducive attributes. Firstly, the compactness of the inner city industrial zones creates a demarcation that conveys a sense of territoriality and identity for new clusters. Next, the nature of the urban design features such as streetscapes, parks and open spaces facilitate the exchange of tacit knowledge that is characteristic of advanced economies. Thirdly, industrial buildings are adaptable in configuration and style to complement new industries and live/work studios. Lastly, the historical resonance of industrial buildings via specific imagery and structures reinforce a sense of locality for creative workers, who might incorporate such references into their own labour (Hutton, 2006, p. 1822).

This chapter has focused on the revival and current use of a specific type of place - the industrial building - due to its increasing popularity within the knowledge economy. This is significant in the context of the current paper as both of the case studies examined are former industrial spaces. Thus, this section is particularly valuable as it will inform the analysis of the case studies through the lens of previous theoretical developments on the topic.

### 2.3.2. Place as inspiration

As seen in the previous section, material places have become increasingly imbued with symbolism and this development has given rise to a complex relationship between creative workers and their surroundings. One of the main ways academics acknowledge the importance of the physical work environment for creative entrepreneurs is through its role of prompting inspiration. However, before delving into studies that focus specifically on creative workers, it is important to note that exploring the physicality of things and engaging with the aesthetics of the surroundings have been closely tied to innovation in general (Helbrecht, 2004). Jacobs notes that innovations are also stimulated by “aesthetic curiosity” (1985, p. 222), describing the very process of metallurgy as beginning “with hammering copper into necklace beads and other ornaments” (Jacobs, 1985, p. 222). Although this observation does not strictly refer to place as inspiration, it makes it clear that innovation and invention are not only cognitive, mental activities, but also physical.

When it comes to the creative industries, Drake highlights the importance of place as inspiration in his study of locality as a stimulus for creative workers (2002). The related interview data suggests that environment acts as inspiration source: firstly, by providing specific visual prompts and signs that can be creatively exploited but also through the overall values of the local environment, with emphasis on urban and architectural change (Drake, 2002, p. 518).

In fact, the idea that an environment can provide inspiration through its visual appeal is recurrent within specialized literature. Clare’s examination of the role of place and spatial boundaries for the creative industries (2012) also acknowledges its importance for creative stimulus and inspiration. Interviews with workers in the advertising industry in London placed emphasis on the visual and emotional aspects of locality, with one human resources officer noting that “there is a grittiness and a rawness to Soho; it doesn’t have that sticky corporate feel” (as quoted in Clare, 2012, p. 53). Clare’s findings suggest that there is a “highly place-specific cultural capital” (Clare, 2012, p. 54) that bears great significance for creative workers by informing their day-to-day working practices and artistic processes. Likewise, a qualitative study of entrepreneurs situated in Berlin creative clusters conducted by Heebels and Van Aalst (2010) is particularly useful in highlighting the symbolic value of place through physical but also intangible aspects. This study suggests that the “look and feel” of specific places provide artistic stimulus through the authenticity of the surrounding buildings, with multiple respondents prompting the historical significance of a place – or more specifically, the visibility of this significance – as a meaningful source of inspiration (Heebels & Van Aalst, 2010).

The above studies briefly confirm the fact that place provides a source of inspiration for creative workers and provide a few examples of the ways in which the interviewees perceive it as such, with visual quality and historical meaning as the main recurrent ideas. However, they do not provide an in-depth examination of these findings but consider them within a more general framework of looking at the role of place for creative entrepreneurs. In this sense, Smit provides a clearer and more focused approach in her 2011 study of the impact of location visual quality on creative entrepreneurs and concludes that visual distinctiveness matters, indeed, and it has an important role as a catalyst for creative production. More specifically, Smit examined three creative districts in the Netherlands and, through interviews with entrepreneurs situated within these districts, found four broad categories of tangible visual elements of these environments that emerged as relevant: urban morphology, architecture, waterfronts and historical character (Smit, 2011). How important is visual quality, however, as a locational factor for creative entrepreneurs? Smit's study highlights that the 63 entrepreneurs interviewed within the study ranked the district's visual features and facilities as the second most important factor in their locational decision, with only hard factors such as office features (price, size and accessibility) ranking higher. Smit, then, concludes, that the visual features of the district were "prioritized over proximity to clients within their city and ranked above the presence of a network of creative firms in their district" (Smit, 2011, p. 180).

Smit's findings, coupled with the other studies that acknowledge place as a source of inspiration, are particularly relevant to the current study as they confirm the significance of visual quality for creative entrepreneurs choosing to locate in a specific cluster. Consequently, this aligns with the assumption that visual features have, indirectly – by providing a source of inspiration for creative entrepreneurs - also a meaningful role for the marketing of creative clusters, who can tap into this perceived significance in constructing their brand.

### 2.3.3. Place as reputation

Besides its utilitarian value, place has a symbolic value for entrepreneurs that choose to locate in specific creative clusters. As suggested before, inspiration is one of the main symbolic roles of locality through visual quality and historical meaning among other factors. Another significant symbolic role of locality is that of reputation, as qualitative studies with various entrepreneurs situated in different creative clusters located across Europe indicate.

Clare references Logan and Molotch (1987) in suggesting that a shared identity arises when people with certain characteristics cluster in specific places and neighbourhoods, which becomes a symbol through which that physical area is identified as a distinctive community (Clare, 2002).

Creative entrepreneurs located in a specific cluster become, then, members of a symbolic community and ascribe to a certain reputation that the community conjures up for outsiders.

Drake's research findings are, of course, aligned with this understanding of a place in terms of its reputation, bringing up the example of the Jewellery Quartier for jewellery makers in Birmingham that are likely to exploit the local traditions and narratives in conveying credibility and authenticity of their economic activity (Drake, 2002). Smit briefly mentions that the most unexpected reason for the importance of visual distinctiveness for entrepreneurs is that this "makes the district attractive for clients to pay a visit" (Smit, 2011, p. 178), which clearly indicates the emergence and importance of a district reputation. Likewise, Heebels & van Aalst's interviews also stress the importance of creating a good image for potential customers, noting that "for all entrepreneurs, the physical environment is important in reproducing and strengthening their companies' reputation of being 'creative'" (2010, p. 359). Therefore, these findings suggest the significance of the symbolic value of locality as reputation by bringing up issues of motivation and authenticity, but also quality and appeal for clients. This idea is recurrent within all the findings of the studies mentioned in earlier sections. Helbrecht's findings (1998) suggest that the appearance of a location is a precondition of the creative production process, with many of her interviewees noting that their location is an integral part of their identity because it is closely linked to clients' perceptions of what their enterprise should look and feel like: "Creative firms try to make a statement with where they are located. Space reflects and reinforces the image of the companies, and thus, particular spaces and neighbourhoods become an important factor for the success of the business" (Helbrecht, 1998, para 20).

Zukin and Braslow (2011) also recognize a territorial identification that develops within these social and professional networks. However, they also note an adjacent aspect of this symbolic identity: it may emerge, in some cases, organically, but there are also increasingly more cases in which real estate developers and public officials make use of this "symbolic capital of the artistic mode of production" (Zukin & Braslow, 2011, p. 132) and actively brand certain places as creative in order to create economic value. This is an important point to make in the context of the present research as it already starts to highlight the idea that the branding of creative clusters has multiple stakeholders involved and this process does not just occur spontaneously.

#### 2.3.4. Place as brand

The last dimension and understanding of place delineated is one that is tightly connected to the previous one but highlights an aspect that is highly relevant to one of the research questions that

the present study addresses: place as brand. More specifically, this dimension of understanding locality is of great significance in analysing how the branding of creative clusters is perceived and reflected on the branding decisions of the entrepreneurs situated within. As seen before, the clustering of individuals with specific characteristics within certain geographic boundaries imbues that territory with a distinctive identity, a reputation that people ascribe to that specific place and that workers within that place or aspiring to locate within that place want to be associated with.

However, besides supplying a reputation to individual entrepreneurs via association with the “creative” reputation of the cluster via the coming together of specific individuals, locality acts as a branding device for the output of these entrepreneurs. Despite being closely interrelated, there is a difference between reputation and brand: reputation is about attaining legitimacy among a wide range of stakeholders (for example, a specific community, governments and the general region) whereas the brand is about relevancy and differentiation processes amongst potential competitors (Ettenson & Knowles, 2008).

Molotch (2002) discusses at length the relationship between commodities and geographical areas, noting that the specificity of a place and the nation in which it is located have an influence on how products created there turn out. This suggests that there are certain mechanisms through which “details of location yield up the details of artifacts, and by extension, the nature of local and regional economies” (Molotch, 2002, p. 665). Why is this relevant to the research at hand? Molotch (2002) goes on to argue that, due to the linkages that a place forges across diverse spheres, even minor variations in locality can have a real impact on constructing commodities. So then, this suggests how important it is, then, for a creative entrepreneur to be located within one place rather than another, as this has a specific impact on their individual reputation, but most importantly, on the sort of creative output they produce and how they market it to potential customers. This point is reinforced by Currid (2010) who recalls Molotch’s “place in product” (2002) when discussing New York city’s cultural agglomeration, remarking that locational decisions of her interviewees were very much influenced by the positive branding associated with the products emerging from the place: “agglomeration benefits make New York a global tastemaker, a place cultural producers want their goods and services to be associated with” (Currid, 2010, p. 461). Therefore, location brand plays a key role in attracting key creative talent to specific clusters but also in marketing cultural goods and services.

Moreover, Drake notes that a “socially constructed local identity” (i.e., a reputation) has a role in contributing to a “locationally distinctive product”, whereas the “nearby visual impact of the environment” (i.e., the visual quality of the place) has an impact on “the aesthetic design of the

enterprise's products" (Drake, 2002, p. 521), thereby concluding that locality can, indeed, function as a branding device via traditions, reputations and visual narratives. In addition, Smit's research also indicates, with regard to the distinctiveness of visual appearance, that a district needs to "radiate creativity" (2011, p. 178) so as to boost the creative image of the entrepreneur's firm but also of the firm's products. Likewise, Heebels & van Aalst (2010) recognize that locality becomes a marketing device, stating that "it takes on the qualities of a strategic tool that enables the entrepreneur to reach out beyond the neighbourhood" (p. 359).

This section has shown that the material place, is indeed, perceived as a brand across a wide range of creative industries and that locality brand is highly important in attracting talented and highly-skilled workers. Thus, it is evident that locality is a clearly marketable asset that can and should be incorporated in the branding of creative clusters.

#### 2.4. Branding processes

The previous section draws from research into creative clustering to show that the physical environment of a workplace has an impact on the way creative clusters brand themselves, but also in how creative entrepreneurs choose to associate their brand with the cluster brand. This section elaborates on this idea further by providing a framework based on current branding literature followed by an application on branding for places in general in order to better grasp conventional branding mechanisms and how they might apply to the current study.

The first step is to examine the core theoretical concepts discussed in relation to the process of *branding*. Based on their review of existing brand literature, De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley define the brand as "a multidimensional construct whereby managers augment products or services with values and this facilitates the process by which consumers confidently recognise and appreciate these values" (1998, p. 427).

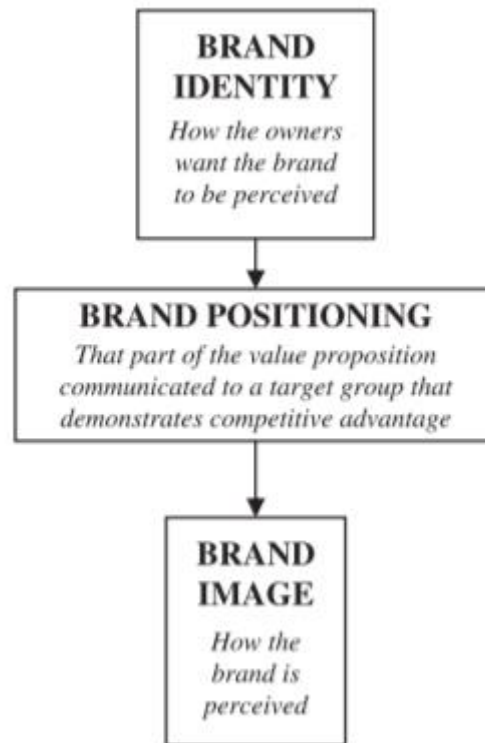


Figure 2-1. The components of the brand (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005, p. 508)

Figure 2-1 above shows the relationship between the main elements of a brand as well as the stakeholders involved with each: identity, positioning and image. Brand identity is created based on how the brand owners want their brand to be perceived and they may choose to stress specific values in its creation: symbolic, experiential, social or emotional (De Chernatony & Dall’Olmo Riley, 1998). Brand positioning refers to the communication of a value proposition that highlights the brand’s competitive advantage from other brands, whereas the brand image is how the consumer perceives the brand in terms of quality, values, feelings and associations (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005).

In the past thirty years, the process of branding has been deeply transformed, with practitioners placing it at the centre of business strategy, talent recruitment and employee management (Moore, 2007). Rather than remaining a practice strictly related to commodities, branding has become increasingly important for a wide range of organisations, from governments and cities to faiths and web communities (Lury, 2009). In this respect, Moor notes that it is now necessary to “decouple branding from simplistic ideas about ‘commodification’ and to reveal it instead as something more akin to a managerial technique or resource that seeks to use broadly ‘cultural’ material for a range of strategic ends” (2008, p. 88). Besides roles of quality assurance and differentiation, Lury considers branding as a process of “assembling culture” (Lury, 2009, p. 73).



Otherwise put, branding is a complex process engaging a wide range of stakeholders not limited to a traditional product-consumer dichotomy, but seeping into the very organizational culture of a wide range of institutions nowadays.

Why might branding be important for organizations such as the micro-clusters examined in the present study? A strong brand image for an organization suggests a strong individual image and facilitates the integration of the entire organization (Alvesson, 1990). Research by Alvesson (1990) suggests that the brand image of an organization is highly significant as it reduces the level of ambiguity characterising the nature of their activity and products for a wide audience. Therefore, brand management is a popular practice within organizations and has the objective to “produce an appealing picture of the company for various publics (employees, customers, shareholders, government) and to position it in a beneficial way” (Alvesson, 1990, p. 377). Alvesson (1990) especially notes the importance of such processes in providing a certain perception of the organization in the minds of their employees or prospective employees, thereby influencing the performance of an organization. When considering the current study, it can be argued, then, that constructing the right brand is important for micro-clusters as it also enables them to maintain appeal for current entrepreneurs residing there as well as to attract prospective entrepreneurs looking to locate there.

Therefore, for the present study it can be said that of particular interest is the relationship between brand identity (how the micro-clusters want their brand to be perceived) and brand image (how individual entrepreneurs perceive it). What complicates this situation further is the addition of the relationship between branding and *place*, which is discussed in the following section.

#### 2.4.1. Branding places

In order to understand the relationship between branding and places, it is important to first understand how people construct places in their minds. Kavaratzis & Ashforth (2005) suggest they do so through three processes: firstly, planned interventions such as urban design; secondly, through the way they can use the respective places, and lastly, via various representations of said places in films, paintings, news or various media forms. In addition, people construct places through perceptions and images, creating condensed mental maps that allow them to navigate a complex spatial reality. This is where place branding comes in, as it “becomes an attempt to influence and treat those mental maps in a way that is deemed favourable to the present circumstances and future needs of the place” (Kavaratzis & Ashforth, 2005, p. 507). It is therefore, important for a place to have a unique brand identity if it wants to be recognised, perceived as superior to others, and consumed in a way that aligns with the place’s objectives (Kavaratzis & Ashforth, 2005).

According to Kotler et al. (1999), four general strategies for building a competitive advantage for place relate to the following: design (place as character), infrastructure (place as fixed environment), basic services (place as service provider), attractions (places as entertainment and recreation). Based on various global examples, Ashforth (2009) identifies three instruments of place branding. The first one is *personality association*, where certain locations associate themselves with a well-known personality with the aim of transferring their unique qualities to the place (e.g. Gaudi and Barcelona). The second one is through the visual qualities of buildings, designs or districts and it can include the flagship building (e.g. Guggenheim Bilbao), signature design or signature districts (e.g. Museum Quarter, Amsterdam). For this instance in particular, the success of the branding depends firstly on the quality of the architecture, which must be distinctive, noticeable and talked about, and secondly on the reputation of the building creator. The last instrument is *event hallmarking*, through which places organise either cultural or sporting events in order to attain recognition and establish brand associations (e.g. Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics). These strategies combine hard and soft infrastructure with historical and cultural amenities and qualities to construct a place brand (Evans, 2015).

Evans (2015) focuses on a specific instance of place branding – cultural and creative quarters, “from historic districts to new digital hubs” (Evans, 2015, p. 135), noting that their role in place-making and branding has only recently been discovered within the academic field. Such places are described as “production-based”, usually located in industrial areas of cities, and combine “work and play”, these features making them distinct place brands. When it comes to the branding of such places, Evans (2015) notes that:

“Whilst creative hubs associated with former cultural and heritage quarters indicate the importance of historical and symbolic association and building types, which can transform and recreate new creative districts, it can be seen that zones can also emerge from post-industrial areas of cities that otherwise lack brand potential” (p. 154).

In analysing such former industrial areas such as Clerkenwell London or the Distillery District Toronto, Evans concludes that an industrial brand is as effective as a heritage or consumption-based place and proceeds to list how place distinction can be achieved for such areas: through “legacy and historic associations – place of origin branding; physically through the morphology and architectural quality and style; through ethnic or other cultural experiences, e.g. festivals, food; as well as in terms of particular cultural activities and business, e.g. speciality retail, street markets and trade fairs” (Evans, 2015, p. 155). These findings are particularly important for the present research as it suggests what elements of place have been found as effective branding material and it provides a

more specific framework for the analysis of the two chosen creative clusters. A brief analysis of the previous chapters coupled with these findings highlights the overlap in elements of the built form in both branding strategies and perceptions of creative entrepreneurs, and this can better guide the current research.

## 2.5. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to operationalize the main concepts of the research question and provide a comprehensive view on the complex relationship between place, branding and the actors involved. As can be seen, elements of physical place are perceived as important for both processes of inspiration and reputation and they are also actively incorporated in existing place branding strategies. However, this chapter suggests that research so far has not thoroughly examined the branding of creative micro-clusters situated in post-industrial buildings, which is what the present study is focused on. As Evans (2015) suggests, this topic has only recently gained interest academically, which means that the current study will contribute to a new avenue of research. It does so by combining literature on locational behaviour, perceptions of creative entrepreneurs and both conventional and location branding strategies in order to provide a more comprehensive investigation of the complex role of place in the branding of creative micro-clusters.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

In order to obtain answers to the research questions outlined above, a qualitative research approach was chosen. As Bryman (2002) suggests, in qualitative research, the stress is “on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” (p. 380). Since the aim of this study is concerned with deepening the knowledge of locational behaviour of individuals as well as understanding a particular process – branding - that is inherently social in that its continuous assemblage and re-assemblage involves different actors and cultural processes (Lury, 2009), the qualitative approach to researching seems to fit the aims of this study best. In addition, as it is assumed that most of the studies conducted on locational factors of creative industries are qualitative (Drake, 2002; Hutton, 2006; Musterd et al, 2007; Heebels and van Aalst, 2010; Smit, 2011; Clare, 2012), as suggested by the theoretical framework, it seemed natural to follow a similar methodology to explore more in-depth a specific aspect that emerged from these studies.

This research is about a particular example of creative clusters in the Netherlands – creative business centres that offer office spaces for workers in the creative industries. More specifically, this study will focus on those creative clusters that tap into their inhabiting building’s history and urban environment to create a locational narrative that can be used as a branding device for the creative cluster. Alongside examining the selected creative clusters as overall entities, the study aims to analyse how the co-located entrepreneurs residing within perceive the image and history of the overall cluster in their locational decision making but also how they take advantage of this reputation for their individual branding process. The current study aims to explore the insights of creative entrepreneurs and cluster managers as well as the branding processes within post-industrial micro-clusters by means of an empirical study of two such buildings located in the Netherlands, one in Rotterdam - Het Industriegebouw, and the other in Amsterdam – A-Lab.

The choice for this case studies is motivated by the similarities but also by the differences between the two in order to see if and how this might affect the branding process outcomes. Both building complexes have a historical background: at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the current A-Lab used to be the Groot Laboratory part of the Shell Research & Development site, whereas Het Industriegebouw opened in 1951 as one of the first business centres in post-war Rotterdam. However, A-Lab is slightly more established, being active since 2013, and it is predominantly specialized in tech and creative industries, as well as experimental projects. When it comes to Het

Industriegebouw, it has only recently – 2015 - been bought by an investor and restored, from its neglected state, to its original purpose of a business centre, having a more open policy in terms of the type of entrepreneurs it hosts (refer to *Appendix E* for a more detailed description).

Because this research is concerned with how they create their brand based on their location, another criterion for selecting the buildings was whether they had an online presence. This is particularly relevant because their online presence acts as a channel for brand construction and reputation development. This idea is supported by Zukin and Braslow (2011), who note that media “are crucial to building a district’s reputation as ‘different’” (p. 136) and highlight the example of Bushwick district’s creative reputation, which was developed primarily via blogs and websites.

### 3.2. Data Collection Methods

In order to decide on the appropriate qualitative method, one should consider what type of information is needed to answer the formulated research questions. The execution of this research required two different qualitative methods: in-depth interviews and social media content collection. In social science research, such a methodological combination is referred to as *triangulation*, a process through which the researcher seeks “convergence and corroboration of results from different methods and designs studying the same phenomenon” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 22). The aim of this combined approach was to provide the researcher with a more comprehensive means of investigating the research questions and sub-questions.

#### 3.2.1. Interviews

To carry out the research effectively, it is crucial to clearly identify the population in this study. When considering the formulated research sub-questions, it is evident that both the administration of the micro-clusters and the creative entrepreneurs who are located within should be addressed. Firstly, to gain insight into motivations behind the branding processes of creative clusters but also the motivations and experiences of creative entrepreneurs located within, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted due to their greater focus on experiences and points of view as well as on the richness of detail and flexibility of direction (Bryman, 2012). The sampling procedure that was chosen for this study is purposive sampling, which is a non-probability form of sampling that allows researchers to sample cases “in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions being posed” (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). As seen before, the two micro-clusters have been selected based on specific criteria that allow a better understanding and in-depth insight of the research question at stake. Likewise, in the case of the interviewees, they were selected and contacted based on their positions within the micro-cluster administration and also whether they fit the criteria of being “creative entrepreneurs” as outlined within the literature.

Therefore, three interviews were conducted with general managers and communications managers from the two selected buildings about their branding but also about their perceptions on the role of their location. In addition, interviews were conducted with one creative entrepreneur from each of the clusters. The researcher has collaborated with the management of the two clusters in recruiting interviewees that correspond to the profile outlined previously, meaning that they work for enterprises that operate within the creative industries and were located within the two buildings. In total, then, the researcher has conducted 5 semi-structured, in-depth interviews of about 40-60 minutes each as seen in *Appendix A*. A sixth interview was planned with a creative entrepreneur working at a design studio in Het Industriegebouw, however, due to their conflicting professional schedule, the interviewee was unable to meet prior to the time constraints imposed for this research. Since only five interviews were conducted out of which only two were creative entrepreneurs, it is important to note that this restricted sample has limitations that can lead to selection bias. This means that the findings reported may be biased due of the specific situations of the interviewees – this aspect is addressed within the results chapter and the conclusion. The audio data was collected by using a phone recording application which was tested beforehand. Three interviews were conducted face-to-face in the offices of the interviewees in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, whereas the other two were conducted via Skype.

The interviews were designed not with the aim of producing statistically significant results, but rather to provide a context for the following part of the analysis and nuance the understanding of the role of place in the branding processes of both creative clusters and co-located entrepreneurs. Therefore, the general topics that have been covered in the interviews are derived from the studies on quality of place as outlined in the theoretical framework:

Role of place	Place characteristics
1. Place as source of inspiration through: 2. Place as source of reputation through: 3. Place as branding mechanism through:  (Drake, 2002; Heebels & Van Aalst, 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual features &amp; physical environment (Hutton, 2006; Smit, 2011)</li> <li>• Distinctiveness &amp; authenticity (Hutton, 2006; Smit, 2011)</li> <li>• Historical meaning (Zukin, 1995; Smit, 2011)</li> </ul>

Table 3-1. Semi-structured Interviews: Operationalization

The interview started with introductory questions regarding the history, activities and products of the firms, as suggested by the methodological approach of Heebels & Van Aalst (2010). The first section contained questions about the factors that determined the interviewees to locate there, distinguishing between hard and soft factors. The second section questioned the interviewees about their perceptions of place as a source of inspiration. The third section contained questions about their perceptions of place as a source of reputation, touching upon issues of authenticity and credibility. The last section delved into the understanding of place as branding mechanism, questioning the interviewees about what role specific place elements play within branding processes. Each section contained probing questions about specific place elements in relation to the themes (see *Appendix B*).

### 3.2.2. Instagram posts

The research conducted via interviews supports a qualitative analysis of the social media content posted by the official Instagram accounts of Het Industriegebouw and A-Lab and the Instagram accounts of the two creative entrepreneurs interviewed in the first phase of the research. Besides their overall background, the two micro-clusters were chosen due to the richness of data available: a prospective examination of their accounts indicated that they are very active, currently posting new content 5-6 times a week on average.

The choice for analysing social media posts is motivated by the fact that social media has become an important component of contemporary visual culture (Duggan et al., 2015) and has seeped into all aspects of communication, producing a plethora of visual data that is readily available for research. The practice of qualitatively analysing such data is still rather novel and not widely documented from a methodological viewpoint, with various researchers applying different established qualitative methods according to what their research aims are. According to Hand (2017), the methodological issue of scope, scale and selection regarding images in social media needs to be considered in the context of qualitative research: the large volume of existing images on social media and their rapid rate of upload has shifted the focus from analysing the individual image to analysing a larger body of visual data. This is further strengthened by the understanding that images are given meaning in relation to a larger sequence they are part of, which then gives rise to a specific 'narrative' (Martin, 2017, p. 219). For qualitative researchers, the selection of visual materials should consider issues of representation, authenticity and 'exhaustiveness' (Martin, 2017, p. 218). In this case, the purpose of the social media analysis was to identify the dominant ways through which place as built form is being integrated into the branding of the selected creative clusters. Therefore, the posts have been selected according to the logic of purposive sampling for intense analysis by defining a set of eligibility criteria in order to reach data saturation. To do so, the

researcher has followed Saumure & Given's (2008) strategies for reaching saturation. Therefore, the sample was cohesive, meaning that all the posts were selected strictly from the Instagram accounts of the two creative clusters and two creative entrepreneurs situated within. Moreover, theoretical sampling - where the posts are selected so "that the resulting data help to build and validate the emerging theory" (Saumure & Given, 2008, p. 196) - has been used to achieve saturation quickly: therefore, the posts were selected based on whether they contained references and visual representations of their location. More specifically, saturation was achieved by selecting images that contained details of the building, the working environment or neighbourhood, according to the key themes that have emerged throughout the theoretical framework.

Therefore, the dataset has been selected as follows: 31 posts from A-Lab and 38 posts from Het Industriegebouw, followed by 10 posts from one A-Lab entrepreneur and only 3 posts from the Het Industriegebouw entrepreneur. Following theoretical sampling with the purpose of reaching data saturation according to the criteria outlined above, the researcher selected 31 posts out of 63 for A-Lab, 40 out of 78 for Het Industriegebouw, 9 out of 20 for the A-Lab entrepreneur and only 3 overall for Het Industriegebouw. These figures indicate that roughly half of the Instagram content posted on these accounts contains references to their location, apart from the Het Industriegebouw entrepreneur. The posts were collected via screenshots and imported in the qualitative data research software ATLAS.ti for a more efficient management of data.

This addition to qualitative interviews is considered necessary in the context of the formulated research questions in two ways: firstly, it complements the interview findings and secondly, due to its "unobtrusive" character, content analysis allows the researcher to study social behaviour without affecting it (Babbie, 2013, p. 340). This means that, by observing how the images of the stakeholders involved are assembled and how they operate on social media, one can gain a more accurate perspective on the role locality plays in their branding. More specifically, the analysis of Instagram posts supports the main research question and it allows for an in-depth analysis of the actual branding strategies that are being used by the chosen micro-clusters. In addition, an analysis of the Instagram posts of selected entrepreneurs within contributes to answering the sub-question regarding the perception of locality as brand by entrepreneurs situated within creative clusters. Therefore, the research combines people's insights with actual instances of marketing and brand-building online. This method aims to provide new insight into the matter as there are limited studies on this topic, to the researcher's knowledge, that incorporate the online medium as a source of data.



### 3.3. Data Analysis

The following section presents the methods of analysis that will be employed for each of the types of data collected: interviews and Instagram posts.

#### 3.3.1. Interviews

The interviews have been recorded and transcribed manually and notes have been made during and after each interview to facilitate the understanding of the data. In analysing the interview data, a deductive qualitative approach has been chosen as it allows the researcher to discover emerging concepts and draw meaningful connections to the theoretical framework constructed in the previous section. More specifically, the interview transcripts have been coded by segmenting the data and reassembling it with the aim of transforming it into findings (Boeije, 2010) via thematic analysis. This method was chosen due to its efficiency in segmenting data-rich documents such as interview transcripts and systematically organising them into meaningful findings. Based on the Straussian approach to grounded theory, the thematic analysis has been performed according to the three levels outlined by Boeije (2010): open, axial, and selective. Open coding was performed initially to make sense of the overall data collected and to delineate meaningful segments into units of analysis. Next, axial coding was performed to organise the data into codes and subcodes which allowed for category development. The final stage of analysis was selective coding which concluded with theme formation: core concepts have been identified by considering the research questions and the operationalization of theoretical concepts outlined in the previous section (*Table 1*). In the coding process, the use of qualitative research software ATLAS.ti was employed in order to make the analysis of large textual data more manageable as it makes the assignment of codes and categorization of themes easier; in addition, it allows for a better visualization of the connections between concepts and different sets of data.

#### 3.3.2. Instagram posts

As specified before, the social media dataset consisted from 79 Instagram posts collected from four different accounts: Het Industriegebouw, A-Lab, and one creative entrepreneur from each building. However, because the analysis of the Instagram posts aims to answer both research questions, the posts have been divided into two separate datasets during the analysis process: one consisting from the Instagram posts of Het Industriegebouw and A-Lab, and the other consisting of the posts of the two creative entrepreneurs. This measure is taken to ensure the transparency of the research and to facilitate a clearer analysis of the findings.

Pennington (2017) provides an overview of the research methods that can be used to analyse and code 'non-text' data on social media, such as videos and photographs, arguing that

standard social science analysis methods can be applied to non-text data. The social media posts have been analysed by ascribing to the general rules of content analysis, which here is understood as "the intellectual process of categorizing qualitative textual data into clusters of similar entities, or conceptual categories, to identify consistent patterns and relationships" (Julien, 2008, p. 120). According to Julien (2008), textual data also includes nonwritten text, such as visual data, which makes content analysis a suitable method for analysing it. In this case, Julien argues that visual data can be analysed "as straightforwardly as identifying objects evident in photographs" or through "more subtle analyses of symbolic communications that can be unconsciously discerned from a physical space" (2008, p. 120).

The analysis of non-text documents such as posts that have already been shared on social media is frequently performed using thematic coding and grounded theory (Pennington, 2017). In this context, in order to benefit from more specific methodological guidelines, the researcher has taken a deductive qualitative approach in the form of thematic analysis based on the Straussian approach. Rather than generating theory, this method was employed for analysing the Instagram posts especially due to its capacity to ground theory in data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This means that this thematic analysis was predominantly theory-guided, aiming to contribute to a broader understanding of the findings from the interview stage of the research as well as to draw connections to existing literature. Choosing a deductive approach to thematic analysis means that the coding process of the Instagram posts has been more theoretically-embedded and the data has been interpreted in the context of the research conducted so far in the field in order to see how it aligns, diverges, or builds upon existing theories. For the present study, the findings of Smit (2011) in regarding categories of significant visual features of a creative district have particularly provided a guiding framework for the coding of the Instagram posts collected. However, elements extracted from other academic sources have been considered as well, according to the following table:

<b>Concepts</b>	<b>Post contains references to:</b>
Urban morphology	Public space, parks, street furniture, pavements, green areas and overall outdoor appearance (Smit, 2011)
Architectural character and physical configuration	Memorable architecture, "diverse and original in size, style, and use of materials" (Smit, 2011, p. 176); external building scale and style, internal building configuration (Hutton, 2006)

Waterfronts	“waterfronts and bridges, wharfs, and views on the water for the sense of space they foster” (Smit, 2011, p. 176)
Historical character	History of the place, preserving heritage values, modern character, combination of old and new (Smit, 2011)
Distinctiveness (Hutton, 2006)	Distinguishing features, uniqueness, originality and authenticity
Personalized workspace	"microscale features" - decoration, design and a personalized creative workspace (Hutton, 2006, p. 1834); (e.g. artwork decorations, bicycle stalls, or 'foozball' tables).

Table 3-1. Instagram posts thematic analysis: Operationalization

However, because Instagram is primarily a visual medium, the thematic analysis was also inspired by Gleeson's (2010) guidelines on performing thematic analysis on visual data. Gleeson had noticed that the existing methodological literature did not provide clear techniques for performing such analyses and did not offer the analytic approach she was looking for. Therefore, the author applied thematic analysis on visual data because she was less interested in the "structural properties or rules underlying the construction of the images" than she was in "recording, describing and organising the features of the images" (Gleeson, 2010, p. 318) in a way that allowed her to focus on the content. This method was also chosen as it offered a quick method of providing an overview of the existing patterns within a large sample of visual data. This corresponded with the aims of the present study as the researcher was looking to find the recurring strategies through which place is incorporated in the branding of the chosen creative clusters via visual social media content. Therefore, this methodological approach was considered a suitable fit for answering the research questions.

Gleeson's approach (2010) to thematically code the images involves looking at the images over and over again in terms of their visual elements and writing notes on each image in order to develop initial 'proto-themes' which are then adapted and transformed by looking for recurring elements. Constantly regrouping images and cross-comparing emerging themes across all images of the dataset is done until no further themes relevant to the research question emerge. Lastly, an analysis of the existing themes is done to see if any of them cluster together, giving rise to the final higher order themes. Because of the similarity in Gleeson's approach to the Straussian approach, for the current dataset, Boeije's three levels of coding (2010) were followed again - open, axial, and

selective coding – to discover the underlying patterns of branding processes of the stakeholders within their Instagram posts.

During the open stage, each unit of analysis has been broadly coded according to what is pictured in the image, but also to what is conveyed in the descriptive caption. Because denotative elements are less easy to extract from non-text documents than text-based ones (Svenonius, 1994), Pennington (2017) suggests that it can be more useful to analyse social media visual content in conjunction with its associated textual counterpart (such as the caption, title or description). This is further emphasized by Neal (2010), who refers to a photograph and its associated tags, captions and description as a 'photographic document' as the two parts combine in order to create meaning. Therefore, in the present study, each image has been coded alongside its corresponding caption. In addition to that, to facilitate the process of open coding, in his methodology for performing *visual grounded theory*, Konecki (2011) suggests to “transcribe/describe images to get into the details of the phenomenon’s visual sphere” (p. 141) before beginning the three-stage coding process. Therefore, each image of the dataset was described in words based on the main visual elements that stand out but also those that emerge as most important based on the chosen textual caption. During the axial stage of coding, the theoretical coding guidelines charted above have been considered to facilitate the category development process. Lastly, the stage of selective coding consisted in identifying and formulating the overarching themes of each dataset (see *Appendix D* for coding example).

In the final stage of the analysis, the Instagram post findings have been examined together to the interview findings to investigate whether the theoretical and interview findings can, indeed, be observed in active branding processes of the chosen case studies. Both data sources provided themes that were incorporated in the final coding tree, which can be found in *Appendix C*.

#### 3.4. Credibility, reliability, validity

Settling upon a qualitative approach entails certain measures that the researcher must take to ensure the credibility of the research. Reliability in qualitative research, or as Lincoln and Guba (1985) prefer to call it, dependability, is firstly achieved by verifying the consistency of the research steps so as to make the study replicable. In this sense, the reliability of the current study resides in the transparency of the research design and through a subsequent examination of the data collected, the careful inspection of the data reduction process as well as via thorough note-taking during the entire research process. Likewise, to increase credibility at a methodological level, qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti is used to organize the raw data, to annotate and keep track of memos and document each step of the data analysis. Additionally, to enhance reliability,

“theoretical transparency” (Silverman, 2011, p. 360) is provided by clearly explaining the theoretical perspective taken in analysing the data and operationalizing each of the concepts that make up the research questions. Within the current study, it is acknowledged that the research questions are embedded in a particular theoretical framework centred on the concept of locality that will lead to related findings.

The aim of qualitative research is not specifically to produce highly generalizable findings, favouring in turn rich descriptions and in-depth interpretations of the phenomena observed. Validity is another issue at stake within qualitative research. In the current case, validity is increased by providing an account of how previous research has built upon the chosen method of research and by the similarity of the instruments of measurement used (in the case of qualitative interviews). Moreover, validity is enhanced by embedding the findings in theoretical concepts. Lastly, Meijer, Verloop and Beijaard (2002) argue that triangulation is a fruitful procedure to enhance internal validity in qualitative research. In the current study, internal validity is increased via a process of triangulation by data source (interviews and social media) aimed to create a more “accurate, comprehensive, and objective representation of the object of study” (Silverman, 2011, p. 369).

## 4. Results

The results chapter aims to present the findings of the two sources of data collected, namely interviews and social media content. Thematic analysis of the data has given rise to several themes that aim to answer the main research question as well as the sub-questions that were identified. First, the interviews aimed to provide context into how creative entrepreneurs perceive place through the perspective of Smit's (2011) research and what they consider to be the factors that determined them to locate within one of these specific creative clusters. At the same time, by providing context to what locational elements matter to creative entrepreneurs and how, the research aimed to identify whether creative clusters actively make use of place (as perceived by creative entrepreneurs) within their own branding and how, with the aim to attract prospective creative entrepreneurs. These insights are provided both by the content analysis as well as the interview findings. Lastly, the research also aimed to explore whether the branding of creative clusters is reflected in the individual branding processes of the creative entrepreneurs.

### 4.1. Initial location factors

To begin with, the entrepreneurs were questioned about the initial main reasons for wanting to locate in one of the two creative buildings analysed. Interestingly, the creative entrepreneurs interviewed first mentioned hard factors such as price, scale, and accessibility when first considering these places. For the entrepreneurs, low rent was a clear reason to locate within these buildings:

After the Second World War, the city was building up and the rents were very low, so a lot of architects and artists came here and especially in the 90s, [...] if we would go, for instance, to Amsterdam, we would pay so much money for such a space like this so because the area was not so much evolved into a hip place, the rents were lower. (architecture firm, Het Industriegebouw)

Additionally, the accessibility of the location in terms of public transport was important both in terms of easily going to work but also due to the ease of explaining the location to prospective clients.

However, besides these hard factors, another important aspect in the initial aspect of locating in these buildings for all the creative enterprises interviewed was the idea of accessing a network of creative people that are open for collaboration across disciplines, which aligns with previous theory on soft factors (Dziembowska-Kowalska & Funck, 2000) such as access to a pool of specialized labour and a creative network of people. These factors are in line with the

representational perspective detailed earlier in the theoretical framework, which focuses on the social benefits of co-locating:

But we also wanted to be in a more nice, creative surrounding where we could have a better network ... like we do graphic design [...] but if a client asks for illustrations or animation or also building a website, we design it but we don't build it, then we really like to work with other people and it's so nice that people are in the same building, and you just have to go next door. (design studio, A-Lab)

In this sense, the creative clusters themselves also acknowledge that a lot of entrepreneurs come to work in their spaces because they want to take part in the “buzz” (Storper & Venables, 2008):

The thing that we've found coming back again and again is that people who are entrepreneurs and they work by themselves, because they are working from home or from a coffee bar, they miss that interaction with other people, they miss walking in the halls, saying “Hey, how are you doing?” or having a cup of coffee and that is very important for them. (Communications Officer, Het Industriegebouw)

Therefore, when taking locational decisions, the creative entrepreneurs interviewed first prioritized hard factors such as value for money, size and accessibility for clients, closely followed by a significant soft factor fitting within the representational perspective - the wish to be surrounded by other like-minded people in the industry.

For the architecture firm situated in Het Industriegebouw, a non-representational factor was also a big part of the initial locational decision: the architectural legacy due to the building being designed by the architect Hugh Maaskant. The interviewee notes that the directors of the firm appreciate his work, so locating there was also important “at least twenty percent because it was a Maaskant building so this also has this empathy feeling.” However, this is an individual situation stemming from the fact that the firm itself is a flagship architecture enterprise that may be particularly drawn to such heritage.

In sum, the main locational reasons creative entrepreneurs explicitly acknowledge showed that hard factors provide the most weight, followed by proximity to other creative people. This confirms Smit's (2011) findings that the most important factors in creative entrepreneurs' location decision are still related to price and size. These factors were mentioned by the interviewees without the prompt of the interviewer, showing that these are conscious locational factors.

However, when prompted to discuss the location itself more in-depth, several themes emerged that further clarified the importance of their current location.

## 4.2. The role of place

This section will present the results of the analysis of both interview data as well as the collected social media content in relation to the role of place for both creative clusters and, to a smaller degree, to creative entrepreneurs. Findings from both sources were analysed together to investigate how they complement or contradict each other with the aim to provide an answer to the overarching research question. Therefore, the results have been categorized according to the main factors that have emerged as important regarding the role of place from previous research as follows: *Place as source of inspiration*, *Place as source of reputation* and *Place as brand*. Within each, several themes emerged as recurrent within the collected data (see *Appendix C* for coding tree).

### 4.2.1. Place as source of inspiration

When prompted to discuss their location in one of the two creative clusters in relation to their creative production processes, several place-specific elements emerged as relevant: the historical character, the internal building configuration, and the workplace personalisation.

#### *Historical character*

Within this theme, two aspects emerged as important for inspiration: the repurposing of the building's old character and the triggering of "ancestral feelings".

For both creative enterprises, the analysis shows that the former historical context of the buildings they are located in makes a difference within their working environment. In the case of A-Lab, of particular importance seems to be the old character of the building, but most importantly the manner in which it has been repurposed for the new building and how "they made it into a workable place for companies but it still has the character of a laboratory" (design studio, A-Lab).

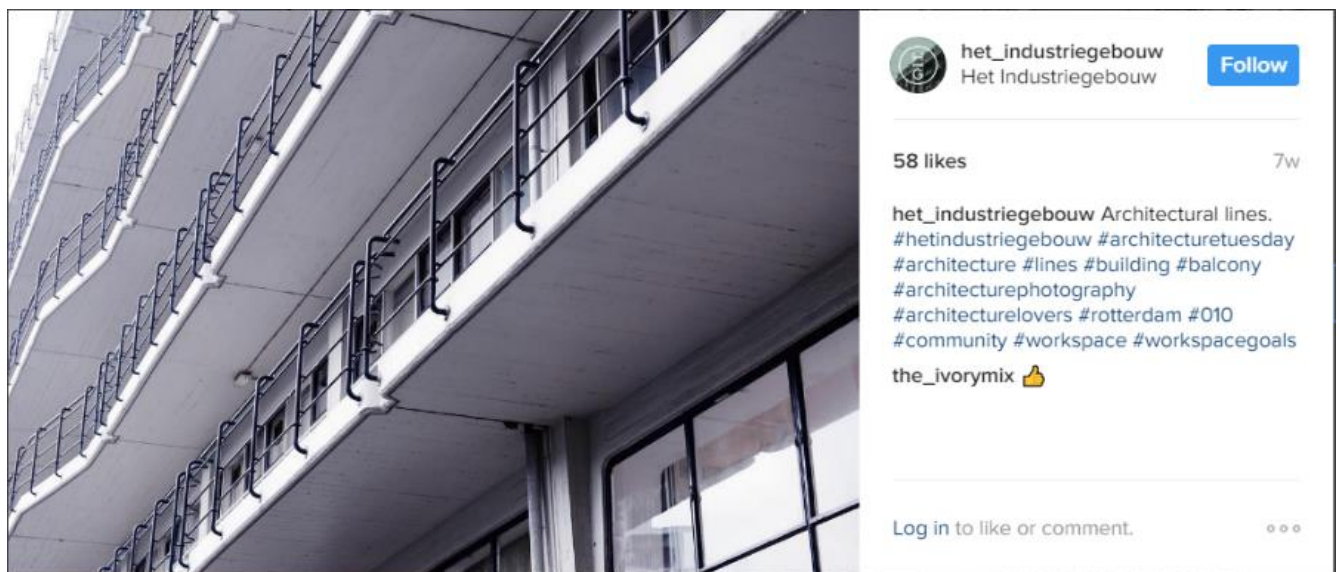
When asked whether they see their location as a source of inspiration, the respondent from Het Industriegebouw associated this process to the "ancestral feelings" derived from being in a history-imbued place and explained that it affects the productive mindset that one gets from working in a "special" space like this:

[...] the balconies, for instance, when you see them, it's really inspiring because it's a detail that for us is "vintage" and a heritage element, and it's not like the concrete flats that we know with the concrete balconies, it's so different, it reminds you of ancestral feelings that you have. Like this was before, and I'm walking in it, like people in Amsterdam walk around



and say "Wow, my ancestors used to live here" and they think about the resemblances and differences. So maybe that's a bit far-fetched, but I think that has to do with it as well, it makes being here more unique and special. And when it's more unique and special, it somehow affects your state of mind and your creativity as well. (architecture firm, Het Industriegebouw)

When looking at the collected social media posts of Industriegebouw, several posts emphasize exactly the distinctiveness of such architectural elements like the inner balconies of the building mentioned by the architecture firm above. For example, the picture below seems to emphasize the uniqueness and visual appeal of the balconies by providing an aestheticized, upward facing image that enhances the warped perspective lines created by the building stories situated on top of each other. In addition, the usage of black and white photography alludes to the "vintage" quality of the building mentioned above. This suggests that creative clusters are aware of the inspirational potential of such visual details for prospective creative entrepreneurs and actively tap into that quality for their own identity.



### *Internal building configuration*

Whereas the historical character of location contributes to a more general sense of stimulation, both creative enterprises interviewed considered their location especially inspiring because of the specific internal building configuration in two ways: by providing a sense of space and improving working conditions.

The respondents agree that high ceilings and big windows create a sense of space that indirectly facilitates creative production. The design studio in A-Lab specifically praises the fact that "it's a bigger studio, the ceiling is higher, it feels as if there's more air, it gives you more space in your head

as well, so there's more room for creativity”, whereas the architecture firm in Het Industriegebouw describes at length how the original internal design of the building indirectly influences working conditions of those located there presently:

Hugh Maaskant designed the building in such a way that there had to be a lot of light coming in, [...] he said ‘When people work, it should not be in the dark, they should really have a good time being at their job’. And that's why there's so much glass in the facades and in the roof and people only notice the difference when the shades are coming on and then it becomes darker [...] So you can see whatever is going on, you feel engaged [...] and it makes you feel like you're a part of the company, even when it's so big.

The fact that both respondents noticed these elements as important within their creative production aligns with previous research which showed that post-industrial buildings are an appealing option for artists and creatives due to their physical configuration (Zukin, 1995) in terms of proportion, large windows and high ceiling. In addition, it reinforces Smit's (2011) observations about the importance of “sense of space” that creative entrepreneurs value in relation to “the space in your head” (as quoted in Smit, 2011, p. 179) - it is particularly interesting how respondents seem to describe and comment on the importance of space in similar ways in this case. This element of inspirational significance can also be seen within the social media content of A-Lab, which often publishes images displaying the high ceilings or the large luminous windows; in addition, they sometimes make use of a fish-eye lens which provides an enhanced feeling of space of the work-labs in the building such as the picture below:



*Workplace personalization*

The third theme that emerged as an important source of inspiration with regard to place for the respondents was related to the customization of the workspace through two aspects: the contrast to standard office buildings and the aesthetic freedom it provides.

All respondents recognized that they appreciate a more informal, creative environment at work and that it, indeed, has an impact on their creative production processes. More specifically, the two creative entrepreneurs interviewed contrasted their current working environment to a typical office building, noticing that they prefer being in a more creative, informal workspace instead:

You see the difference between being in A-Lab and being in an office where everything is new still, those low ceilings and all the doors are locked and there's a grey carpet on the floor, it's just a boring office, I think that has an impact on your state of mind ... I think [being in A-Lab] makes you more excited to go to work. (design studio, A-Lab)

Similarly, the architecture firm contrasts their colourful workspace with different names for each room and described it as “very present, very shouting, asking for attention”, to a “grey office which has nothing”, noting that the former “gives a little bit of comfort” to the working environment.

In addition, the design studio specifically mentioned details such as the artwork and the humorous quotes on the walls of A-Lab in conjunction with its “open door” policy as conducive to a “care-free spirit and freedom” within the building which creative people particularly appreciate within their surroundings. These findings coincide with Hutton’s observation about workspace design practices shifting towards “amenity, aesthetics, identity, and freedom” (2006, p. 1835). Likewise, it reinforces the idea that creative industry workers tend to oppose the strictness of corporate rules and bland and neutral office aesthetics (Pratt, 2001) and welcome the freedom of expression in terms of identity and behaviour especially when it comes to their working environment.

#### 4.2.2. Place as source of reputation

When discussing the value of their location in terms of providing reputation, the following themes emerged as important to the respondents: attractivity to clients, , the novelty of the area, the fact that it certifies creativity and the relationship between cluster and individual entrepreneurs.

##### *Attractivity to clients*

The idea of client appeal developed when questioning the respondents about how various location-specific elements provide a source of reputation for them, with three reasons emerging: the

building's heritage, because it enhances professionalism and because of the workplace personalisation.

To begin with, the heritage of the building was mentioned in the case of A-Lab as providing a certain reputation to the cluster as well as to those who choose to join it in the eyes of clients:

You also see that clients come here and they say "What a great area, I'd like to be here" and then they use this because they'd like to be in the new hotspot of Amsterdam; "you have to be here", they go "This is the former Shell building, experimental stuff, great stuff happens here!" (management A-Lab)

In addition, in the case of the design studio situated in A-Lab, the analysis shows that the place itself provides an enhanced level of professionalism in the case of client meetings that, to a certain extent, ascertains the expertise of their work.

For example, I used to work from home, and there is a big difference. They come in your home, and it doesn't feel very professional ... And in A-Lab, everything is very professional, there's a certain air that puts you in a different mindset than when you're meeting at home, you know you're getting to work with qualified professionals. (design studio, A-Lab)

For the architecture firm in Het Industriegebouw, the way the workplace presented itself was of particular importance in communicating their reputation to some clients as it reflected the vision and style that is typical of their work:

It depends on the client, but most clients that we have are very big companies and they're used to having more like a corporate style. So we tried our best to make it a very open community within our office, but not too corporate. Elegant, but present. And open. And I think those things are the most important for us, because that's our DNA.

This theme was also discovered during Helbrecht (1998) and Smit's (2011) studies, however Helbrecht mentions only that location is important for the image a company conveys to its clients and Smit focused solely on "district visual quality" (2011, p. 178) in relation to client attractiveness. However, the present research goes more in-depth in that it identifies specific relevant elements: the heritage of the building, the professional air, and lastly, the way the workspace is personalized emerge as locational components that clients perceive as important.

*Novelty of the area*

Another theme that emerged as important for the respondents in relation to reputation was the novelty of the areas the buildings were located in: first, because they represent the newest hotspots, and second, because they represent developing areas which provided an outside appeal.

In the case of A-Lab, both the management and the creative enterprise interviewed remarked that they receive attention due to this. As an emerging area touted as the newest “hotspot”, A-Lab and its general area has been garnering increased notice:

I think people are always trying to look for the next new thing and A-Lab has been here for a while but people are now discovering this part of the city and Amsterdam North itself is very upcoming, so people tend to come here more often and see it as the latest place to be.  
(community manager, A-Lab)

In the case of Het Industriegebouw, the location within a developing area was very important for the reputation of the architecture firm interviewed because it aligned with their work vision of developing areas through their work and especially areas of Rotterdam, which they see as a “laboratory” with opportunities for transformation and regeneration and they see their current location as an “activator within the neighbourhood” which is increasingly becoming a “super cool, hip area” (PR officer, architecture firm).

This theme is particularly interesting because it provides a surprising and new angle to theoretical insights gathered so far by previous researchers. According to the respondents interviewed for this study, emerging areas as particularly attractive for creative entrepreneurs because they conjure up ideas of freshness, novelty and innovation that are inherent of places that are considered to be “the next best thing”. Consequently, the reputation of being at the forefront is something the interviewees found important and attractive to be associated with.

### *Certifying creativity*

In the case of A-Lab, the analysis highlights the fact that their location elevates their status within their industry because it strengthens their “creative” reputation in three ways: by being part of the A-Lab community, by being part of a bigger creative district and by representing the opposite of corporate.

First, it does so by means of association with an already formed symbolic community that stands for specific values. In A-Lab, renters are considered “members” because renting the space is about the added value of being part of its community rather than the “cheap square meters”, according to one of its managers. This is corroborated by the design studio interviewed, whose project manager stresses the importance of being part of such a symbolic community:

I think it helps to be in a place that is known to be a creative hub because then somehow people can more easily associate you with a level of quality in the creative work that you do that is appreciated by peers and other people in the industry. (project manager, design studio)

Besides associations with the creative community within the building, the cluster itself gathers but also generates “creative” reputation by being situated within this specific area and surrounded by their neighbours, as the manager of A-Lab touts it “the creative North bank” of Amsterdam:

North was always like ‘you don't come to North’ ... Amsterdam sees it like the ‘Rotterdam of Amsterdam’ ... this is for the labourers, but now it also ends up being a sort of creative North bank ... and we are, then, part of it. You have film, you have music, you have the art school, you have us, so this is also kind of a cluster.

In addition to this, the A-Lab manager notes that it is particularly this creative reputation that is counterdistinctive to the commercial feel of standard workspaces that attracts some entrepreneurs to A-Lab:

They come here because that’s [standard workspaces] becoming too much corporate, suits are coming in, innovation dies off, bigger companies are coming in saying ‘I want to have my creative innovative environment’.

Such ideas are less evident in the case of Het Industriegebouw, which, according to one of its communication officers, prefers to present itself as a cluster gathering an “eclectic mix of people”, therefore being open to a mix of both corporate and creative parties in the building.

These findings confirm ideas that have emerged in previous research in relation to reputation: firstly, Clare’s (2002) idea of the shared identity of a community that its members ascribe to is in line with the perceived reputation of A-Lab. In addition, it reinforces both Heebels & van Aalst (2010) and Smit’s (2011) proposal that location is perceived as important in reproducing and strengthening a company’s reputation of being “creative”.

#### *Cluster-Entrepreneur relationship*

The last aspect that was discussed in relation to reputation was the varying relationship between the reputation of the building and the reputation of individual firms within it. For example, an expected finding was that the reputation of the building strengthens the reputation of the enterprises within,

and that is the case with A-Lab as it tends to work with emerging start-ups, so naturally this rapport would occur:

When a new client comes in, for example last Friday we had a new client and we really could feel that he was impressed by the building and impressed that we were there and that we were a part of A-Lab and what it stands for and that we made a decision to be there instead of somewhere else. (design studio, A-Lab)

However, in the case of the architecture firm located in Het Industriegebouw, the relationship manifests itself in quite the opposite way, due to the already well-known status of the firm within the country but also globally in relation to the rather newly established building. The interviewee explains that the increased media exposure that the architecture firm receives is transferred onto the building it is now located in, amplifying its reputation:

Then, all of a sudden, everyone knows you, but then you really have to step up and make a difference. So, I think we help each other, we want to be in the city, and they want us to be here. (architecture firm, Het Industriegebouw)

The Het Industriegebouw representative confirms that, indeed, they tend to look for more established enterprises due to both reputation and financial reasons that can help strengthen the cluster itself and assure its sustainability. These findings suggest that the reputation of the cluster is indeed particularly significant only in the case of emerging enterprises that have not built a widespread reputation of their own yet, showing that it can even work the other way around and the enterprises can even confer reputation to the whole cluster if they are already more well-known.

Regarding this theme, another finding emerged from the interviews, and that is the importance of “value alignment” between cluster and individual entrepreneurs for both parties involved. In the case of the buildings, this is more evident in the selection process and both clusters aim to look for people who adhere to their vision. For example, in the case of A-Lab, they are particularly uninterested in “corporate” people:

These are commercial people, who don't know how to 'play', and whenever we don't see any fit, even though they are willing to pay three times the price we have here, we don't like to have them here [...] We even have different prices so for creative people, they pay less than the more corporate people. (manager A-Lab)

This is equally important to enterprises in making their locational decisions, in that the cluster they join aligns with their own values:

It was one of our freelancers that used to be a member of A-Lab and he always said to us 'you have to move there because it would suit you, it would fit [the design studio]' ... I think we really fit here, I think it had to be like this, I think we had to come to A-Lab. (design studio, A-Lab)

This was also the opinion of the architecture firm in Het Industriegebouw, who considered the building fresh and young in vision, wanting to "move forward and invest in the future", which aligned with the ideals of the company itself, therefore the common goals and vision were important in reinforcing each other's reputations.

#### 4.2.3. Place as branding

The previous sections have examined how place is perceived by entrepreneurs in creative clusters in line with previous research by interviewing entrepreneurs but also questioning the creative clusters themselves about their own experience with their members. This section will analyse if and how these perceptions of place are incorporated within the branding of creative clusters by analysing the insights of the communications officers of the two buildings as well as their social media content. Lastly, based on a smaller data sample of two creative entrepreneurs situated within each of the selected buildings, an analysis of whether they make use of the brand of the cluster to promote themselves will be performed.

Before examining the main themes of the analysis in relation to brand, both clusters were asked to describe their brand in a few words. This was important to know in order to assess afterwards whether place was indeed, a relevant element in their branding processes as a whole. For A-Lab, the three main characteristics of the brand are "creativity, innovation and social relevance":

We have a building with creative people, we are focused on creativity, innovation, and social relevance companies. With them we try to have a diverse community that facilitates collaboration and new projects and a lot of partnerships [...] people are not renters, but they are members. (community manager, A-Lab)

The communications officer of Het Industriegebouw stressed the importance of co-working as well and having different enterprises collaborate with each other, but more importantly already connected it to the initial purpose of the building:

It's about people, it's about co-working, it's about bringing brands together, and having cross overs between different companies so say, I need a website and we will have a graphic designer and a website builder in that building so it would stimulate each other to work faster and smarter and better. I think this is also reflected in what the old building from the



'40s was about [...] so it is interesting to see it come full circle and achieving its goal in present times.

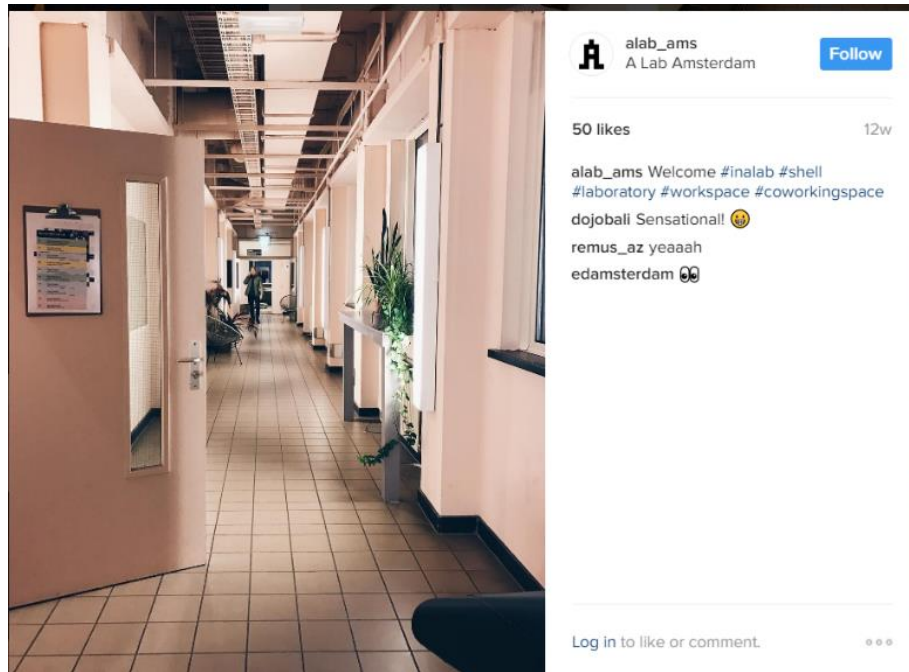
The following themes have emerged as relevant in understanding how creative clusters incorporate place in their branding and whether they tap into the perceptions of creative entrepreneurs highlighted above.

#### *Incorporating heritage values*

The historical character of the buildings proved to be a big part of the branding processes of both creative clusters. As seen in the previous sections, this element was also perceived as a source of inspiration via “ancestral feelings” and reputation through attractivity to clients for the respondents. The interviews with the two communications officers revealed that the heritage values of the former buildings are very relevant and actively incorporated within the brand of each respective cluster:

This area has a very interesting history that people sometimes know about or can relate to, because Shell is of course a name that people know and therefore, we also as A-Lab are trying to connect the history to the A-Lab story [...] so that's why we named the rooms the Blockchain lab, the Art lab or the Music lab so with photographs as well, we try to show the old history of the building through the programming of events or the news items that we share. (community manager, A-Lab)

For A-Lab, what was of particular importance was the experimental heritage the building offered which was aligned with one of the main values A-Lab stands for: innovation. Because of that, the heritage was kept and integrated within the very identity of the building, down to the name chosen for the new entity which clearly recalls its laboratory past. They also consider this to be a pull factor for people to visit or join because it highlights their penchant for experimental projects and innovative ideas, according to its community manager. This is evident also when analysing the Instagram account of A-Lab, with posts such as the following:



The image itself depicts the hallways of A-Lab and the open door of one of the labs, however the caption itself draws focus on its heritage by using the hashtags “#laboratory” and “#shell”. Therefore, this indeed highlights the fact that the experimental lab heritage is present both conceptually and visibly within their brand identity.

For Het Industriegebouw, the fact that the building was initially designed to be a community building that reunites different companies together was of utmost importance for the branding of the new cluster:

Yes, absolutely! Because Rotterdam was bombed in the 1940s, and that was one of the first buildings that got built after the bombing so it plays a very important role in the identity, it stood for the new way of working, and it stood for a newfound feeling of post-war hope.

When looking at the social media account of Het Industriegebouw, there are at least three instances of old pictures of the building that were posted within the dataset collected such as the one below:



This post depicts an old black and white photograph of the interior of Het Industriegebouw 70 years ago: people in lab-coats can be seen working on industrial machines but also queueing to get food. The caption emphasizes that this is a snapshot of how the building and the style of the people working there used to be, but at the same time alludes to the idea that the building retains a similar atmosphere within present times.

#### *Emphasis on internal building configuration: Industrial*

In the case of A-Lab, a particularly recurrent pattern within their social media posts is to photograph their interiors in such a way that it emphasizes the distinctive internal building configuration in terms of high, half-finished ceilings and windows and the bare pipes that highlight the industrial rugged aspect of the building. When questioned whether this is an active choice, the community manager of A-Lab replied that they always try to connect the story of the old laboratory with the story of A-Lab as it is known today. Moreover, she added that this visibly post-industrial feel of the building is an attractive factor:

I think people like the sort of roughness of the building, that it's not very clean, it's a bit more used and it has industrial characteristics ... so I think that interests people, and then, they always ask what the building used to be so I think this is definitely one of the motives that people come here in the first place.

When it comes to the social media content, 15 out of the 31 posts collected from the A-Lab account displayed the elements mentioned as part of the “story” depicted in the photograph shared:



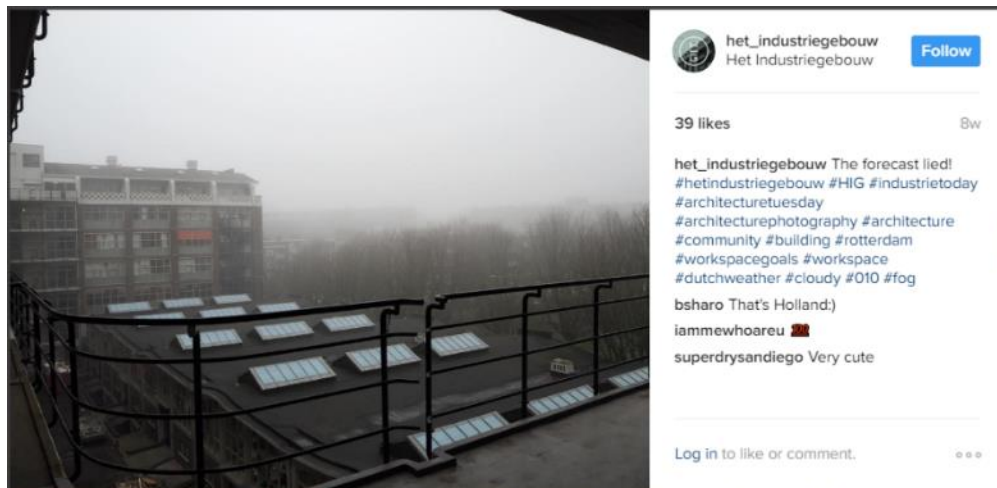
The picture was taken during a talk, displaying a room full of people sitting at tables and listening. The ceiling, bare pipes and high windows serve as a backdrop for the talk – this is often the A-Lab strategy with including these elements in the frame, as a visually stimulating component that provides an industrial setting to the event. The caption presents the theme of the event and explicitly localizes it by using the hashtag “#inalab”.

This recurrent emphasis on specific elements of the internal building configuration complements the findings that emerged from the interviews with the entrepreneurs, who specifically mentioned the high ceilings and windows as a source of creative stimulation in that it offers them “space in their head”. It is interesting to notice that this perception is indeed incorporated within the social media branding processes of A-Lab – not as the main focus of a picture – but as an inherent component of everything that happens in the building.

### *Distinctiveness of place*

Emphasizing the uniqueness of place and location is done by both clusters analysed through various strategies: aestheticizing architectural elements, showing work-in-progress, aestheticizing urban morphology and using localized hashtags.

For Het Industriegebouw, the main strategy is to aestheticize elements of the built form, predominantly architectural elements. For example, the post present below depicts an aestheticized picture of the inner courtyard of the building which showcases the balconies, a part of the building and the rooftops of the inner part of the building. The caption uses a weather update as a pretext to showcase the building architecture, as it is revealed by the use of hashtags such as “#architecturetuesday”, “#architecturephotography”, “#building”.



In fact, this trend is quite predominant in the dataset collected, with 15 out of 38 pictures exhibiting various architectural elements as well as the aforementioned hashtags. When asked specifically whether the building architecture had a role in the Het Industriegebouw identity, the communications officer answered that its architecture is undeniably relevant due to its heritage:

Of course, it's not just a building, it's an icon of the rebuilding. It is also a very impressive building, cause Hugh Maaskant and Willen van Tijen were amazing architects, you can't really look past that fact and the building is so old, but still, so beautiful and relevant, so that is definitely a big part of our communications.

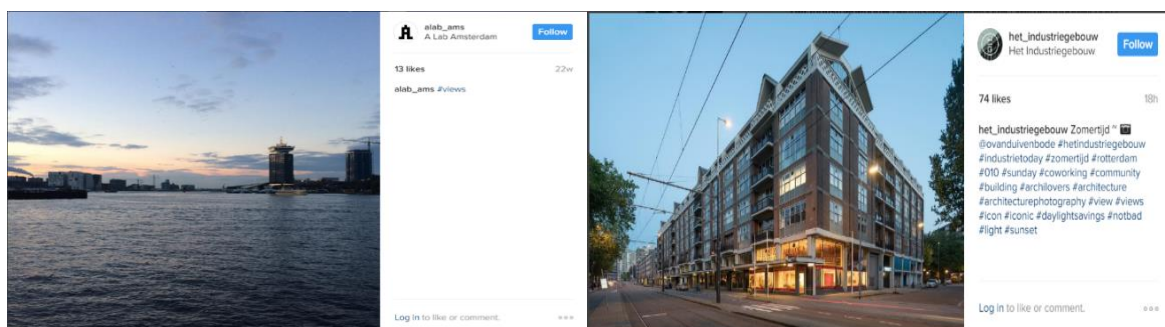
A follow-up question was asked to clarify whether this was also done to attract entrepreneurs, to which the communications officer replied that on the one part it's done to show the process of the building being refurbished, “but it's also to attract new renters to come and look and people to come and visit so it's both”.

This observation also highlighted another trend in highlighting visual distinctiveness on social media, which is that of showcasing the “work-in-progress” quality of the building, as can be seen in the example below:



The picture is again, presented in an aestheticized light – taken in black and white. It depicts an empty room being refurbished by construction workers. In the left side, scaffolding can be seen and half-painted walls and construction materials lying on the floor. The caption promotes the member who will move into this space and the specificity of the location. Around 6 out of the total pictures depict similar images, and this partly alludes to a finding from the previous section that being in an area “in development” is attractive in that it conveys ideas of novelty and freshness.

Likewise, the external building and the general outdoor appearance and urban morphology is aestheticized and depicted via streetscapes and images depicting a sense of space for both A-Lab and Het Industriegebouw:



These pictures highlight the contrast in location between the two, as A-Lab chooses to present a view of the waterfront with the skyline at dusk which depicts its industrial, nautical location, whereas Het Industriegebouw emphasizes its urban location by depicting the streetscape surrounding the building.

This section has shown that the visual quality of the location provides an asset in the branding processes of creative clusters, who choose to aesthetically depict their own distinctive

visual elements to attract and inspire both creatives and visitors alike. In addition to this, location specificity is emphasized for both buildings through the use of personalized hashtags: “#inalab”, in the case of A-Lab, and either “#hetindustriegebouw” or “#peopleofHIG” for Het Industriegebouw.

### *Workplace personalization*

A third theme that emerged as important in the branding of both buildings was the emphasis on workplace personalization through emphasizing microscale features and promoting member facilities. As it was seen in the previous sections, that is something that provides both a source of inspiration and a source of reputation. This was also acknowledged by the community manager of A-Lab, who recognized that this is an active choice and it is an important part of what they’re trying to communicate via their online branding:

Yes, I think that we try to show that the community is very diverse and also the interiors and how they decorate their lab space, that they can bring their own stuff and create, really, their own work environment so that's also a thing we try to communicate.

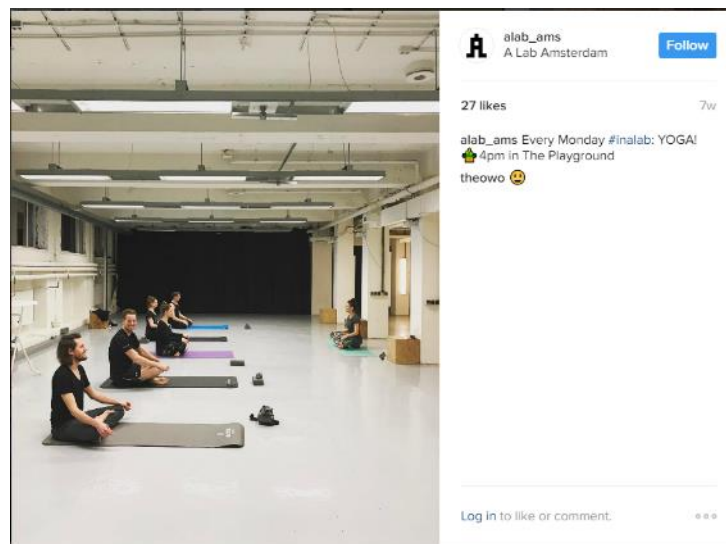
In terms of the social media content collected, workspace personalization is suggested firstly by emphasizing their “microscale features” (Hutton, 2006) such as artworks and distinctive décor of each building. For example, the picture below shows a peek inside an open door of a lab full of people working around a table. However, the emphasis is on the outside hallway walls of the lab, which are in the process of getting illustrated. The caption specifies that this is a mural that is being painted on the second floor and the artist is mentioned:



In the case of Het Industriegebouw, workspace personalization is depicted in a slightly humorous way. For example, the post below shows the doors to the women’s toilets which lists all the names of the women who work there. The caption emphasizes that this is an ultimate feeling of “co-working”, as well as what all workspaces should aim to have: “#workspacegoals”:



Another way that the two buildings emphasize the distinctiveness of the workplace is by promoting the facilities offered to their members. This is more evident visually in the case of A-Lab, who regularly promote events or special member facilities they have, such as the image below, which shows a group of people doing yoga in one of the labs in A-Lab. The ceiling, the high windows and the bare pipes are also evident. The caption promotes the yoga activity that takes place in “The Playground”, one of the rooms in A-Lab:



However, the communications officer of Het Industriegebouw argued that providing facilities for their members is also important but it's not something they necessarily advertise this to those who are not part of the building:

[...] there are activities organized: for example, Friday night movie screenings, or Wednesday morning Yoga classes, I mean we're trying to do that all. And also things like security, very



fast internet access, that's stuff that we wish to provide for our renters and that people appreciate and look for in the spaces they work in.

#### *Role of members in cluster branding*

Similarly to the previous section related to reputation, the interviews highlighted the branding relationship between clusters and individual entrepreneurs. Both buildings agreed that their members are important in the enhancing the visibility of their brand. For the communications officer of Het Industriegebouw, members are “our ambassadors, they are our mouth-to-mouth advertisers, they're free advertising”, arguing that “if they find that the working environment is a nice one and a productive one, then we also consider that to be part of our marketing tool and an effective means of advertising ourselves”.

As a follow-up, the respondent was asked for a specific example of how this could happen, which consisted in including their location in their own communications and PR, motivating that this is important in establishing the building as a vibrant, central point in the local community:

We make agreements with them on that. For example, there's a new restaurant coming in, we had a meeting with them to talk about the branding and said “Hey, you know, if you have an interview with a newspaper or magazine, be sure to mention, you know ‘Our restaurant is situated in Het Industriegebouw’”.

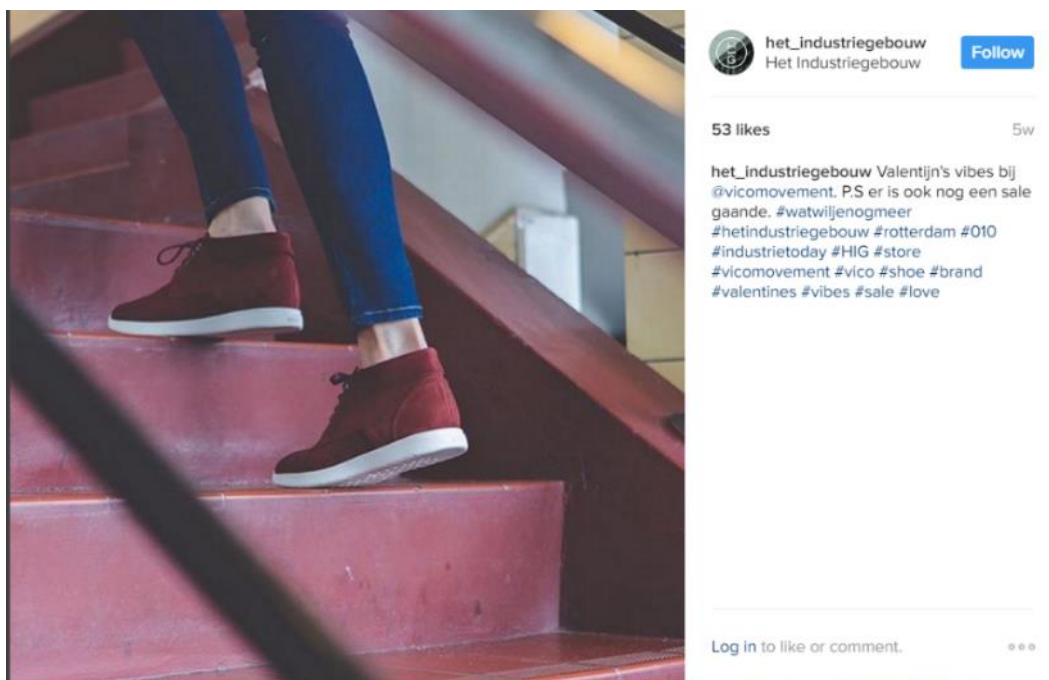
For A-Lab it's equally important for members to make use of their location in promoting their own events. When asked if their members are important for their brand, the community manager of A-Lab replied the following:

For the brand A-Lab? Of course, I think what we love is when A-Lab members tell our story through their own perspective. Sometimes projects happen in A-Lab where different members collaborate, that's also a part of the story of A-Lab so that's one of the most important advertisements for us, when members are active collaborating and advertising their own projects within the community of A-Lab.

However, when asked if she has indeed seen other members make use of the brand of A-Lab in their own direct branding, she argued that she hasn't yet seen it directly, but that a lot of them use the “#inalab” hashtag, which aggregates on their website all the posts containing it and creates a the “story” of A-Lab from all points of view. Regarding this, the manager of A-Lab explained that the use of the hashtag, which also stresses location specificity, is a mechanism of making their brand known and distinctive in the sense that A-Lab becomes a way of describing its members:

“We want people to say ‘We have to be at A-Lab’ ... we just opened a Twitter account and a hashtag #inalab and we are now up to whenever a company that comes here and becomes bigger we say “there's an A-Lab inside”, it's part of what comes from A-Lab.”

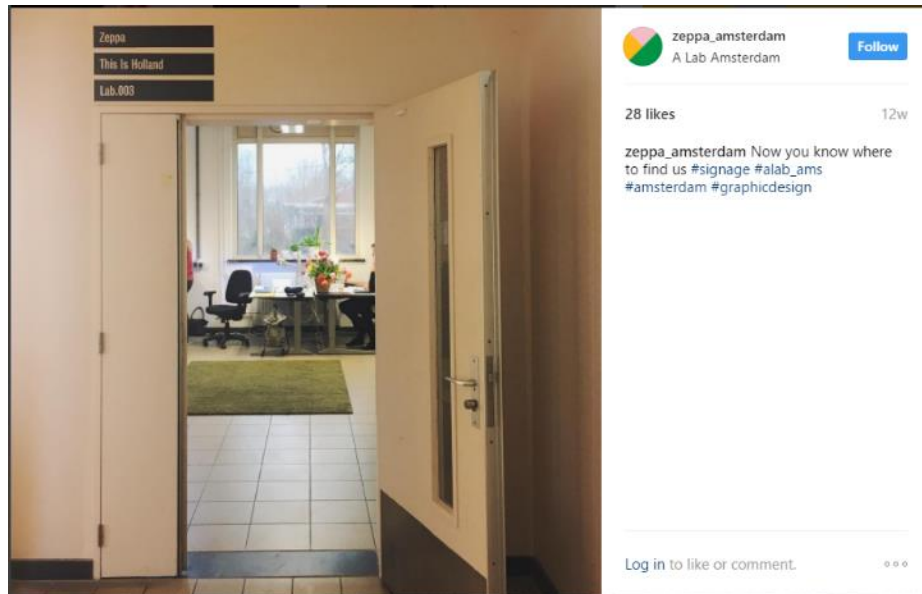
When looking at the social media content posted by the two buildings, one can notice that they regularly promote their own members either by tagging them or showcasing their products, such as in the example below, which shows a zoom-in on the shoes of someone going up the stairs of the building. The caption explains that this is the product of one of their members and directly links to their account. It can also be observed that the Het Industriegebouw main staircase serves as a backdrop for this product advertisement:



### *Role of cluster in members' branding*

The last sub-question of the present study was focused on finding out whether the individual entrepreneurs of the selected clusters make use of the cluster's explicit branding within their own. This was done by looking at whether there are entrepreneurs who post about their location on social media. By doing so, the researcher found that this is a rather uncommon practice, provided that numerous of these enterprises are start-ups who do not have yet have a fully-fledged branding strategy and social media presence. In the case of the creative entrepreneurs interviewed, for the design studio in A-Lab, 9 out of 20 posts examined contained references to their location. In the case of the architecture firm, only 3 posts referenced their location. In both cases, this was done to announce their relocation to a new place. In the case of the design studio, this was emphasized

repeatedly in various ways: through photographs of their new lab, of their workspace, of the external building, or by using the A-Lab logo. For example, this post shows the open door of the lab the design studio is now situated in. The name of the studio is written above. The inside of the studio can be seen, with a green carpet and flowers and working desks. The caption specifically emphasizes their new location in A-Lab Amsterdam:



In the case of the architecture firm, it can be the case that because they are more well-known, they are more preoccupied with promoting their latest architectural creations rather than their location. In the case of the design studio, because it is still establishing itself in the industry, it can be assumed that their location provides further context for creating and strengthening their own brand.

## 5. Conclusion

This final chapter will answer the main research question as well as the sub-questions in light of the analysis results. These will be discussed in relation to the chosen theoretical framework and methodology. Afterwards, implications and limitations of the research will be discussed, as well as recommendations for further research.

### 5.1. Research question

The main research question of this study was the following: ***What is the role of place in constructing the brand of creative clusters?***

To answer the main research question, four sub-questions were formulated that incorporate theoretical concepts related to the main research question:

*Sub-question 1: What are the initial motivations of creative entrepreneurs to locate in a creative micro-cluster?* Existing theory distinguishes between hard and soft factors, and the present study aimed to focus on soft factors relating to place, more particularly its physical built form. The interviews conducted suggest that hard factors such as price, size, and accessibility are still the main priority for creative entrepreneurs locating in a micro-cluster, aligning with Marshall's neoclassical economics perspective (1890). Afterwards, soft factors such as access to specialised sources of information and creative environment (Dziembowska-Kowalska & Funck, 2000) were mentioned as important in the initial decision-making process. The most interesting finding comes from the architecture firm, which second to low rent stressed the importance of being in a building designed by a well-reputed architect. This already prefigures subsequent findings that contribute to answering the main question.

*Sub-question 2: How do creative entrepreneurs perceive the role of place?* The next step was to examine the perceptions the interviewees have upon place, as suggested by previous research – as a source of inspiration and as a source of reputation (Helbrecht, 1998; Drake, 2001; Hutton, 2006; Smit, 2011). The findings suggest that place is perceived as a source of inspiration for creative production through historical character (relating to heritage values), internal building configuration (high ceilings, large windows that create space) and workplace personalization (which provides aesthetic freedom). Place is, indeed, also a source of reputation for the interviewees because it certifies their creative status, it locates them in an original new hotspot, and it makes them more attractive for clients to visit. The relationship between cluster and individual entrepreneur is also discussed, suggesting that a transfer of reputation occurs mutually, depending on which party is more established and well-known.

*Sub-question 3: How do creative micro-clusters incorporate creative entrepreneurs' perceptions of place in their branding?* The aim of this sub-question was to see whether the above perceptions of place are incorporated within the active branding via social media. More specifically, taking into consideration the components of the brand (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005, p. 508), do micro-clusters construct their brand identity in order to provide a satisfactory brand image to their audiences? The social media analysis suggests that they do through various strategies. First, they emphasize the industrial internal configuration of the building, its roughness and specific elements such as the high ceilings, large high windows, bare pipes and create an overall feeling of space. To attain brand distinction, they first actively make legacy and historic associations, what Evans (2015) calls "place of origin branding" (p. 155) – in the case of A-Lab, they incorporate the experimental values of the former Shell lab, whereas for Het Industriegebouw, they incorporate the co-working legacy of the post-war era. However, they also do that physically, through aestheticizing urban morphology and architectural style, which confirms Evans' strategies for attaining place distinction (2015). They also provide visually appealing snapshots of renovations which emphasize the combination of old and new (Smit, 2011). Something that did not come up in the place branding literature but did in the knowledge clustering literature (Helbrecht, 1998; Hutton, 2006) as well as the interview findings is the strategy of emphasizing workplace personalization, showing that the micro-clusters are aware of the workspace wants and needs of creative workers.

*Sub-question 4: How are place branding processes perceived by entrepreneurs situated within creative clusters? Are they incorporated within their own branding?* The last sub-question is related to individual entrepreneurs within these micro-clusters and whether they make use of locality and micro-cluster brand in their own branding processes. Looking at the nature of their relationship, micro-clusters consider members an important part of their branding process, either as brand ambassadors via word-of-mouth or actual exponents of their brand identity through the work they produce (in the case of A-Lab). The branding mechanism is mutual, micro-clusters often endorse and explicitly mention their members both to increase their own brand (if the members are well known) but to also support less well-known entrepreneurs. When it comes to the role of place in the individual entrepreneurs' branding, the research did not find enough evidence on social media to produce meaningful results. This can be explained by the fact that most entrepreneurs located in these micro-clusters are either start-ups with no actual online branding strategy yet or already established enough that the only mentions of the place are to inform upon their new location. What can be concluded in the case of the design studio from A-Lab is that a large part of their social media content highlights various aspects of the place brand – the outdoor morphology, the workspace, social events within as well as the logo of A-Lab.

After considering the results in relation to the sub-questions, an answer to the main research question can now be formulated. The findings suggest the existence of complex dynamics between the physical location of a micro-cluster, the stakeholders involved (both management and entrepreneurs within), and the branding processes of such organizations. More specifically, place is an active and recognised source of inspiration and reputation for the workers within it; consequently, the two creative clusters indeed actively make use of the locational behaviour of creative entrepreneurs in their branding. This is most evident when considering the overlap between the statements of the entrepreneurs, those of the micro-clusters management and PR staff and the themes emerging from the social media analysis; this shows that place elements mentioned by entrepreneurs are indeed incorporated within the buildings' branding. The role of place is highly significant in the branding processes of organizations such as micro-clusters; more specifically, the research shows that the most popular strategy for post-industrial micro-clusters such as A-Lab and Het Industriegebouw is that of the "place of origin" (Evans, 2015), making associations with the historical legacy of the physical space and incorporating it within the brand identity. The second main way of incorporating place in branding relates to one of Ashforth's (2009) instruments of place-making: the *signature design* strategy, which refers to creating associations with the visual qualities of the building in question. Ashforth posits that the success of this strategy depends on the quality of the architecture and the reputation of the building creator. The case of Het Industriegebouw particularly illustrates this strategy as their branding predominantly emphasizes distinctive architectural details based on the reputation of Hugh Maaskant, the building's architect. A third strategy is that of "workplace personalization", with the two buildings emphasizing microscale features and customisable facilities that can appeal to prospective members and clients as well as contribute to the brand image.

## 5.2. Discussion and contribution

In the introduction, the scientific and social relevance of this research was examined. In light of the findings, the contribution of this research can be discussed in more detail. The study has revealed several insights that contribute to existing theory. First, it confirms existing theories from the non-representational perspective: place is indeed an essential generator of inspiration and cultural production creative workers (Helbrecht, 1998; Drake, 2002; Clare; 2006). Guided by Heebels & van Aalst's future research suggestions (2010), this study has also further explored the relationship between place and reputation, developing more in detail the ways through which creative entrepreneurs construct credible reputations within the two micro-clusters. In addition, by employing spatial elements that have emerged as relevant to creative entrepreneurs in Hutton's (2006) and Smit's (2011) studies within the analysis, the current research validates and builds on

their understanding of the role of physical built form for creative clusters and provides academic continuity that can be developed even further in future research. It does so by adding the dimension of the *brand* within the non-representational literature and developing it with the help of branding literature – both general and related to place-making. In that sense, it systematically presents relevant place elements and relates them to existing strategies. More specifically, this thesis contributes to existing academic research by showing that the most used and effective strategies for branding post-industrial micro-clusters are the “place of origin” strategy (Evans, 2015) related to the historical heritage “inherited” and the “signature design” strategy (Ashforth, 2009) related to the visual morphology and architectural quality of the building. What this research adds to existing theory in terms of novel findings is the emergence of a third place-related branding strategy that appeared as important for the two micro-clusters studied: the “workplace personalization” strategy. This element of place – the workspace – has not been considered as a place-making strategy for creative clusters within branding literature yet, but the current research shows it is a very effective approach of attracting both clients and entrepreneurs and conveying a creative, distinctive brand image.

Moreover, this thesis contributes to existing research by linking clustering theory to branding theory, thereby providing a multidisciplinary approach on the role of locality in the branding of creative clusters. Likewise, the usage of a mixed methodology has provided new insight on a topic previously researched solely via interviews. This was particularly useful as the different sources (interviews with the micro-cluster management, interviews with creative entrepreneurs, social media content) complemented each other in providing a more complete picture of the phenomenon of place branding in relation to each of the stakeholders. The analysis of social media content allowed for a close documentation of how each element of place mentioned within the interviews but also within the existing literature occurs (or, in some cases, does not) and is actively incorporated within the place branding processes of A-Lab and Het Industriegebouw.

From a social perspective, this research can contribute to the branding of organisations like A-Lab and Het Industriegebouw. There is currently a gap in research dealing with the branding processes of clusters on a micro-level - independent buildings rather than whole districts - and the difference in scale and the stakeholders involved suggests that existing branding strategies should be adjusted and improved. As it has been seen, not all documented place branding strategies can be applied to such micro-clusters and new strategies tailored to the nature of these spaces (such as the “workspace personalization” strategy) are necessary. Therefore, this research provides a starting point for developing a clear branding plan specifically applied to this manifestation of the creative cluster phenomenon. For example, a crucial recommendation emerging from this research is that

effective micro-cluster branding should incorporate the heritage of the building instead of ignoring it and use it to build competitive advantage. Likewise, in attracting creative workers, creativity is key: visual stimuli such as emphasising the aesthetics of the building and the freedom of customization can indeed provide a “seductive space” (Hutton, 2006, p. 1835) for creative entrepreneurs. This is useful for both managers of post-industrial clusters looking to attract and retain high-skilled workers but also for urban planning institutions looking to redevelop former industrial buildings into working spaces for the knowledge economy in a way that they incorporate, preserve and promote their heritage and making it a marketable asset. This phenomenon is highly popular in the Netherlands, but the study of these successful examples can be a starting point for other countries for the economic development of out-of-use buildings and post-industrial areas. For A-Lab and Het Industriegebouw, the research provides insight into the motivations and behaviour of their members and shows that the two can also learn from each other’s branding strategies in order to make use of all of their place assets.

### 5.3. Limitations and further research

As with every research, the study has its limitations. The aim of the research was to approach the topic from a strictly non-representational perspective, however, upon conducting the actual research, the researcher found that it was highly difficult to separate the interviewee’s perceptions about place strictly into the two theoretical paradigms as they often tend to be more intertwined. Therefore, the findings were more of a mix between the two, but with an emphasis on the importance and perceptions of the built form. In addition, a limitation proved to be the restricted access to interviewees and their social media accounts, especially in the case of entrepreneurs. When conducting interviews, the researcher noticed that some of the interviewees were not as comfortable in English as they might have been speaking in Dutch, which made their answers less descriptive and elaborated than expected. An implication of the research relates to the chosen cases, A-Lab and Het Industriegebouw. It is important to acknowledge that the findings of this research are evidently linked to the context, background and history of the two buildings, which are particular examples of post-industrial micro-clusters with different purposes. Since branding is quite a context-specific process, this implies that the current findings cannot be generalized in that they might not apply to all instances of building branding. Likewise, the chosen creative enterprises within gave rise to particular findings, especially in the case of the architecture firm in Het Industriegebouw. Its status as a flagship firm within the building suggests that their perspective provided a selective view on the issues that is not generalizable to all enterprises within, especially when it comes to the relationship between cluster and individual entrepreneur.



For further research into this topic, a suggestion would be to examine the branding of other types of buildings instead of post-industrial ones through the same theoretical lens, since this is a limitation of the current study. Related to this, examining creative micro-clusters situated in other countries might render different results dependant on their specific cultural and physical heritage. In addition, the current study initially aimed to find out more about the relationship between cluster branding and individual branding, however the lack of accessibility coupled with the lack of online branding for the entrepreneurs selected made it difficult to reach conclusive results regarding this, so this could provide an interesting avenue for future research. Likewise, as the present study had a limited pool of interviewees, future research could interview a larger number of creative entrepreneurs operating within a wider range of industries so as to provide a more comprehensive overview of creative entrepreneurs' perceptions about place.

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## 7. Appendix

### A. Overview of interviewees

Building		Interviewee position	Works at	Company joined building in
A-Lab	1	Director, male	A-Lab	
	2	Community manager, female	A-Lab	
	3	Project manager, female	Design studio situated in A-Lab, founded in 2014	2017
Het Industriegebouw	4	Communications officer, female	Het Industriegebouw	
	5	PR & Business Development, male	Architecture firm situated in HIG, founded in 1993	2016

Table 7-1. Overview of interviewees



## B. Topic List Interviews

## Individual Entrepreneurs/Members

Topic	Subtopic	Elements	Questions
Introduction			<p>Could you please introduce yourself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- - describe your company <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When was your company established</li> <li>- How many employees do you have</li> <li>- Who are your clients?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Location motivations/details			<p>12. When did you move to this building?</p> <p>13. What were the most important reasons for your company to relocate? [Distinguish between practical/soft factors]</p> <p>11. Could you please tell me more about the building/your workspace?</p> <p>14. If you had the opportunity to move back in time, would you choose another place to locate?</p> <p>22. How would you describe the building's role in the neighbourhood?</p> <p>23. Do you think the building influences the neighborhood? If yes, how?</p>
Role of place	Source of inspiration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinctiveness and authenticity</li> <li>• Image/ character of the building</li> <li>• Historic and heritage value of the building</li> </ul>	<p>Does the building influence your creative work?</p> <p>OR</p> <p>What elements influence your creative work (from the list) and why? How?</p> <p>Do any of these elements act as inspiration?</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modern: old/new</li> <li>• Freedom that the space offers</li> <li>• Inspiration</li> <li>• Architecture of buildings</li> <li>• Waterfronts</li> <li>• Image/character of the neighbourhood</li> <li>• Creative/cultural atmosphere</li> <li>• Amenities (cafes, facilities, meeting spaces)</li> </ul>	<p>NEIGHBOURHOOD</p> <p>How would you describe the atmosphere within the neighborhood?</p> <p>Do you feel connected with the neighborhood?</p> <p>Does the neighbourhood influence your creative work?</p>
	Source of reputation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Image/character of the neighbourhood</li> <li>• Creative/cultural atmosphere</li> <li>• Historic and heritage value</li> <li>• Distictiveness &amp; authenticity</li> <li>• Local traditions and narratives</li> </ul>	<p>Do you feel like you share a common identity with other members of this center? Would you say you form a symbolic community? In what way?</p> <p>Would you say place/location/environment is important for your <b>employees</b>? In what way? (does it enhance credibility? Authenticity? Sense of belonging? Strengthens reputation of "creative"?)</p> <p>Would you say place/location/environment is important for your <b>clients</b>? In what way? (does it make it attractive for them to visit? does it enhance credibility? Authenticity? A certain quality of your service/product?)</p>
	Branding mechanism		<p>How would you describe your "brand"?</p> <p>Would you say A-LAB/HIG has a specific brand/image? How would you describe that?</p> <p>That being said, would you say your location has a role in the identity of your enterprise? In what way?</p>

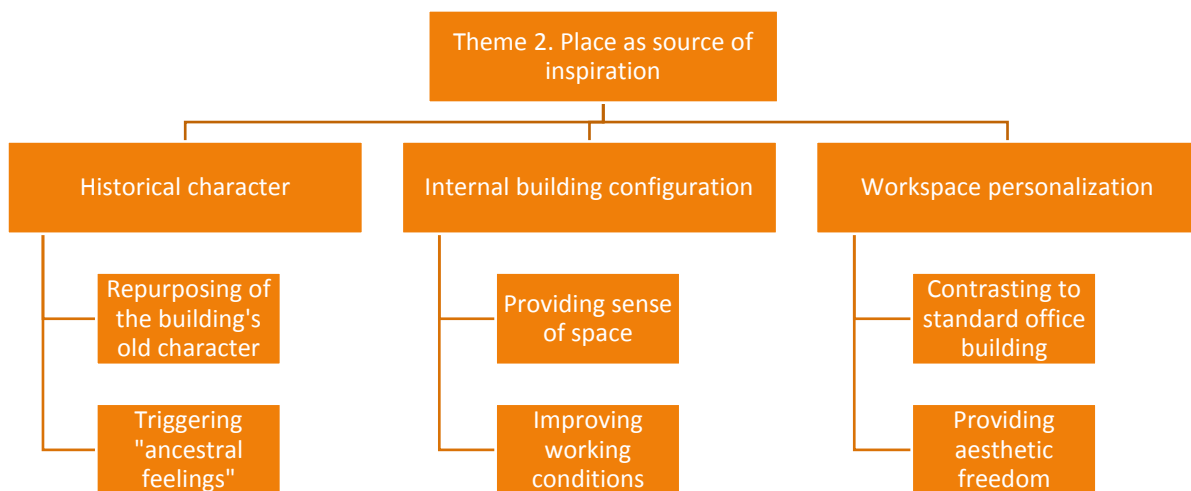
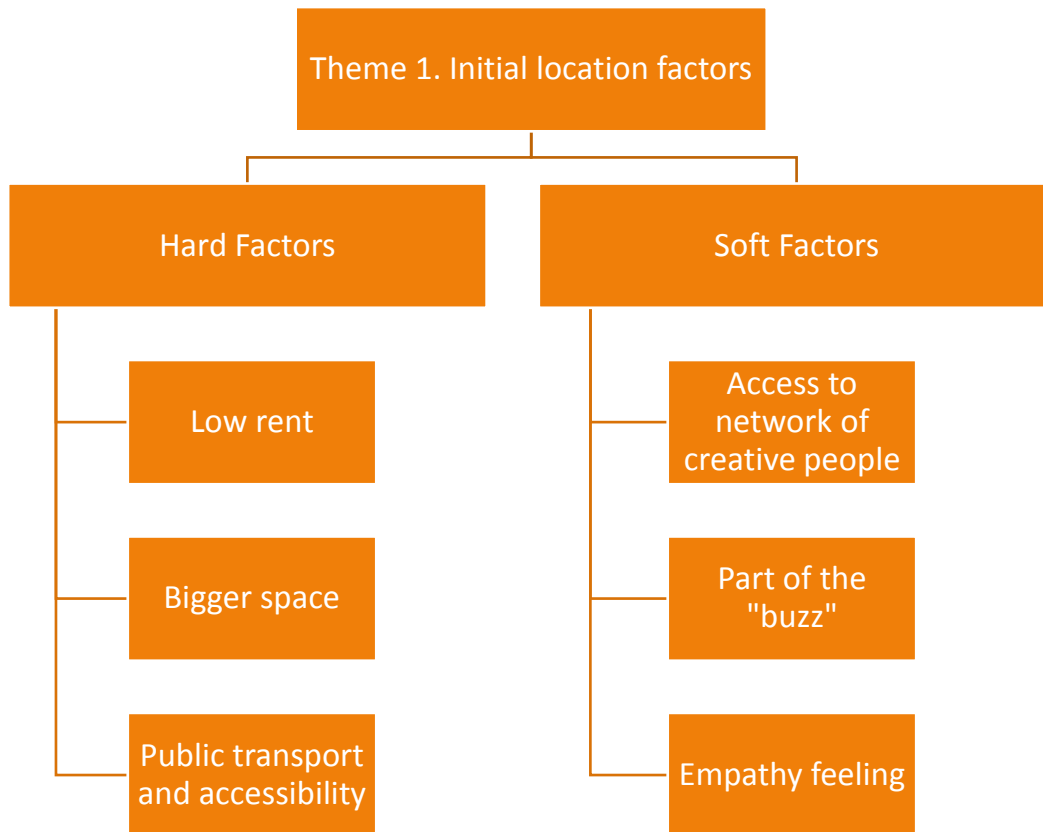
			<p>Which elements of the location are particularly relevant and why?</p> <p>How are these elements incorporated?</p> <p>Are they connected to the product/service you offer?</p> <p>Do they impact the aesthetic design of your products?</p> <p>What do they help communicate about your enterprise?</p> <p>Are there any visual references to the building/reputation/atmosphere of A-LAB?</p> <p>Would you say the brand of A-Lab/HIG has had an impact your individual brand?</p> <p>Would you say your location within this center strengthens your brand?</p> <p>Does it help you reach a broader customer segment/specific audience?</p>
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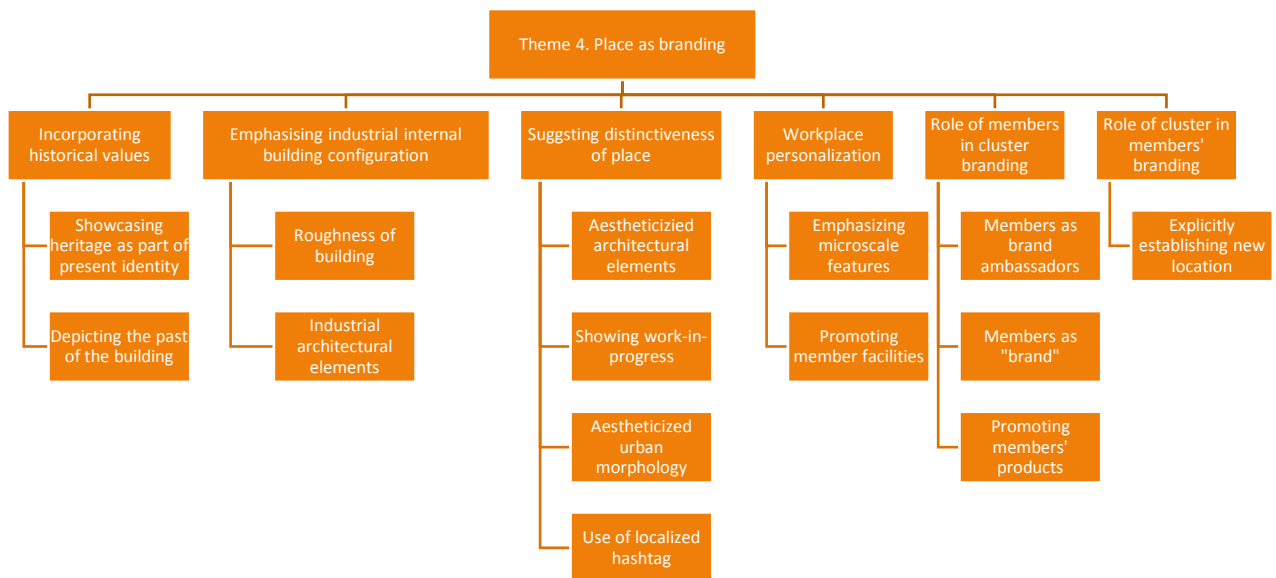
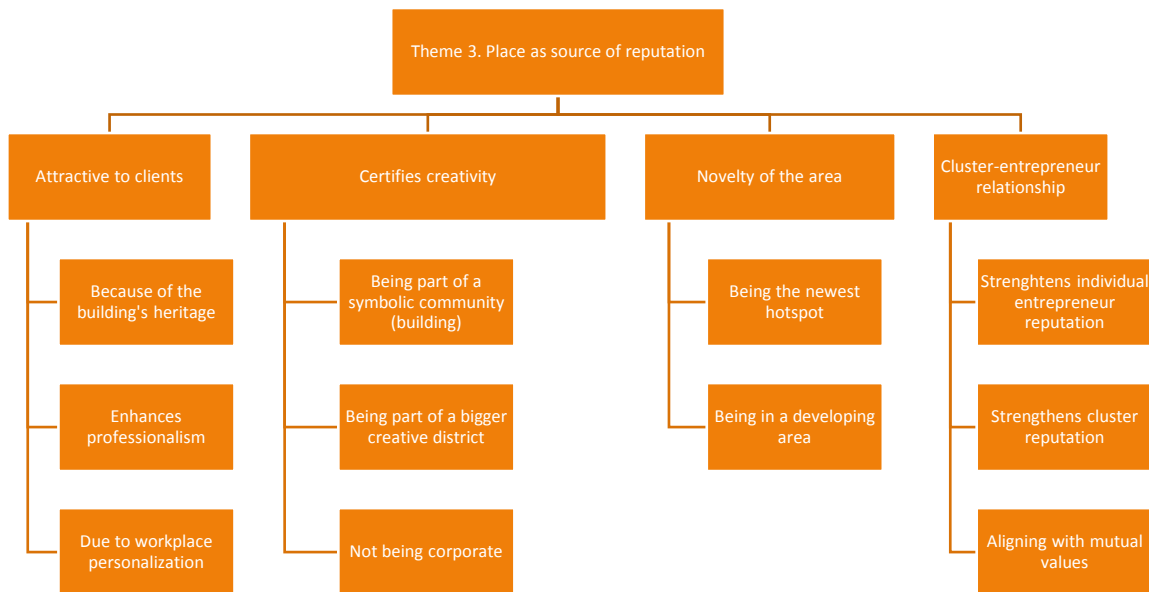
**Management of A-Lab/HIG**

Topic	Subtopic	Elements	Questions
Introduction			<p>Could you please briefly introduce yourself:</p> <p>What is your role in X and what do you usually do?</p>
	Organisation and members		<p>Could you tell me a bit about A-Lab/HIG and its origins: when it was established, with what purpose? any evolution from the initial idea? What is the business model of A-Lab, who has ownership?</p> <p>How many employees do you have?</p> <p>How many entrepreneurs are located within X?</p>
Location motivations/details	Source of inspiration	<p><b>Building itself</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinctiveness and authenticity</li> <li>• Image/character of the building</li> <li>• Historic and heritage value of the building</li> <li>• Modern: old/new</li> </ul> <p><b>Neighbourhood</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom that the space offers</li> <li>• Inspiration</li> <li>• Architecture of buildings</li> <li>• Waterfronts</li> <li>• Image/character of the neighbourhood</li> </ul>	<p><b>Intro:</b> Could you please tell me more about the building, how it is designed (the workspaces)? Is there a rationale behind the organization?</p> <p>How would you describe the atmosphere in A-LAB?</p> <p>Why was this building/area chosen for A-LAB? &lt;- ask about specific elements, if they were relevant, why</p>
	Source of reputation		<p>What are the “pull” factors of A-Lab or what would you say is the reputation of A-LAB?</p> <p>How does the reputation influence the attractiveness of A-LAB for other entrepreneurs?</p> <p>How would you describe the atmosphere/sphere within the</p>

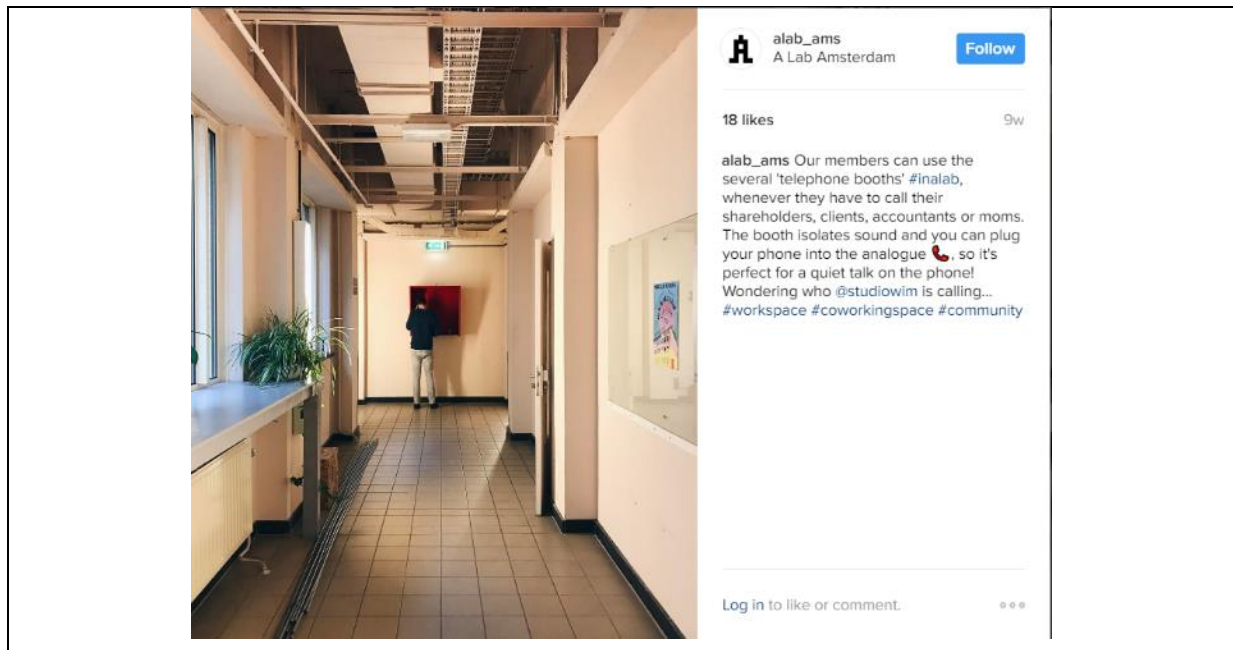
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative/cultural atmosphere</li> <li>• Amenities (cafes, meeting places, facilities)</li> </ul>	<p>neighborhood? Would you say there is a sense of community, or an overall image of this area that A-LAB contributes to?</p> <p><b>Concluding:</b> If you had the opportunity to move back in time, would you choose another place to locate?</p>
	Branding mechanism	Location	<p>How would you describe your “brand”?</p> <p>Would you say A-LAB/HIG has a specific brand/image? How would you describe that? How is that communicated?</p> <p>That being said, would you say your location has a role in the identity of your enterprise? In what way?</p> <p>Which elements of the location are particularly relevant and why?</p> <p>How are these elements incorporated?</p> <p>e.g. What sort of image is communication? “Industrial heritage”?</p>
		Members	<p>Could you describe, in general, the type of entrepreneurs that you *host*? What do they have in common (if anything)?</p> <p>Are the members that choose to locate here important for your brand? Why/in what way?</p> <p>How do you think or notice that the members use the reputation or image of A-Lab in their own branding/communication?</p>

C. Overview of codes and themes





D. Coding example – social media posts



Description	Open	Axial	Selective
<p>This picture shows part of a hallway in A-Lab. The unfinished ceiling can be seen as well as artwork on the walls and a green plan in the hallway. One person is standing at the end of the hallway using a phonebooth. The caption promotes one of A-Lab’s facilities, the telephone booth that isolates sound for phone conversations. The idea of coworking space is emphasized via hashtag. One of the A-Lab members is directly mentioned. The location is emphasized through the hashtag “#inalab”.</p>	<p>Promoting workspace facilities: sound-isolating phonebooth</p> <p>Depicting decorative artwork and green plants</p> <p>Promoting A-Lab member</p> <p>Idea of coworking/community is emphasized via hashtag</p>	<p>Promoting “microscale features”</p>	<p>Workplace personalization</p>

Table 7-2. Example of visual coding process for social media content

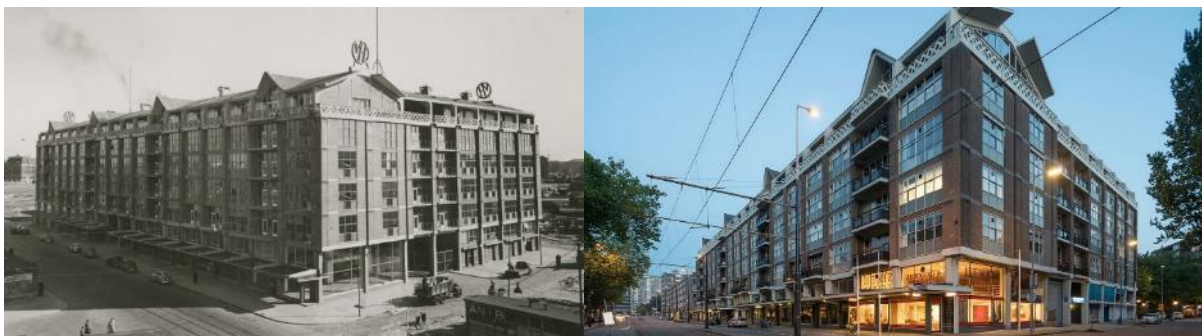


## E. Het Industriegebouw & A-Lab

The research was conducted with the focus on two specific buildings that cluster together a diverse range of entrepreneurs operating within the creative industries which are understood in the present research as defined in the previous section. In order to fully understand the phenomenon examined, background information about the setting of the two buildings is provided in this section. The two buildings – Het Industriegebouw, in Rotterdam, and A-Lab, in Amsterdam - were chosen for this research due to their historical background, their location, their focus on the creative industries and their active social media presence.

### 7.1.1. Het Industriegebouw

The Het Industriegebouw was built as a response to the demand for office and commercial space, and it opened in 1951 as a collective business complex. The building was designed via the Industriestichting Rotterdam initiative that was set up by the Chamber of Commerce in 1940. Its locationIt was part of a series of industrial buildings built by the architects Hugh Maaskant and Willem van Tijden in post-war Rotterdam, including one on Oostzeedijk (1947) which was modernised in 2012 as a student accommodation facility, and the well-known business centre Groothandelsgebouw on Weena (1953). Hugh Maaskant is known as one of the main architects responsible for the post-war reconstruction of the city of Rotterdam.



*Figure 7-1. Het Industriegebouw completed in 1951, Het Nieuwe Instituut archives versus Het Industriegebouw, 2017.*

The building is located on Goudsesingel in a general area that, before the war, was considered a slum and had been destroyed by the 1940 German bombing. The Industriegebouw is 110 metres long and has 20,000 square meters, U-shaped and has three facades. Within the U-shape, towards Achterklooster street at the back there are five low-rise halls (see *Figure 2*), and in-between there is a service street that is parallel with Goudsesingel. The ground floor was occupied by showrooms and

retails space, and the four floors were for commercial space; in addition, on the top floor there was a canteen area and meeting spaces (Ruis, 2015).



*Figure 7-2. Het Industriegebouw under construction, September 1949. KLM.*

The architecture of the building is reminiscent of the post-war period, illustrating Van Tijnen's idea of 'shake-hands' architecture, which tried to bring together Delft School traditionalism with Nieuwe Bouwen modernists for a "marriage between brick and concrete" ("Goudsesingel Industrial Building", n.d.) the building has a concrete skeleton that is visible on the facades and used with a decorative purpose on the roof. With regard to the building design, architecture critic Rein Blijstra criticised its rather non-functional decorative elements - "it is exceptionally detailed, perhaps bordering too much on 'beautiful'" (Blijstra, 1952, as cited in "Goudsesingel Industrial Building", n.d.) however, he praises the working environment created within building: "The workplaces are no hostile environment where people simply earn their wage so that they can really live in their scarce remaining hours. They are a part of life here, because it is a pleasant environment" (Blijstra, 1952, as cited in "Goudsesingel Industrial Building", n.d.).

In 1991, the building was designated a national monument, and after a period of neglect, it was bought by an investor in 2015 who commissioned Piet Hein Eek to restore the building to its original condition. Coming under a new and young management team, it now represents a community building that provides working space for various enterprises, "from growing tech start-ups to creative entrepreneurs" (Het Industriegebouw.nl, 2017) and offers a wide range of facilities for its renters, including the original canteen, a café, personal gym and special events and lectures. In present times, in contrast to its pre-war 'slum' notoriety, the Het Industriegebouw advertises its location as being part of 'Het Hoogkwartier' – "the place to be" (Hetindustriegebouw.nl, n.d.), which is now blossoming into a popular area with various cafes, restaurants and shops emerging in the past couple of years (see *Figure 3* for a map of the current neighbourhood area).

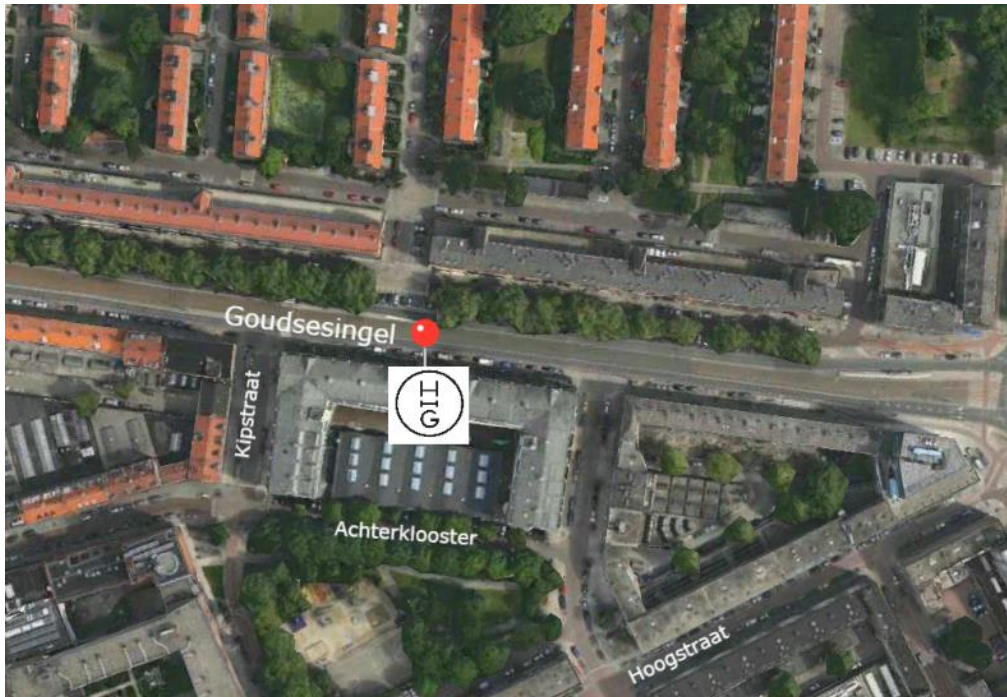


Figure 7-3. Map of "Het Hoogkwartier" area, 2017.

### 7.1.2. A-Lab

The second building chosen for this study is A-Lab, which opened in 2013 as a business complex as well as a catalyst lab that offers office spaces to creative and tech start-ups interested in experimenting with new ideas combining technology and culture within various physical and virtual labs: Art & Culture, Journalism, Music, Social Robotics & Visual. A-Lab provides 33 office spaces as well as common meeting areas, as well as programming for its members both for social and professional development in the form of lectures, experiments and competitions (A-lab.nl, n.d.)

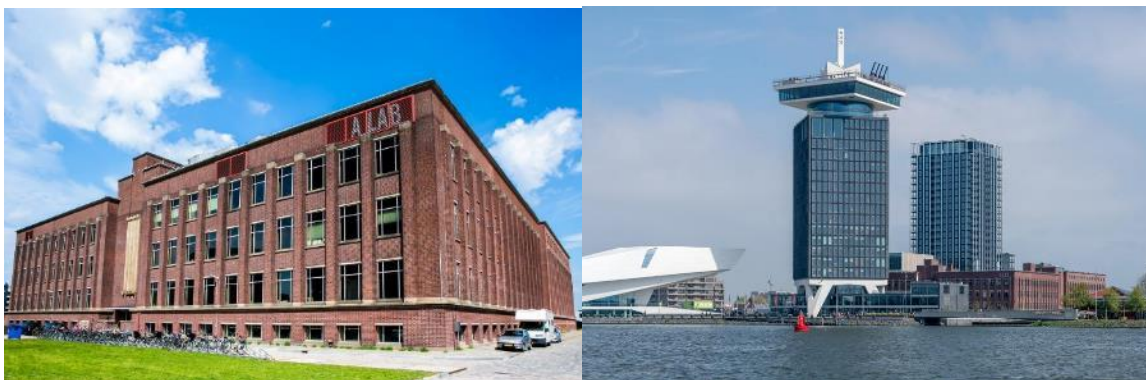


Figure 7-4. A-Lab & skyline of Overhoeks district, 2017; photo sources: A-Lab.nl, Ossip van Duivenbode.

The A-Lab is located in the Amsterdam Noord district, on the northern bank of the IJ river and opposite the Amsterdam Central Station, an area which used to house the former Shell site. When

this area was taken over by the Batavian Petroleum Company (subsequently known as Shell) in 1911, the oil company built its laboratory there for research and development. The building in which A-Lab is located is the former Groot Lab, part of an ensemble of Shell buildings, most of which were resold in 2007 and demolished or redeveloped when the city of Amsterdam bought out and reduced the Shell from 27 hectares to a mere 7 hectares. The laboratory and the former Overhoeks Tower (see *Figure 5*) – designed by architect Arthur Staal - are the only buildings that recall the industrial past of the area (“Overhoeks”, n.d.).



*Figure 7-5. IJ river and the Overhoeks Tower, around 1983. Source: Historisch Centrum Amsterdam-Noord.*

The large building of the Groot Lab was built in two stages – the first part in 1929, which was four storeys high, followed by an addition of a second part – five storeys high - in 1939. Its construction is symmetrical and made from sturdy, red brick, which is visible from the Central Station (Abbing, 2012). Besides the A-Lab, the building also houses the Breitner Academy, part of the Amsterdam University of the Arts, as well as the hip youth hostel ClinkNOORD. The A-Lab is located besides the Overhoeks Tower, which is now called Twenty4Amsterdam and has been redeveloped into a complex of offices and entertainment venues with a revolving restaurant on the top. Likewise, the Eye Film Institute has also moved there since 2012 from its former Museum Quarter location, and across the bridge from it is the cultural venue Tolhuistuin. The area (see *Figure 6*) is easily accessible from the Amsterdam Central Station via free ferries and has been touted as the newest creative hotspot due to the agglomeration of creative enterprises and venues that has emerged in the recent past (Overhoeks, n.d.).



Figure 7-6. Map of Overhoeks district, 2017